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20 Minutes into the Future:
Cyberpunk vs. Post-cyberpunk

The genres of cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk are centered primarily around the effects of advanced science, the information age, and computers/networks coupled with the breakdown or radical change in social order. The primary difference between the two genres is that cyberpunk tends to vilify big government and corporations while leaning heavily towards dystopian literature while post-cyberpunk tends to be slightly more realistic and optimistic. These forms of speculative fiction force the readers and/or audience to confront some very tough issues including the ethical limits of technology and the measure of what makes us human. While more suited for mature audiences, cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk manage to boil tough questions into a format that is easy enough to understand for the average reader/viewer.

In keeping with the advent of technology, the genres of cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk have expanded beyond the realm of the novel into graphic novels, video games, and film. In the interest of keeping this bibliography literary, only two non-literary examples will be given.

Gibson, William. Neuromancer. New York: Ace, 1984.

William Gibson has been referred to as the father of the cyberpunk genre. In addition to creating the word cyberspace and one of the first uses of a digital simulation known as the Matrix is provided in this novel. The characters are well fleshed out and Gibson provides very immersive settings. “Case had been the sharpest data-thief in the business, until vengeful former employers crippled his nervous system. But now a new and very mysterious employer recruits him for a last-chance run. The target: an unthinkable powerful artificial intelligence orbiting Earth in service of the

sinister Tessier-Ashpool business clan.” This is the goodreads.com summary.

Anderson, M. T. Feed. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick, 2002

“For Titus and his friends, it started out like any ordinary trip to the moon - a chance to party during spring break and play with some stupid low-grav at the Ricochet Lounge. But that was before the crazy hacker caused all their feeds to malfunction, sending them to the hospital to lie around with nothing inside their heads for days. And it was before Titus met Violet, a beautiful, brainy teenage girl who has decided to fight the feed and its omnipresent ability to categorize human thoughts and desires.” This novel has been noted for its frequent use of slang and colloquialisms in a futuristic setting. The death grip of the social media in the novel strikingly resembles current trends to an unsettling degree. This is a good book for anyone who obsessively checks their online status.

Stross, Charles. Rule 34. New York: Ace, 2011

Rule 34 follows three narratives surrounding a series of murders via internet. All of the victims are internet scammers, and the Rule 34 squad is hot on the case. Centered around the internet rule of the same name, an entire division tasked with policing internet porn. A strong suspense/mystery novel, Rule 34 is well paced. This novel brings up many good questions regarding the nature of information security.

Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam, 1992.

“In reality, Hiro Protagonist delivers pizza for Uncle Enzo’s CosoNostra Pizza Inc., but in the Metaverse he’s a warrior prince. Plunging headlong into the enigma of a new computer virus that’s striking down hackers everywhere, he races along the neon-lit streets on a search-and-destroy mission for the shadowy virtual villain threatening to bring about infocalypse.” Barnes and Noble Review.

This book is considered to be one of the first, and prime example of post-cyberpunk. It is generally light-hearted and is certainly not as gritty as many of the novels that compose the genre of cyberpunk. A good novel for exploring the issues of virtual identity and potentially escapism.

Atwood, Margaret. Oryx and Crake. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2003.

The world has been destroyed by a plague, and this story follows one of the few survivors, named Snowman, as he struggles to survive not only the merciless environment, but his own guilt and memories from the time before the end. In his flashbacks, Snowman returns to a dystopian world run by pharmaceutical mega-corporations where he once worked as an advertiser. The mystery of the end of the world is buried deep within his memories, it is only a matter of time before they are brought to light. The flashbacks take place in a dystopic world and many of the characters relations are tied to the net and the digital world. Oryx & Crake takes a very grim look at the nature of mass advertising and the decay of the English language in response while also exploring the potential pitfalls of genetic manipulation and corporate corruption.

Farmer, Nancy. The House of the Scorpion. New York: Atheneum for Young Readers, 2002.

“Matteo Alacran was not born; he was harvested with the DNA from El Patron, lord of a country called Opium. Can a boy who was bred to guarantee another’s survival find his own purpose in life? And can he ever be free?” a goodreads.com review. I would highly recommend this novel as a piece of speculative fiction because it brings up some interesting discussions regarding not only the morality of cloning, but the rights of clones themselves. This novel brings up genuine issues that will require a large amount of debate before any of us are ready to answer for certain what course to take.

Brunner, John. The Shockwave Rider. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

“Nickie Halflinger, the only person to escape from Tarnover- where they raise hyper-intelligent children to maintain the political dominance of the USA in the 21st century – is on the run, dodging from loophole to crevice to crack in the computerized data-net that binds the continent like chains. After years of flight and constant changes of identity, at the strange small town called Precipice he discovers he is not alone in his quest. But can his new allies save him when he falls again into the sinister grasp of Tarnover...?” goodreads.com review. This novel has been noted as predicting computer worms and bandwidth long before it came into reality making it one of the most surprisingly accurate pieces of speculative fiction in that respect. In addition to predicting various aspects of the internet and computers, a fair amount of the book is centered around identity, possibly prophetic regarding the surge in identity crimes that surfaced surrounding the internet.

Ruff, Matt. Sewer, Gas & Electric: The Public Works Trilogy: A Novel. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1997.

This novel certainly follows a more humorous route than most of these entries. The story begins with an eccentric businessman Harry Gant constructing the new Tower of Babel in 2023 New York. At the same time Gant's ex-wife has been hired to investigate the murder of a Wall-Street takeover artist with her assistant AI with the personality of Ayn Rand. No, that is not a typo. This murder mystery is worth reading simply for its humor and colorful cast of characters including environmentally friendly pirates and a giant, mutated great white shark living in the sewers. As far as speculative fiction goes, there is a lot less speculation and a lot more fiction.

Paprika. Dir. Satoshi Kon. Prod. Masao Takiyama and Jungo Maruta. Screenplay by Seishi Minakami and Satoshi Kon. Adapt. Yasutaka Tsutsui. Madhouse, 2006. DVD.

This Japanese animated film centers around a single question: what would happen if we invented a

machine that would allow us to enter people's dreams? The DC mini allows doctors to enter a patient's brain to help them recover through revolutionary therapeutic sessions. However, this new technology faces strong resistance when several copies are stolen by terrorists who now have access to the dreams of any person they choose. Keep in mind that this film came out before the more well known film, *Inception*. *Paprika* expands on this idea by focusing more on the technology involved, the moral issues and the dangers that come with entering another person's brain. It is not a film that can be easily grasped in one sitting and it is loaded to the brim with symbolism. The characters also explore the natures of both the digital self and the dream self.

Elysium. Dir. Neill Blomkamp. Prod. Neill Blomkamp, Bill Block, and Simon Kinberg. Perf. Matt Damon and Jodie Foster. Alphacore/TriStar Pictures, 2013. Film.

In 2154 the small, wealthy population of earth has retreated to the orbital habitat known as Elysium while the rest of humanity resides on the overpopulated and desecrated earth below. While the people below are policed by robots and struggle to survive, the rich folk of Elysium have access to advanced medical science and all the comfort they could ask for. After receiving a lethal dose of radiation, a poor factory worker named Max Da Costa must fight his way into Elysium for a cure or die. This film is great for not only its action scenes, but the remarkably sharp commentary on immigration, health care, and class issues that are relevant in today's world. This film is more focused on the social issues than the technology involved.

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/22328.Neuromancer>

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/feed-m-t-anderson/1100305951?ean=9780763662622>

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/snow-crash-neal-stephenson/1100301882?ean=9780553380958>

<http://functionalnerds.com/2012/01/review-rule-34-by-charles-stross/>

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13376.The_House_of_the_Scorpion





www.goodreads.com/book/show/41070.The_Shockwave_Rider



Cyberpunk & Post-Cyberpunk

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So, what is cyberpunk?

- Transformative effects of:
 -  Advanced Science
 -  Information Technology
 -  Computers and networks
 -  Breakdown or radical change in social order

Psychology and Technology



Deterioration of Society



Megacorporations



- More often than not the state of society is in decay
- Large corporations tend to hold a majority of the power.

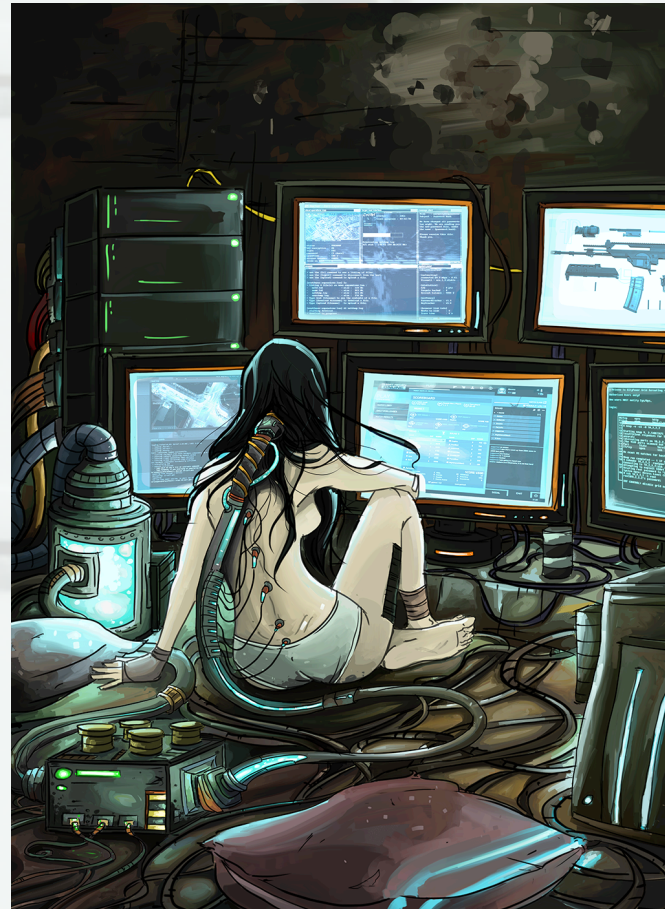
Human Augmentation

- What is the measure of a human being? At what point does someone become more than human?



Hackers

- How much information should be accessible to the public?
- How is cybercrime evolving?



Difference Between Punks

- Cyberpunk

-  Dystopian
-  Bleak
-  Anit-Government

Post-Cyberpunk

Generally more
optimistic
More realistic
Positive growth