

“Cyberspace on Page and Screen”

Prompts for Paper Two.

Due March 31 before class.

Directions:

1. Incorporate a theoretical text assigned after Week 6 (i.e. you may use Hansen’s Virtual Reality chapter, but nothing earlier).
2. You may use any fictional texts that you did not previously discuss in your first paper. This includes any video game or film you may want to write about.
3. Review my commentary on your first paper so as to avoid the same mistakes.
4. Write three pages and turn in as a PDF to your Sakai dropbox.

Prompts:

1. Politics. Several of our readings have tapped into the political promise of technology for both utopian and oppressive ends. Write a paper that considers the politics of cyberspace(s) as either positive, negative, or both. What sort of revolutionary potential does cyberspace enable? What are the power relations between individuals and social institutions afforded by cyberspace? You may want to specify a specific sort of politics: issues of equality in race, gender, or wealth; corporate structures; biopower and biopolitics; social relations such as governmental organizations, personal and group identity, and political representation versus direct action; the expansion of visibility and the contraction of privacy (surveillance). Do these perspectives change the sort of place or space that cyberspace is? For example, can a political understanding of cyberspace accord with the kind of disembodied, romantic cyberspace we saw in the first few weeks of the course?

2. Nature/Culture. Consider some of the instances—or absences—of nature in relation to technology in our readings. What kinds of natures—human nature? a natural world?—do we see depicted by the technological worlds we have read about in fiction and in theory? Is nature a cultural creation engendered by technologies deployed by experimental science and in the manipulation/creation of reality? Does technology disavow the very idea of nature—as a stable

real, an ultimate foundation for all things, a source for immutable forms or essences, or an outside of human culture? Or does technology link culture to nature, revealing that culture had never left nature's fold, but that technological has only ever added to nature's creations? Again, "nature" can be widely interpreted, and I encourage you to play with this word and its possible meanings.

3. Realities. Is augmented reality cyberspace? Consider how either the superposition of digital images onto, or (as in GPS navigation) their indirect reference to, a physically experienced space changes the relationship of the virtual to reality, of software to hardware, and of computation to embodiment. Reflecting back on our readings from some of computer science's progenitors, how new or different of a development is augmented reality in comparison to the early ideas for cyberspace, hypermedia, and augmentation? Does augmented reality, such as the geolocative art in Gibson's *Spook Country*, introduce a new dimension of time to cyberspace that was lacking in its earlier, more intra-computer versions? You may want to account for the shifted register for the term "augmentation," which has gone from bodily augmentation to worldly augmentation. Is this a substantial difference? In the case of a video game's GUI or HUD (head-up display), for example, might not body/avatar and world be considered one and the same?

4. Object, system, network. As our readings have shifted registers from virtual to more physical, from science fictional to present and/or speculative, the theme of globalization has remained. We read, for instance, in *Spook Country*: "The salt, he [Tito] wondered, was it Bulgarian? Where had those cartridges been made? In Sofia? In Moscow, perhaps? In London, where the Bulgarian was said to have worked before?" (Gibson 111). Take a moment to consider the efficiency of cyberspace: it renders commensurable and connected vast swaths of space, myriad objects, and all sorts of agents. It will be useful to review your notes from earlier class meetings in order to gather together the various qualities of cyberspace. Now, select an object. It may be from one of our fictional works or a theoretical piece. Or you may want to choose another object from real life. Write a paper that exposes what we could call the cyberspatial reflection in that object: in what ways does the object reflect the realities (experiences, values, qualities, etc.) of cyberspace, and how, if at all, does it remain opaque to such a comparison?