SUMMARY

Submitted to

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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2018

Introduction:

The thesis takes cyberpunk, a subgenre of Science Fiction that emerged in the 1980s, and attempts to locate its counter-cultural, revolutionary cult status within the paradigms of gender and identity discourses. While considerable work has already been done on cyberpunk literature, several gaps in existing research were noticed, based on the work already done. Most researches on cyberpunk have examined the subgenre either from a feminist lens, or a racial identity lens. Classic cyberpunk, or the First Wave cyberpunk, was heavily criticised for its masculinist tendencies, as well for its Techno-orientalist leanings. Subsequent literature written in the Second Wave cyberpunk, which we shall refer to as Postcyberpunk, garnered much critical approval for subverting the "white, straight, male" clichés of cyberpunk to incorporate feminist, queer, and ecological themes, thus making it more inclusive, as well as representative of contemporary concerns.

On a similar note, Japanese cyberpunk, in the form of anime and manga, or Japanese animation and comics respectively, has been adequately researched, but only as an independent genre. The Techno-orientalist themes emerge clearer in classic cyberpunk as one makes a comparative analysis of Japan as the location of the future in classic cyberpunk, and Japan's own tradition of cyberpunk. The two Japans, as is apparent, are vastly different.

While postcyberpunk has often been applauded for its feminist and queer leanings, the sudden removal of Japan from its narratives as the location of the future has seldom been questioned. Of further importance is the fact that Japan has been replaced by a multitude of apparently random places, an act of apparently moving away from both, the masculinist, as well as Orientalist tendencies of classic cyberpunk. However, the random places are, with few exceptions, countries that are currently locked in a political or ideological conflict with the USA, opening the possibility of a different strategy of Techno-orientalism projected towards conflicting countries.

Another medium in which cyberpunk is highly popular, yet, rarely studied, is video games. A source of thrill to thousands of people, it has recently emerged as an equally ideologically loaded mode of entertainment, with critical engagements being applied to gaming as a hostile community built on the "male" privilege. However, while gender representations have been adequately extended to many games, cyberpunk games have escaped critical attention for years while massively popular among the gaming community.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, was to examine cyberpunk in all its popular forms – literature, manga, anime and video games, from the lens of gender and cultural identity, to bring together all media under the wider understanding of cyberpunk, and address the research gaps.

The Introduction of the thesis, therefore, begins with a preliminary understanding of the problematic term "cyberpunk", as it eludes a strict definition even as it further negotiates the theoretical limits of what is considered as cyberpunk fiction. Further, it provides an overview of classic and postcyberpunk, noting the several ideological points of departure in postcyberpunk, with specific reference to gender and identity. The study then undertakes the chronologically parallel, yet asymmetric development of cyberpunk in manga and anime, their roots in post-Occupation Japan, both as a source of anxiety and hope, while also tracing gender and sexual assumptions in the subgenre. Anita Saarkesian's analyses of gender for video games are taken further to tease out similar tropes and stereotypes of gender in cyberpunk games.

Chapter 1 looks at the representation of gender n classic cyberpunk and Japanese cyberpunk, tracing their complex histories, and similarities as well as distinctiveness as a subgenre. While gender studies, in the scope of the thesis, points to no particular idea of feminism, it is rather used to signify the expanding connotations of the term.

Chapter 2 looks at the representation of gender in postcyberpunk works and video games, in an effort to locate how stereotypes, queer themes and other markers of gender are located in different works. Gender, in many works, is inflected with religion, capitalist economy and the essentialist ideas of femininity. Thus, contesting views of gendered behaviour are examined in the chapter through the figure of the cyborg.

Chapter 3 looks at Techno-Orientalism in classic cyberpunk, noting the political conflict behind the demonization of Japan in the subgenre, contrasted with Japan's own portrayal of itself in its cyberpunk anime and manga. This contrast establishes the techno-oriental roots of classic cyberpunk.

Chapter 4 looks at traces of Techno-orientalism in postcyberpunk as it locates the future in various places, as well as an examination of world-building tropes in video games., thus lending it to not just a feminist critique, but also a critique of identity politics.

The thesis deals with the changing definition of cyberpunk, of gender and identity studies, and perceptions of normative behaviour. This thesis has been an attempt to address and open up problematic representations within cyberpunk traditions, in the hope that a wider understanding of the subgenre can be achieved, in both its canonical and non-canonical, literary and popular, aesthetic and political forms and contexts, from the lens of gender and cultural identity.

Thus, the thesis is an attempt to bring together all media in which cyberpunk is consumed, and enjoyed, to read the embedded meanings of gender and identity, and lay bare questions that need further research, to examine the varied media to understand how cyberpunk is a subgenre fraught with both, conflicts, and possibilities.