



# On the Design of Cyberpunk Female Image in Cyberpunk Films

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**Abstract:** Born in the 1980s, cyberpunk predicts a high-tech and low-life future in the form of science fiction. In 40 years of development, some of the predictions have come true, and people have never stopped exploring and imagining the cyber world. The emergence of cyberpunk films has enriched and activated the vitality of philosophy and aesthetics, in which the female characters are from nothing and from simplicity to complexity. Even their assumption of major roles in the cyber world is an inevitable trend of social progress.

**Keywords:** cyberpunk, image design, feminism, science fiction film

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## Introduction

Cyberpunk has been controlled by middle-class white heterosexual males since the beginning of its existence, and most of its works focus on the love and hate of male protagonists. Although cyberpunk's main theme is to explore social class, capitalist groups, technology out of control and other issues, its original nature is not so deviant, but reveals its deep-rooted conservatism. This is why the exploration of the role of Cyber women can be an entry point to the development of the Cyber world and the progress of its cultural significance. We can also reflect that science fiction is not equal to advanced, but still reflects the microcosm of social reality.

## 1. Evolving cyberpunk movies

### 1.1 The beginning of cyberpunk

In Jewish mysticism, Golem is a creature with living characteristics made of inanimate materials. [1] Cyborg is the "golem" of science fiction writers. Cyberpunk, this sci-fi compound term originated in the 1980s appropriately includes high-tech products such as human-computer interaction, biological variants, and the digital revolution. This initially ironic term gradually became widely known to the world through the media and word of mouth with the rebellious spirit of the time, and even became a synonym for youth, rebellion and fashion. Especially in the field of literature, it has set off a sci-fi frenzy. The long science fiction novel *Neuromancer* written by William Gibson, the master of American science fiction literature, perfectly conceived such a bizarre and high-tech future.

At the same time, the specific media properties of cyberpunk movies played a key role in bringing the niche to the masses. This subcultural aesthetic system has completed the transformation of mainstream art and quickly occupied the market share of science fiction films. One of the pioneering cyberpunk movies, *Blade Runner*, was adapted from the science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of electric Sheep?*. The film created a huge controversy after its release, and the audience was divided into two factions. One school thought the film was lengthy and meaningless, and was not a qualified commercial film at all; another thought it was an epoch-making masterpiece. The critical thinking behind it and the construction of a cyberworld paint a long-standing technological fantasy. It weaves the repeated interrogation of spirit and flesh, technology and morality, class and system in this huge dream catcher, and forms a unique temperament.

### 1.2 Speculative cyber female image

In many cyberpunk works, women are mostly traditional images in cyberclothes. Their existence is often to set off the righteousness and invincibility of the "Cyber Boys Alliance". Even if they have great power, they will need the blessing of male characters at critical moments. In order to break the false cyber patriarchal barriers, feminist artists have added to the separation of flesh and spirit so common in cyberpunk themes, a sense of responsibility to reflect on real life and look to the future while accomplishing redemption for self or others in the virtual world. They pay more attention to the connection and sublimation of the body and the spirit, and believe that what really makes an individual different is the thinking, so more and more representative and speculative female images appear.

## 2. The design symbol construction of cyberwomen in movies

### 2.1 Empathy: from the female body

*Ghost In The Shell* is a sci-fi animation film directed by Mamoru Oshii, released in 1995. The film mainly tells the story of the "parallel world" in 2029 that humans can use infinitely replaceable prosthetics to continuously break through the limits of human flesh, and the boundaries between humans and machines are becoming more and more blurred. The protagonist Kusanagi Motoko is a complete cyborg with a female body. In terms of color design, Motoko is powerful and calm as the Shousa of the "Section 9 Team". Motoko's clothing and hair color are black, white, gray and purple with no obvious gender orientation. The mysterious color not only conveys the sharpness and wise sense of science and technology of Motoko, but also shows the complicated and confusing side of his life experience and the fragile side of melancholy and loneliness; Different physical boundaries often mark differences in class, race and culture,[2] Therefore, in terms of modeling design, as a "cyborg" element, its soft skin surface covers the complicated circuit boards, which can add more empathy to the character itself. The appearance of oriental women also endows the audience with the imagination of oriental culture, and the mechanical components exposed in the state of damaged skin instead arouse the audience's sympathy for the inhuman "cyborg".

### 2.2 Rebel: cyborg's definition of emotion

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, released in 1982, is set in Los Angeles in 2019 and depicts the feud between humans and human cloning. The female clone Rachel became the sensational female cyborg image of the time. Rachel is different from Kusanagi Motoko's decisive temperament. She is sexy and ignorant, and her appearance is closer to the patriarchal aesthetic. But Rachel, as an improved version of the bionic robot, has more perfect intelligence, and can even escape the Turing test, becoming a powerful plot promoter and the hero's savior. In the process, Rachel also accepts her clone identity and pursues self-improvement and a happy future regardless. Although she was born to perform dangerous and dirty work in place of humans, she has her own outlook on life and world. This was obviously influenced by the rising feminist movement in the 1980s. It can be said that Rachel is a product of the feminist movement and a symbol of the feminist movement's staged achievements.

Rachel's feminine form design reflects the fact that women or female cyborgs are still in a world structure that is appreciated and controlled. But Rachel's eyes are crystal clear, which is in stark contrast to the dirty world around, a cyborg with mature charm but innocence, which is a silent and powerful resistance to the world. Another feature of Rachel in the film is smoking. The language of smoke represents male power, self-indulgence, rebellion, and thinking. Smoking, a human-specific behavioral language, sublimates Rachel's character characteristics, and the image of a female robot who pursues herself and breaks through constraints is three-dimensional.

### 2.3 Rescue: cyber-heroine

When women are mechanized, this makes up for the lack of physical strength, and both nature and society may be reconfigured. Alita, the heroine of *Alita: Battle Angel*, released in 2019, is one such cyborg woman. In the 26th century with serious class divisions, she led people and inhumans to transform the world and declared war on the exploiters. As a 2019 film, cyborgs have "evolved" at this time to grow like humans. As a character with an obvious growth path, Alita constantly improves herself in battle, gradually transforming from ordinary girls' costumes to vaguely gendered mechanical armor. The two red marks on her cheek also symbolize the spirit of wildness (i.e. human nature), even depicting the female cyborg as a revolutionary leader against class domination. The movie score of *Alita: Battle Angel* is not outstanding among all the cyberpunk movies, but the symbolization of the female body under the gaze of dissolving the patriarchal gaze in this film is further. She has truly broken through the boundaries of man-machine, gender, and secularism. It is not only women who need to be saved, but all oppressed and bound human beings, regardless of gender.

## 3. Research on the causes of cyberwomen's image design

### 3.1 Awakening of feminine consciousness

In early cyberpunk literature or film, stories featuring white heterosexual males as main characters were clearly biased against other racial and female characters. For example, the female robot Maria in the 1927 film *Metropolis* is a typical case. This robot is a replica of a human woman and is used by the ruling class. She uses sexiness as a weapon to seduce men, provoke class hatred, and ultimately ends in a bad death. This kind of plot is related to the fear that the women's movement brought to men at that time. The female robots in the film were burned to death in the form of witch hunts in the Middle Ages, reflecting the patriarchy's fear of resistance to the weak female groups in production and labor, and slaughter became

a way to discipline women. Therefore, in the early cyberpunk works, its values were not so deviant, but instead, under the coercion of capital, it became an exploitative tool under the banner of advanced ideas. As Foucault said: "Power relations always directly control it, interfere with it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to perform certain tasks, perform certain rituals and send certain signals".[3] Therefore, the real artistic revolution requires the cooperation between women and cyberpunk.

### 3.2 The social relation of cyberwomen's image design

In the early cyberpunk literature and film and television works, breaking away from the bondage of the body was highly respected, and the body was considered a prison. The stark contrast between the protagonist's loneliness in reality and his heroic image in cyberspace in *Snow Crash* resembles the current cool novel. Elanie Graham believes that "Whether it is the implantation of limbs and limb augmentation, or the disembodied 'pleasure' of cyberspace, it is a technological means to get rid of the fragility of the body." [4] This obvious "super-male" character itself has obvious fantasy and obscenity, and its purpose is to make people detached from reality and fall into the abyss of fantasy. Feminist cyberpunk writers and artists at this time firmly believed that the act of disembodiment did not essentially uncover the growth of the protagonist. This apparent negativity continues to propel the female cyborg characters in sci-fi to slowly transform from adornments to main characters and indispensable keys such as warriors and saviors. With the progress of society and the awakening of women's consciousness, and under the continuous innovation of technology, women continue to make up for the difference in strength through the power of technology, and at the same time, because of their meticulous psychology and rich empathy, they have a better performance. Therefore, Donna Haraway believes: "The myth of cyborg is not only to build a pluralistic society with blurred boundaries and conflicting elements, but also an appropriate metaphor for women." [5] Technological innovation will be an opportunity to eliminate gender inequality.

## 4. Conclusion

Foucault believes that "man is a recent invention and is approaching its end." This prophecy has been evolving and fulfilling in cyberpunk movies. The cyborg group will eventually rise up in the oppression, exclusion and humiliation accumulated, expressing an angry resistance to human beings, which also coincides with the violent resistance advocated by radical feminism. But precisely because countless human beings have the desire to live in harmony with artificial intelligence in the future, cyberpunk literature came into being. Its birth did not exacerbate the confrontation between humans and cyborgs, but more to find a way for all things to coexist. Cyberpunk movies, as a microcosm, condense the continuous progress of gender equality, human-machine co-prosperity and environmental protection awareness. To investigate the reason, exploring female cyborgs is actually a combination of various vulnerable groups in today's society. Women, disabled people, robots, and virtual humans may all be key factors in the future realization of the liberation of all mankind. Only by uniting all the forces that can be united can we realize the ultimate ideal of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, which is the original intention of constructing the complex female images in cyberpunk movies.

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