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The Exploration Into the Influence of Social Unconscious on the Individual Through Cyberpunk

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this thesis is to explore the influence of the social unconscious on human beings in a future context. In psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's view, the social unconscious refers to Individuals who are afraid of being separated from the society they live in, they often adapt and distort their human needs to meet the requirements of our social system. However, with the strengthening of personality and self-awareness in our present society, how will the relationship between the social subconscious and people's self-awareness change in the future? This is the key issue of this thesis.

In the first part, by studying the definition of the social unconscious and related works, this thesis tries to understand the root cause of the influence of the social unconscious and how it affects people's behavior and decision-making. In the second part, this thesis makes an in-depth study of Cyberpunk and objective imagery in related works, revealing that Cyberpunk is a projection of the real world, and clues for many problems in the real world can be found in the Cyberpunk world. In the third part, this thesis explores the changes in people's consciousness in the Cyberpunk world.

Finally, this thesis concludes people will not be rid of the influence of the social unconscious whether in the real world or the future world. Even as people's self-awareness is constantly enhanced, self-awareness and social unconscious will always exist as contradictory to one another.

THE EXPLORATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL UNCONSCIOUS ON THE
INDIVIDUAL THROUGH CYBERPUNK

By

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Thesis
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1. Introduction

In our daily life, people often agree on specific unwritten rules. We don't know who has made the unwritten rules or theories, but it does impact our judgment. For example, In the feudal society of some Asian countries, men were considered to have a higher status than women. People have been fed the belief that a higher price means better quality; many people think that professions such as doctors and teachers sound more respectable than photographers and artists. *The Sunday Times* has published the results of a survey on people's perceptions of essential jobs, and the results show that artist is the top non-essential job.[1] However, individual thinking and behavior are influenced by social groups or people or groups who are more powerful than themselves. The unwritten rules are what sociologists call the social unconscious.

In the future, due to the development of science and technology, people will be able to make up for insufficient physical strength through various technologies; humans will seem to have become biologically more equal. At the same time, the culture will be more integrated through the convenient transmission of information. It makes people more susceptible to the thoughts of others. In this situation, will people's thinking will be more unified or inclined to break old rules?

Looking back at my artwork over the past three years, I am very interested in specific topics, such as sci-fi, dystopia, and Cyberpunk, and I have created a series of characters and scenes. Among these topics, I am most interested in Cyberpunk. I think it can show artists' rich imagination and explore some social issues in the real world, which can perfectly integrate the creative style and the topic of realism. Therefore, I plan

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[1] Ashley Tan, (2020). Sunday Times survey saying artist is topmost non-essential job sparks anger in community. Retrieved from https://mothership.sg/2020/06/sunday-times-survey-artist-non-essential/

to make an animation with a Cyberpunk background as my graduation work, trying to

tell a story reflecting real problems in the future. Also, I want to integrate some of my

views on Cyberpunk into my graduation thesis and discuss people's ideological changes

under the background of Cyberpunk. The theme of this paper is an exploration of the

influence of the social unconscious on human consciousness in the Cyberpunk world.

2. The concept of the social unconscious

2.1 Comparison of the unconscious, the collective unconscious, and social unconscious

The unconscious theory is the pillar term of psychoanalysis. Freud creatively pointed

out that psychology should study people's unconscious to transfer the research field of

psychology from consciousness to unconscious. Based on the unconscious, Jung put

forward the concept that the collective unconscious is common to human beings. The

collective unconscious differences among different social cultures and ethnic groups are

minor. Based on studying social culture, the psychonanalyst Erich Fromm proposed the

social unconscious, believing that people have a different social unconscious in various

social and cultural environments. Although the three refer to different content, there is a very close relationship among them.
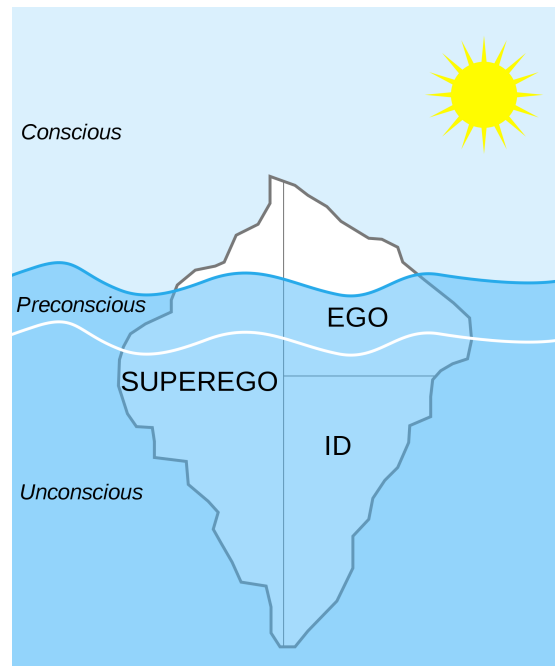
Figure1 Structural-Iceberg

The core of the psychoanalytic theory is that the unconscious mind is the basis of its extension. Sigmund Freud divided the mental process into three levels: consciousness, pre-consciousness, and unconscious (Figure1). Freud believed that consciousness was an existence that could be recognized and perceived by individuals, directly connected with the external world and the inner world. The pre-consciousness is between the conscious and the unconscious and plays the role of a gatekeeper. The psychological content of the unconscious can enter the consciousness through the filtering of the pre-consciousness. Therefore, Freud believed that the unconscious mind was the basis of psychoanalysis, and his theories all revolve around the unconscious mind.

Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, divided the psychological process into three levels: consciousness, individual unconscious, and collective unconscious based on Freud's unconscious theory. The individual unconscious is the

second level of personality structure. Jung believed that the individual unconscious is the unconscious composed of all the repressed memories and experiences as well as individual impulses and desires mentioned by Freud. The collective unconscious is the most innovative, mysterious, and controversial concept in Jung's theory.

As a contemporary psychoanalytic school representative, Fromm's research method is based on The Freudian theory. However, it is different from the content of classical psychoanalysis in many essential concepts. The idea of the social unconscious is a classic one. The so-called social unconscious refers to the repressed realm that most members of society exist in. Fromm believed that consciousness was the product of culture, and any human behavior resulted from a specific historical culture. In contrast, a specific historical culture was the language, logic, and social taboos shared by most people in a country or region, which were called social filters.

2.2 Erich Fromm's Social Unconscious

2.2.1 Erich Fromm's theory: The connotation and forming mechanism of the social unconscious

The so-called unconscious refers to the instinct, impulse, and desire that cannot be recognized by social rules in individual consciousness and has to be suppressed by consciousness. Although the unconscious mind cannot be aware of individual consciousness, it is the basis of individual conscious activities. Erich Fromm (1986) ultimately inherited Freud's basic idea of unconscious repression and regarded the social unconscious as the psychological tendency that existed in the consciousness of most members of the society, due to the everyday social repression and could not rise

to manifest consciousness. "The areas that are repressed are the same for the largest number of society members. When a society with particular contradictions is functioning effectively, these jointly repressed factors are precisely what the society does not allow its members to be aware of "(p. 93).[2]

In Fromm's view, the human subconscious evolves in a changing society, so there are different social unconsciousness in different social periods. Some of the subconscious can become social unconscious through some social mechanism. The social mechanism that prevents some social consciousness from becoming social consciousness is the "social filter." Erich Fromm (1986) have noted, "Every society has its 'social filter'. Only specific ideas, ideas, and experiences can pass through when the social structure changes fundamentally. The 'social filter' changes accordingly" (p. 5).[3] Therefore, we can say that the social unconscious refers to thoughts, concepts, and experiences that do not pass through the social filter. In Fromm's view, the social subconscious is historical, and different societies and periods have different social subconscious. A specific social subconscious in a particular society or period may be social conscious in another society or period. However, one thing is fixed: there is always a certain social subconscious in a particular society and period.

In short, a particular thought and experience can only become social consciousness if it passes through the filtering of the social filter composed of language, logic, and social

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[2] Erich Fromm,(1986).*Beyond the Chains of Illusion*(Yan Zhang,pp.93).China: Hunan People's Publishing House.(Original work published in 1962)

[3] Erich Fromm,(1986). *Greatness and Limitation of Freud's Thought* (Heyong Shen, pp.5).China: Hunan People's Publishing House.(Original work published in 1980)

taboos. If a specific thought, concept, and experience do not pass the filtering, it can only stay at the social unconscious stage. In essence, a specific thought, idea, and experience cannot be filtered through the social filter. Its essence is repression. The main reason why people suppress their thoughts, ideas, and experiences are out of fear, fear of being a loser on the one hand, and fear of loneliness and rejection on the other. Fromm focused on the social unconscious, not because it was more important than the social consciousness, but because people ignored it. The consciousness was always in a state of repression, blocking the possibility of people attaining absolute freedom.

2.3 Literary work about the social unconscious

*The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Min*d (Figure2), by Gustav Le Pen was first published in 1895.The book has been translated into nearly 20 languages and is still influential in the academic world. Le Pen's extremely detailed description of the

collective mind has greatly influenced people's understanding of the role of collective behavior and thinking about social psychology.
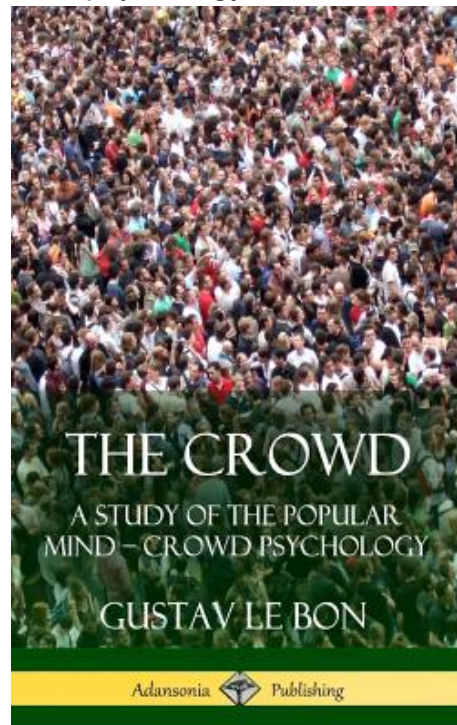
Figure2 Book cover of T*he Crowd A Study of the Popular Mind by Le Pen*

In his book, Le Pen showed that psychological groups are different from groups in the general sense. They are a group of people whose feelings and thoughts are developing in the same direction. Their self-conscious personality disappears, and a kind of collective psychology is formed, which is subject to the unified law of group spirit. Therefore, even if a thousand people gathered in a public place by chance, it is not enough to form a group without any apparent purpose.

This book examines groups psychological characteristics in detail and explores the moral, emotional, imaginative, and faith aspects of groups. Also, the book points out that individuals are prone to lose self-consciousness after entering a group and become a member of a blind, impulsive, fanatic, and credulous mob under the oppression of the collective will.

The factors influencing group concepts and beliefs include race, tradition, system. The highly infectious language, the call of the Republic, the incitement of leaders also positively or negatively affects the group. Le Pen pointed out that when an individual is an isolated individual, he has distinct personality characteristics. When he integrates into the group, all his personality will be drowned out by the group, and the group's thoughts will immediately replace his thoughts. When a group exists, it is characterized by emotion, consensus, and low IQ.

The factors influencing group concepts and beliefs include race, tradition, rule. The highly infectious language, the call of the Republic, the incitement of leaders also positively or negatively affects group behavior. Referring to the leader of a group, Le Pen point out that a group is like docile sheep until they have a leader. The role of a leader is to guide them. Whenever a group of creatures, whether animal or human, gather together, they instinctively place themselves under the rule of a leader. In other words, the group's demand for leaders is an indispensable demand for the group's existence, and it is an instinctive expectation and desire. Leaders of groups do not need sharp minds, and they do not need foresight, do not need natural intelligence. After understanding the group's psychological characteristics, the leader realizes the control of the group through the mobilization means of assertion, repetition, and contagion. This process makes the group naturally accept the control of the leader.

3 Cyberpunk

3.1 Seeing Social Trends and Contradictions from Cyberpunk

As we enter the third decade of the new century, new techniques that were once only found in science fiction art are increasingly becoming a reality. In the real world, without

the science and technology of Cyberpunk movies, the Cyberpunk trend is often viewed as a subcultural phenomenon. However, with the rapid development of science and technology, who can predict that such a subcultural phenomenon will not become a mainstream social existence and cultural phenomenon in the future? Moreover, when all this becomes a reality, human beings are closely integrated with science and technology. Thinking consciousness can roam in the network composed of information and data without restriction; what kind of state will our world turn into?

3.1.1 The origin of Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk, also known as digital Punk, is derived from Cybernetics and Punk. It is a science fiction story, which often takes computer or information technology as the theme. The plot usually revolves around the contradiction between human and artificial intelligence (AI) or Cyborg. To sum up, Cyberpunk contains two primary meanings: Cyberpunk technology, and anti-traditional and anti-establishment punk thought. As a combination word, Cyberpunk is a genre of science fiction literature, film, and television creation, and the movement and ideas of this genre, formed and popularized in the 1980s. How did Cyberpunk come into being?

Figure3 Book cover of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick.

Science fiction writer Philip Kindred Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*? (Figure3) is regarded as the forerunner of Cyberpunk. Although there is no direct description of Cyberpunk technology in this work itself, the film *Blade Runner*, influenced by Cyberpunk and based on it, successfully modeled and established the Cyberpunk punk image style contained in the novel. Therefore, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* also holds the distinction of being the seminal work of Cyberpunk.

So, what are the characteristics of Cyberpunk? Bustling cities, Icy atmosphere, misty views, colorful neon lights, and human beings with mechanical parts are essential cyberpunk elements. As a branch of science fiction, Cyberpunk sets the story in the near future. In this world, there are always people at the bottom and on society's margins, such as drug traffickers, musicians, criminals and hackers, dreamers, or someone who seeks out hobbies. Cyberpunk characters, who love freedom, often fight

back with the technology that controls them. Storylines often go into the illegal world, where morality is blurred, and it is difficult to distinguish the traditional hero from the good guy. In these kinds of works, apart from the world outlook and stories, the most significant feature is integrating cultural elements of many nationalities and countries in the future world. In cities full of science and technology, Chinese buildings appear out of the blue. People are dancing in traditional Oriental costumes. People from different countries are fighting with different fighting systems, cold weapons, and hot weapons compete on the same stage. Human beings are all mechanical parts beside brains.

3.1.2 Tell reality with futurism

Cyberpunk tries to forecast the future, to convey melancholy anxiety lit by neon, to tell a realistic story in a futuristic context. This is reflected in two primary ways.

Firstly, Cyberpunk explores future society. From the second half of the 20th century into the 21st century, the emerging postmodern cultural trend of thought has had a theoretical and philosophical guiding effect on creating Cyberpunk works. It is through these postmodern cultural trends that the symbols of Cyberpunk works have achieved a qualitative leap. Cyberpunk works reflect the interweaving and collision of various ideologies. At the core, it is about the change of power in human society and the thinking about human subjective consciousness from a technological society's perspective. Based on these meanings, Cyberpunk works raise deeper and broader questions: how and to what extent does the technical media construct the subject's subjective conscious and what dominant perceptual relationship is embedded in it?

Second, Cyberpunk images reflect the existing state of modern people. The images in Cyberpunk movies, whether landscape or character, are the society's expression in

which human beings are the social main body. Cyberpunk is the cultural product of such an information process. As a cultural symbol, it represents the spirit of an era. All kinds of images in Cyberpunk artworks, whether landscape or characters, are condensed images of imagination and material reality and the experience they represent. Cybernetics and the limits of humanism, the traditions of man and animal, man and machine, visible and invisible. Cyberpunk provides an opportunity for human self-reflection, allowing people to immerse themselves in the gorgeous cyberspace where reality and fantasy are gradually blurred. Simultaneously this reminds them that every kind of progress has its drawbacks and that human beings will encounter unavoidable problems in the future.

3.1.3 Objective imagery in Cyberpunk films

Cyberpunk works depict a compelling vision of the future world through numerous images with Cyberpunk space characteristics. Cyberpunk films' objective images can be divided into geographical imagery, artistic imagery, and Global imagery.

Cyberpunk films usually choose the city as their central narrative scene. The metropolis with a strong sense of science and technology that often appears in Cyberpunk films has apparent characteristics of urban sprawl in development.

In the world view setting of Cyberpunk background, due to the absence of government supervision, technology-oriented commerce develops in disorder under globalization, and urban sprawl becomes the final form of urban development. This has led to a series of environmental and social problems. The environmental aspect mainly reflects the destruction of the ecological environment. In contrast, the social aspect is the noticeable divisions in the social stratum, and human settlements' chaos. Symbols

of urban sprawl can be seen everywhere in Cyberpunk movies. Overflowing advertisements, run-down apartments, and squalid neighborhoods highlight the chaotic plight of these cities. In the classic Cyberpunk movie, we can see a clear social class division. For example, in the movie *Blade Runner* ,the social classes from high to low are rights holders, supervisors serving power holders, social production enterprises, and new humans (Cyborg) serving the above groups. The city here is not concrete but a symbolic city, and it is a city with social and ecological problems caused by urban sprawl.

Cultural imagery and the impact of Cyber technology on people's lives are reflected through a great deal of technical detail and realism. Technology companies use technology to meet people's survival and psychological needs, making people depend on each other and obtain benefits and power. In the world of Cyberpunk, technological tools are the means to maintain the implicit social order and the main way to build technological power. On the one hand, the actual human gradually lost its natural and social attributes and became a part of the giant system, engaged in mechanized production and life activities. On the other hand, cyber technology and human-computer interaction make machines or artificial intelligence gradually possess the emotional and social functions that human beings the subjective consciousness.

Global imagery is also one of the cyberpunk films' objective images. The globalized political, economic, and social forms are the main elements of Cyberpunk films. In most Cyberpunk movies, we barely see the state or government. Governments are often replaced by multinational technology giants or by giant systems based on network technology. The political, economic, and social forms of globalization are the main

elements of cyberpunk films. In most cyberpunk movies, we hardly see countries or

governments. Governments are often replaced by multinational technology giants or

giant systems based on web technology. These giant systems usually take an

opportunity (war, disaster, or other ecological damage and resource risk) to establish

themselves as builders of social power and gain maximum benefit.
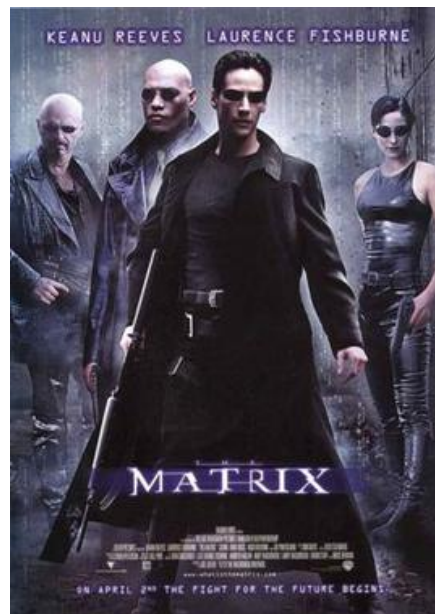
3.1.4 Related works

Figure4 Poster of *The Matrix*

There are several films with distinct characteristics of Cyberpunk that provided

inspiration for my Thesis Project.

The reason Cyberpunk films have become one of the hottest topics in recent years

is not only due to adaptation to the development of information technology but also due

to the rise of postmodernism. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment, human beings

have tried to transform the world with the power of reason. Freedom and human rights

in humanistic thoughts have been gradually eroded by standardization and unity

dominated by science and technology. In this trend, the science and technology created

by human beings will, in turn, control people's thoughts, behaviors, and cultural activities, and people have to balance the real material benefits with the spiritual degradation. The Wachowskis' 1999 film, *The Matrix* (Figure4), captured this theme. The film describes life and death and reincarnation of philosophical thinking in the game with the virtual intelligence matrix to realize that human beings are only imperfect experiments. In this film, virus intelligence can be abstracted into virtual units and can be embodied in replicators, which makes you admire the two directors' imagination.

Blade Runner (Figure5) and *Ghost in The Shell* (Figure6) are two of Cyberpunk's most iconic films. Science fiction works have their artistic quality, but they are profound and accurate in depicting human beings survival plight. Although the survival dilemma in Cyberpunk films is not the main driving force of the narrative, it has become an integral part of the Cyberpunk world view.

| Figure5 | Figure6 |

In the Cyberpunk movie, where humans and machines are the eternal contradictions, its resounding theme can be analyzed through different perspectives of observation, such as the fear and reflection of technology, the survival dilemma of human beings, and the identity of the subject, including a Cyborg. These three themes are not narrated independently but intercross and influence each other.

At the end of *Blade Runner's* director, an origami unicorn has cut hints that the main character, Deckard, is a clone. Such a turn breaks the logic of mechanistic narration. It also sheds light on the hidden plot: Officer Gaff, who already knows that the protagonist's dream is a unicorn, does not kill Decard and his lover Rachael but leaves origami to indicate that he has been to Decard's house. The last words he says to Decard are, "It is a pity she will not make it, but who can? "In this film, Gaff represents human beings, whose kindness are the reflection of human self-reflection.

As an artificial mechanical life, the Cyborg has human attributes in a sense, but what it lacks is recognizing social identity, that is, whether it can exist as a human. As for the subject's identity, Immanuel Kant have noted that the subject is "the self," that is, "the person who can make decisions independently and resort to actions according to his own free will". [4]

The puppeteer in *Ghost in the Shell* is very clear about his identity. He believes that he is born on the Internet as a human being. Motoko Kusanagi, who is also a Cyborg, is confused about her identity. Perhaps Cyborgs have the same confusion: she may have

[4] Brook, Andrew and Julian Wuerth, *Kant's View of the Mind and Consciousness of Self*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/kant-mind/>

died a long time ago, the present "me" is just a fictitious personality created by the semantic body, and the electronic brain or the real "me" never existed at all.

Cyberpunk films have a double narrative, the surface of which is to construct the future world view, but the depth of which is to reflect the plight of human existence. With science and technological development, more and more science fiction works appear, and their content may become reality one by one. Excellent Cyberpunk works have multiple narrative themes, so the audience should not only pay attention to the forward-looking technology or audio-visual stimulation. Only from the perspective of science and technology, social environment, or human identity can we realize that works have great humanistic care and realistic value, which is why Cyberpunk movies are so popular with audiences.

3.2 Influences of Hi-tech on people's thinking in Cyberpunk

3.2.1 Individuals of Cyberpunk

According to the state of human society shown in various Cyberpunk literature works and movies, it is not difficult to conclude that individuals will experience the following changes in the world of Cyberpunk:

○ People are addicted to virtual reality and simulation games built-in cyberspace, and even memory tends to be electronic.

○ The variation of the social subject in the Cyberpunk space

○ Fear of future technology

○ Individualism in Cyberpunk: Revolt and reshape the social subject. The ultimate choice in Cyberpunk movies is generally a revolt against technology's power, which can

be divided into three categories at the specific performance level. Self - sacrifice, and self - perfection, and self - sublimation.

3.2.2 Social unconscious in Cyberpunk

The philosopher Hilary Putnam (1981) pointed out the "Brain in a VAT" conjecture ,"A man has been operated on by scientists. Nerve endings in his brain are connected to a computer programmed to send messages to the brain to maintain the illusion that everything is perfectly normal. The brain can also input or intercept memories. It can even be entered as a code." The most basic question about this assumption is, 'How do you protect yourself from being in this predicament?" (p.1-21).[5] The "Brain in a VAT" is a well-known thesis of Western skepticism and has become a recurring theme in Cyberpunk films.

There is always a system in Cyberpunk fiction that governs people's lives, such as powerful governments, paternalistic corporations, or people of the traditional Christian faith. A particular technology always governs such systems. This super technology combines human genetic material with mechanical structure, creating machines that can think like humans and people that think like machines. This technique supports the survival of many real humans, spreading in the human ego through brain transplants, artificial limbs, and cloned organs to integrate humans and machines and make them controlled by systems.

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[5] Hilary Putnam,(1981). Reason, *Truth, and History*. (pp.1-21) Cambridge, England :Cambridge University Press.

4.Visual Thesis and Conclusion

4.1 Visual Thesis

Figure7

　　To better illustrate my point of view, I made a short animation as my visual work

(Figure7). I want to explore the contradiction between the self and the social

unconscious in today's society through a futuristic approach, so the story happens in a

cyberpunk world (Figure8).

Figure8

Figure9

In this world, people have been through countless wars, human culture was reduced to ruins (Figure9). At the same time, due to the deterioration of the environment, people will suffer from a kind of "Robot disease". People with this disease will gradually lose their five senses and the ability to think, finally become like robots without subjective thoughts. The Robot disease represents the current social situation in which people are always willing to believe in the so-called authority and the opinions of most people, instead of thinking with their brains
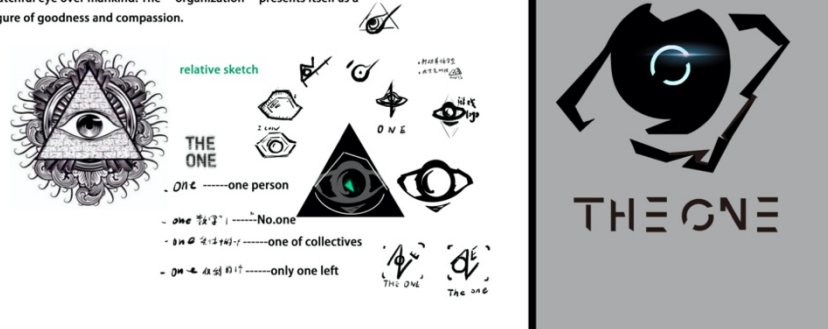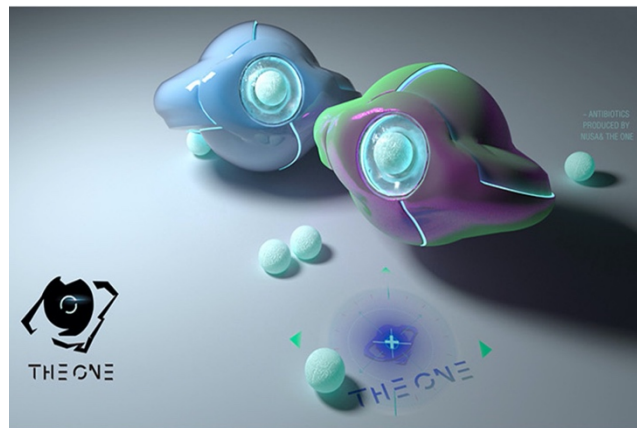
Figure10

Figure11

There are two groups in the story: The first group is the social unconscious

represented by the vast majority of normal people controlled by the company. The

company is called "The One"(Figure10)and it distributes pills to people (Figure11),

saying that this kind of pill can protect people from harmful substances in air outside to

prevent "robot disease". This company represents a group of people who control

people's thoughts and influence the trend of society. The pill represents modern

communication equipment and all the ways we receive information. They not only bring

us convenience but also interfere with our ability to think independently.

Figure12

The second group is the Self represented by the protagonist (Figure12). This kind of

person is from the marginalized groups of society, they use the high technology as their

weapons to doubt about social unconscious, to counterattack the system, and pursue
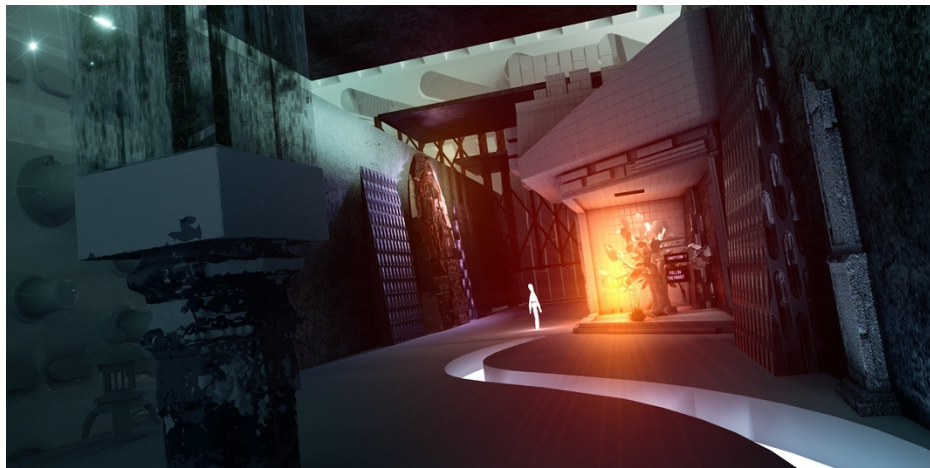
personal freedom.

Figure13

Figure14

In the beginning, protagonist No.7 was invited by the company (Figure13) to enter their building and accept their treatment. She wears the same clothes as everyone else, wears masks given by the company, and takes a small pill (Figure14). What's more, they are not allowed to do things differently from others. It is just like that in reality, people are always influenced by the social unconscious, doing things defined as "right" by others.

Figure15

As the days went by, No.7 gradually could not bear this kind of depressing life. She dyes her hair red, and then she is captured by a group of doctors (Figure15). As the representative of self-consciousness in our personality, the protagonist constantly tries to pursue independence in her numb life.

When she woke up in an experiment room (Figure16), she found the group trying to erase her memories (Figure17).
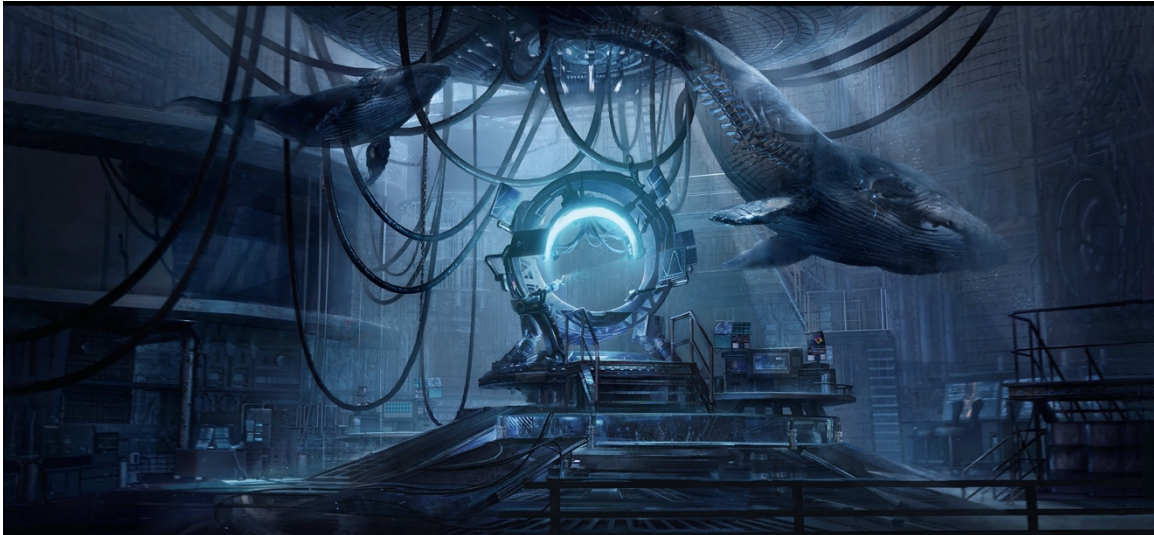

Figure16

Figure17

She realized that the purpose of the company was not to cure people of robot disease but to control their minds, by erasing the memories of those who had "disobeyed" so that people remembered what it had told them. In reality, organizations with power and voice often use their influence to make people believe that what they say is official or authoritative. As soon as they found dissenting voices, they silenced them. This is also the way that the social unconscious affects people.

Figure18

Figure19

She finally found the door to escape the building in a secret room (Figure18,19).

Figure20

Figure21

However, in the end, the camera focused on a monitor in a room (Figure20). A mysterious man sat in front of the monitor and watched her every move (Figure21). I want to show the awakening and rebellion of self-consciousness through the protagonist trying to escape from the building. The final ending reveals that people can never escape the influence of the social unconscious.

4.2 Conclusion

Finally, I came to the following conclusion: No matter in reality or the future world, people seem unable to eliminate the influence of the social unconscious. As social animals, human beings will always be influenced by others and society. At the same time, human self-consciousness will not change with the development of science and technology in the future and the emergence of "new humans" such as Cyborg. Thus, the contradiction between the ego and the social subconscious will continue in the future.

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