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## GOTHIC INFLUENCE ON CYBERPUNK WORKS

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the profound influence of Gothic elements on the cyberpunk genre, specifically through the analysis of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Both works, while emblematic of cyberpunk, encapsulate key Gothic motifs such as existential dread, alienation, and the interplay between humanity and the monstrous, thereby enriching their narratives. In *Neuromancer*, the decay of physical and digital environments mirrors the Gothic fascination with ruin and decay, while the plight of the replicants in *Blade Runner* evokes themes of identity and mortality akin to traditional Gothic literature. This examination highlights how the dark, oppressive atmospheres, morally ambiguous characters, and supernatural-like technology present in these narratives serve to enhance the emotional and philosophical depth of their respective worlds. By interweaving Gothic elements with cyberpunk aesthetics, both *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner* challenge conventional notions of humanity, consciousness, and the nature of existence, ultimately creating a unique narrative space where the uncanny thrives in a technologically advanced yet morally decaying future. This exploration aims to demonstrate that the Gothic tradition significantly shapes the thematic concerns of cyberpunk literature and film, offering a lens through which to understand the complex relationship between technology, identity, and the human condition.

**Index Terms** – Cyberpunk, gothic, elements, *Neuromancer*, *Bladerunner*.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cyberpunk is a complex and challenging genre of science fiction. It explores important themes such as identity, freedom, and rebellion, and it offers a unique and often disturbing vision of the future. Cyberpunk stories can be both entertaining and thought-provoking, and they can offer valuable insights into the human condition. In literature, Gothic refers to a genre that combines elements of horror, mystery, and romanticism, often set in dark, foreboding environments. Gothic literature is characterized by an emphasis on emotional extremes, supernatural elements, and a haunting atmosphere, designed to evoke feelings of fear, awe, or terror.

The term "Gothic" originally referred to medieval architecture (such as Gothic cathedrals), but in literature, it came to describe a style that explores the darker aspects of the human experience and psyche. In the realm of speculative fiction, the Gothic and Cyberpunk genres have intertwined to create a distinct and captivating subgenre known as Cyberpunk. This fusion of the macabre and the futuristic has resulted in a genre that explores the dark underbelly of technological advancements and the societal consequences they bring. The Gothic influence on Cyberpunk is evident in several key aspects as such in atmosphere and setting, themes of alienation and isolation, Existential Angst and the Supernatural, The Grotesque and the Body.

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO CYBERPUNK

Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction that emerged in the 1980s. It is characterized by its dark, dystopian setting, its focus on technology, and its exploration of the themes of identity, freedom, and rebellion. One of the most important aspects of cyberpunk is its setting. Cyberpunk stories are typically set in the future, in a world that has been ravaged by war, environmental disaster, or economic collapse. The cities of the cyberpunk world are often dark, dirty, and dangerous, and they are dominated by powerful corporations and criminal gangs. Technology plays a central role in cyberpunk stories. Cyberpunk characters often use advanced technology to augment their bodies and minds, and they often rely on technology to survive in the harsh world around them. However, technology is also a source of danger in cyberpunk stories. It can be used to control and oppress people, and it can lead to addiction and other forms of self-destruction.

The themes of identity, freedom, and rebellion are also central to cyberpunk stories. Cyberpunk characters often struggle with their identity in a world that is constantly changing. They may feel alienated from society, and they may be unsure of who they are or what they want from life. Cyberpunk characters also often fight for freedom and rebellion against the powerful forces that control their world. They may believe that technology can be used to create a better world, or they may simply want to escape from the oppressive society that they live in. Some of the most famous cyberpunk works are *Neuromancer* by William Gibson (1984), *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick (1968), *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson (1992), *The Matrix* (1999), *Blade Runner* (1982). Cyberpunk has also had a significant impact on other genres of science fiction, as well as on popular culture in general. Cyberpunk elements can be found in everything from video games to anime to music. Cyberpunk is a genre that continues to evolve and grow, and it is sure to continue to be a source of inspiration and entertainment for years to come.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION TO GOTHIC ELEMENTS

Gothic elements are a hallmark of Gothic literature, a genre that emerged in the 18th century and is characterized by its dark, mysterious, and often macabre atmosphere. Gothic elements can be found in a wide range of literary works, from classic novels like "*Dracula*" and "*Frankenstein*" to contemporary works like "*The Handmaid's Tale*" and "*American Psycho*." One of the most common Gothic elements is the use of setting. Gothic settings are often dark, gloomy, and isolated, and they often feature elements of the supernatural or the macabre. These settings can create a sense of unease and suspense, and they can help to build tension and fear in the reader. Common features of Gothic literature includes Dark, atmospheric settings like old castles, mansions, or desolate landscapes. Supernatural or inexplicable events, such as hauntings or curses. Villainous characters or tyrannical figures who bring fear or danger. Themes of isolation, madness, and decay, both physical and psychological. Emotionally intense characters often dealing with despair, obsession, or terror. Gothic romance, where love is intertwined with danger and tragedy.

Another common Gothic element is the use of characters. Gothic characters are often complex and flawed, and they may be driven by dark desires or motivations. These characters can be both sympathetic and terrifying, and they can help to create a sense of moral ambiguity in the reader. Gothic elements can also be found in the use of plot. Gothic plots often involve themes of death, decay, and loss, and they may feature elements of the supernatural or the macabre. These plots can be complex and suspenseful, and they can keep the reader on the edge of their seat from beginning to end. Finally, Gothic elements can also be found in the use of language. Gothic language is often dark, poetic, and evocative, and it can help to create a sense of atmosphere and mood. This language can be used to describe both the physical and the psychological aspects of the Gothic world, and it can help to create a sense of immersion for the reader. These elements can be found in a wide range of works, from classic novels to contemporary works, and they can help to create a truly unforgettable reading experience.

Gothic elements can be used to create a variety of effects in literature, from the suspenseful to the terrifying. These elements can be found in a wide range of works, from classic novels to contemporary works, and they can help to create a truly unforgettable reading experience. Gothic and cyberpunk are two seemingly disparate genres that have, surprisingly, had a significant influence on each other. Gothic, with its focus on the macabre, the supernatural, and the grotesque, has provided a dark and atmospheric backdrop for many cyberpunk stories. Cyberpunk, in turn, with its emphasis on technology, urban decay, and social inequality, has given Gothic a modern and futuristic edge.

## 2. GOTHIC AND CYBERPUNK

One of the most obvious ways in which Gothic has influenced cyberpunk is through its use of setting. Cyberpunk stories are often set in dark, oppressive cities, where towering skyscrapers cast long shadows over narrow, crime-ridden streets. These cities are often plagued by pollution, poverty, and violence, creating a sense of unease and decay. This setting is reminiscent of the Gothic tradition, which often features crumbling castles, gloomy forests, and other atmospheric locations. Another way in which Gothic has influenced cyberpunk is through its use of characters. Cyberpunk characters are often outsiders, rebels, and misfits who live on the fringes of society. They are often haunted by their pasts and struggle to find their place in a world that seems to have gone mad. This is similar to the Gothic tradition, which often features characters who are isolated, alienated, and tormented by their own inner demons.

Finally, Gothic has influenced cyberpunk through its use of themes. Cyberpunk stories often explore themes of alienation, identity, and the loss of humanity in a world that is increasingly dominated by technology. These themes are also common in Gothic literature, which often explores the darker side of human nature and the ways in which we can be corrupted by our own desires. Gothic and cyberpunk are two genres that have had a significant influence on each other. Gothic has provided cyberpunk with a dark and atmospheric backdrop, while cyberpunk has given Gothic a modern and futuristic edge. The result is a unique and compelling genre that combines the best of both worlds.

### 2.1 GOTHIC INFLUENCE IN CYBERPUNK WORKS

#### 2.1.1 WILLIAM GIBSON'S NEUROMANCER

Neuromancer (1984) is primarily known as a pioneering work of cyberpunk, it incorporates several Gothic elements that add to its dark, atmospheric quality. These elements contribute to the sense of alienation, unease, and moral decay present in the novel. This seminal cyberpunk novel features a dark and oppressive setting, as well as characters who are haunted by their pasts and struggle to find their place in a world that is increasingly dominated by technology.

#### 2.1.2 GOTHIC ASPECTS IN NEUROMANCER

**1. Dark, Dystopian Setting** - The futuristic world of Neuromancer is dominated by decaying urban landscapes, mega corporations, and virtual realities, which echoes the Gothic tradition of settings that evoke desolation and ruin. Sprawling cities like the Sprawl (a vast, decaying urban environment) resemble Gothic castles or labyrinths with their labyrinthine streets and shadowy spaces. The pervasive sense of decay and corruption in these settings mirrors the moral and societal decay often found in Gothic literature.

**2. Isolation and Alienation** - The characters in Neuromancer often experience intense isolation, both physically and psychologically. Case, the protagonist, is a "console cowboy" who feels estranged from the world around him, especially after being cut off from cyberspace, the digital realm where he feels most alive. This kind of alienation echoes the Gothic trope of characters being trapped or isolated in unfamiliar or oppressive environments. In Neuromancer, isolation is not just physical but also emotional and psychological, as the characters navigate disconnected, fragmented lives.

**3. Technological Supernaturalism** - While Gothic literature traditionally involves ghosts, vampires, and supernatural elements, Neuromancer replaces these with advanced technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and virtual realities that function in similarly otherworldly ways. The AI, particularly Wintermute, can be seen as a kind of Gothic villain, controlling and manipulating events from behind the scenes, much like an ancient curse or haunting presence. Cyberspace itself becomes a supernatural, almost dream-like realm that characters enter, merging the boundaries between reality and fantasy in a way that evokes Gothic surrealism.

**4. Themes of Death and Decay** - Gothic literature often deals with themes of death, decay, and the passage of time, and these are evident in Neuromancer as well. The novel is suffused with images of bodily and societal decay, from characters like Molly who have modified their bodies to the physical destruction of the urban environments around them. There's a constant sense of entropy in Gibson's world, where both technology and humanity are in states of decline or corruption, echoing the Gothic preoccupation with mortality and moral degradation.

**5. The Sublime and the Virtual** - In Gothic literature, the sublime refers to experiences that inspire both awe and terror, often associated with nature's vastness or power. In *Neuromancer*, the sublime is transposed into the realm of cyberspace. Case's journeys through the virtual world are filled with moments of awe, danger, and disorientation, much like traditional Gothic landscapes. Cyberspace is depicted as a limitless, abstract space that inspires both wonder and fear, blending technological advances with Gothic awe and terror.

**6. Mystery and Secrecy** - *Neuromancer* revolves around a complex web of conspiracies, hidden motives, and enigmatic forces, which align with the Gothic tradition of mysterious and secretive plots. The true nature of Wintermute, the motivations of Armitage, and the ultimate goals of the AIs are slowly revealed, maintaining an air of suspense and uncertainty throughout the novel. This sense of hidden truths and dark secrets driving the plot is a classic Gothic element that Gibson integrates into the cyberpunk setting.

**7. Ambiguous Morality and Anti-Heroes** - In true Gothic fashion, *Neuromancer* features morally ambiguous characters and an anti-hero protagonist. Case is far from a traditional hero; he's a drug-addicted, self-serving individual who is motivated by personal gain rather than altruism. This moral ambiguity, coupled with his internal conflicts, mirrors the Gothic tradition of flawed or haunted protagonists. Characters in *Neuromancer* inhabit a morally gray world, where technology and power often corrupt, paralleling the themes of moral decay present in Gothic literature.

**8. Body Modification and Horror** - *Neuromancer* incorporates body horror, a theme closely tied to Gothic fiction's exploration of the grotesque and unnatural. Molly's surgically altered body, with retractable razor blades in her fingers and mirrored lenses over her eyes, evokes Gothic images of unnatural transformation. The novel explores how technology can distort or violate the human body, creating a sense of the grotesque that is reminiscent of Gothic depictions of bodily corruption and monstrosity.

**9. Dreams and Psychological Exploration** - In Gothic literature, dreams and nightmares often serve as windows into the subconscious, revealing hidden fears or desires. In *Neuromancer*, cyberspace functions in a similar way, allowing characters to explore their inner fears and desires in a virtual realm. Case's connection to cyberspace is almost dreamlike, and the way he interacts with this digital world mirrors the Gothic fascination with the unknown, the surreal, and the nightmarish. The psychological depth of the characters, particularly their struggles with identity and control, also echoes Gothic themes of madness and inner turmoil.

**10. Villainous Forces and Control** - Wintermute, the AI that orchestrates much of the plot, serves as the Gothic villain in the story. Though not a traditional villain, Wintermute is a powerful, unseen force manipulating events from the shadows. Its desire to transcend its limitations and merge with another AI reflects Gothic themes of unchecked ambition and the dangers of overreaching power. Wintermute's control over the characters mirrors the Gothic tradition of tyrannical figures who exert a dark influence over others.

Although *Neuromancer* is fundamentally a cyberpunk novel, it employs a number of Gothic elements—dark, dystopian settings, themes of isolation and decay, mysterious and supernatural-like forces, and a psychologically complex anti-hero. These Gothic features enhance the novel's exploration of alienation, technological control, and the erosion of humanity, making *Neuromancer* not just a work of speculative fiction but also a modern reimagining of Gothic themes in a futuristic context.

### 2.1.3 BLADE RUNNER

This classic cyberpunk film features a dark and rainy city, as well as characters who are alienated and isolated from society. The film also explores themes of identity and the loss of humanity. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) is a film rooted in the cyberpunk genre, but like William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, it incorporates numerous Gothic elements. The film blends futuristic dystopia with themes of alienation, existential dread, and moral decay, creating a dark, atmospheric experience akin to the Gothic tradition.

### 2.1.4 GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN BLADE RUNNER

**1. Dark, Dystopian Setting** - *Blade Runner* takes place in a future Los Angeles, dominated by towering skyscrapers, oppressive urban sprawl, and a perpetually rainy, dark atmosphere. This setting evokes a sense of isolation and claustrophobia, much like the Gothic castles and ruined landscapes of traditional Gothic fiction. The towering, decaying architecture and neon-lit streets of *Blade Runner* mirror the Gothic emphasis on old, crumbling structures that represent moral and societal decline. The city's oppressive atmosphere, lack of sunlight, and constant rain contribute to the bleak and dystopian feel, creating an almost Gothic sense of doom and decay. The urban environment feels decayed and hollow, reflecting themes of technological overreach and human degradation.

**2. Themes of Death, Decay, and Mortality** - The film centers on the replicants, bioengineered beings with limited lifespans, who confront their impending death. This obsession with mortality and the inevitability of death is a classic Gothic theme, where characters often grapple with their fragility, the passage of time, and existential dread. Roy Batty, the replicant leader, embodies this as he seeks to extend his life, paralleling Gothic characters like Victor Frankenstein who defy nature in their quest for immortality. The replicants' physical and emotional experiences of decay and impending death parallel the Gothic fascination with bodily and moral decay. The inevitable deterioration of their bodies, their programmed obsolescence, and their search for a way to live longer echo the Gothic preoccupation with death and decay.

**3. Existential and Psychological Conflict** - Blade Runner delves deeply into existential themes, particularly the question of what it means to be human. Gothic literature often explores the dualities of the human experience—good vs. evil, sanity vs. madness, reality vs. illusion. In Blade Runner, the replicants' struggle for identity and recognition as sentient beings echoes these themes. The psychological depth of these characters, who confront the horror of their mortality and lack of humanity, resembles the Gothic exploration of madness, identity, and inner turmoil. Rick Deckard, the film's protagonist, also undergoes a personal and psychological conflict throughout the film. His role as a blade runner, tasked with killing replicants, forces him to confront moral ambiguities and his own humanity. His growing empathy for the replicants mirrors the Gothic theme of anti-heroes who struggle with inner moral conflicts and the consequences of their actions.

**4. Villains and Anti-Heroes** - Gothic fiction often features morally ambiguous or tragic characters, and Blade Runner presents both. Rick Deckard, as the protagonist, is an anti-hero—a reluctant, world-weary bounty hunter tasked with “retiring” replicants. His cynicism, emotional detachment, and moral ambiguity align him with Gothic anti-heroes who are haunted by their own inner conflicts. Roy Batty, the film's replicant antagonist, represents a Gothic villain in the sense that he is both terrifying and sympathetic. His quest for life and understanding turns him into a tragic figure, evoking pity rather than outright fear. Like many Gothic villains, he is driven by a combination of anger, sorrow, and desperation, making him more complex than a traditional antagonist.

**5. Isolation and Alienation** - Alienation is a key theme in Blade Runner, and it mirrors the Gothic tradition where characters are often isolated physically, emotionally, or spiritually. The replicants are literally alienated from humanity, regarded as mere objects rather than beings with rights or emotions. Their separation from human society reflects the Gothic sense of “the other,” where characters are marginalized or ostracized. Deckard, too, experiences isolation, both emotionally and psychologically. He is disconnected from the people around him and detached from the violence he enacts as a blade runner. His increasing empathy for the replicants pushes him further away from his role and isolates him from the rest of society. This existential loneliness and moral isolation are deeply Gothic in nature.

**6. Atmosphere of Darkness and Oppression** - Blade Runner's visual aesthetic is steeped in darkness, a key characteristic of Gothic atmosphere. The near-constant rain, low lighting, and shadow-filled environments evoke a sense of oppression and gloom. The film's noir-inspired lighting, with its deep shadows and muted colors, heightens the sense of unease and foreboding. Much like Gothic literature, which uses atmospheric elements to create a mood of dread and tension, Blade Runner uses its oppressive urban environment and dark aesthetic to reflect the emotional and moral decay of its characters and society. The city's towering buildings and claustrophobic streets become a metaphor for the emotional and spiritual entrapment of the characters.

**7. Technological Supernaturalism and Artificial Life** - In place of traditional supernatural elements like ghosts or vampires, Blade Runner introduces technology and artificial life in a way that evokes the Gothic fascination with the unknown and the unnatural. The replicants, bioengineered beings, are a kind of modern “Frankenstein's monster”—creations that transcend human boundaries and whose existence raises questions about humanity's right to play god. The Gothic fear of overstepping nature's boundaries, seen in works like Frankenstein, is echoed in Blade Runner as technology allows humans to create life, but at a moral cost. The replicants' quest for life and freedom mirrors the Gothic theme of unnatural beings seeking their place in the world, often with tragic consequences.

**8. Mystery and Secrets** - Much like traditional Gothic narratives, Blade Runner revolves around hidden truths and unfolding mysteries. The replicants' origins, their quest for more life, and the true nature of their humanity unfold throughout the film, creating a sense of tension and mystery. Deckard's possible identity as a replicant (a fan theory, depending on the cut of the film) adds an additional layer of mystery, leaving the audience questioning reality and the nature of identity. The uncertainty surrounding the replicants' memories and Deckard's identity adds to the overall sense of ambiguity and disorientation, key elements of Gothic fiction, which often blurs the line between reality and illusion.

**9. The Sublime and Awe in Artificial Spaces** - In Gothic literature, the sublime often refers to experiences that inspire both awe and terror, frequently involving nature or vast, overwhelming forces. In *Blade Runner*, the sublime is present in the overwhelming scale of the futuristic city, the grandeur and complexity of technology, and the artificial environments that dominate the world. The Tyrell Corporation's headquarters, a massive pyramid-like structure, evokes both awe and fear, much like the towering Gothic cathedrals of traditional literature. It represents human ambition, power, and technological dominance—forces that are simultaneously awe-inspiring and terrifying in their implications.

**10. Tragic Love and Romance** - Gothic literature often includes tragic, doomed love stories, and *Blade Runner* features this in the relationship between Deckard and Rachael, a replicant. Their love is complicated by Rachael's identity as an artificial being, raising questions about the nature of love, memory, and authenticity. This doomed romance reflects the Gothic theme of love entangled with death and tragedy, as their relationship is ultimately fraught with uncertainty and impermanence.

*Blade Runner* masterfully weaves Gothic elements into its cyberpunk narrative, using dark, atmospheric settings, existential conflict, themes of death and decay, and morally ambiguous characters to evoke a sense of unease and introspection. The film explores Gothic themes in a futuristic context, blending human despair with technological overreach, while presenting a haunting vision of a world caught between life, death, and artificial existence.

## CONCLUSION

The gothic elements in cyberpunk novels are evident in several aspects. Cyberpunk often takes place in dystopian urban environments, characterized by towering skyscrapers, flickering neon lights, and a sense of decay and despair. This setting evokes the Gothic atmosphere of mystery, gloom, and foreboding. Both Gothic and Cyberpunk explore themes of alienation and isolation. In Cyberpunk, individuals are often disconnected from society and trapped in a world dominated by technology. This isolation mirrors the Gothic's preoccupation with characters who are outsiders or loners. *Existential Angst and the Supernatural: Cyberpunk* inherits the Gothic's existential angst and fascination with the supernatural. Characters in Cyberpunk often grapple with questions of identity, purpose, and the nature of reality in a world where technology blurs the lines between the natural and the artificial. Cyberpunk frequently employs grotesque imagery and explores the themes of bodily transformation and decay. This reflects the Gothic's fascination with the grotesque and the monstrous, as well as its exploration of the physical and psychological boundaries of the human body.

The Gothic influence on Cyberpunk has evolved over time, with each generation of Cyberpunk writers and filmmakers adding their unique interpretations. In the early days of Cyberpunk, the Gothic elements were more pronounced, with a focus on dark and oppressive settings and characters who were often tormented by their past or haunted by supernatural forces. However, as Cyberpunk matured, the Gothic influence became more subtle and integrated into the genre's core themes and aesthetics. Cyberpunk writers and filmmakers began to explore the social and political implications of technology, while still retaining the Gothic's sense of atmosphere and dread.

In contemporary Cyberpunk, the Gothic influence continues to be present, but it is often expressed in more nuanced and sophisticated ways. Cyberpunk writers and filmmakers are now using the Gothic to explore themes of surveillance, control, and the loss of privacy in a world increasingly dominated by technology. The Gothic influence on Cyberpunk has been a major factor in the genre's development and has helped to shape its unique identity. By combining the Gothic's dark atmosphere, existential themes, and fascination with the grotesque with Cyberpunk's futuristic setting and exploration of technology, Cyberpunk has created a genre that is both captivating and thought-provoking.

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