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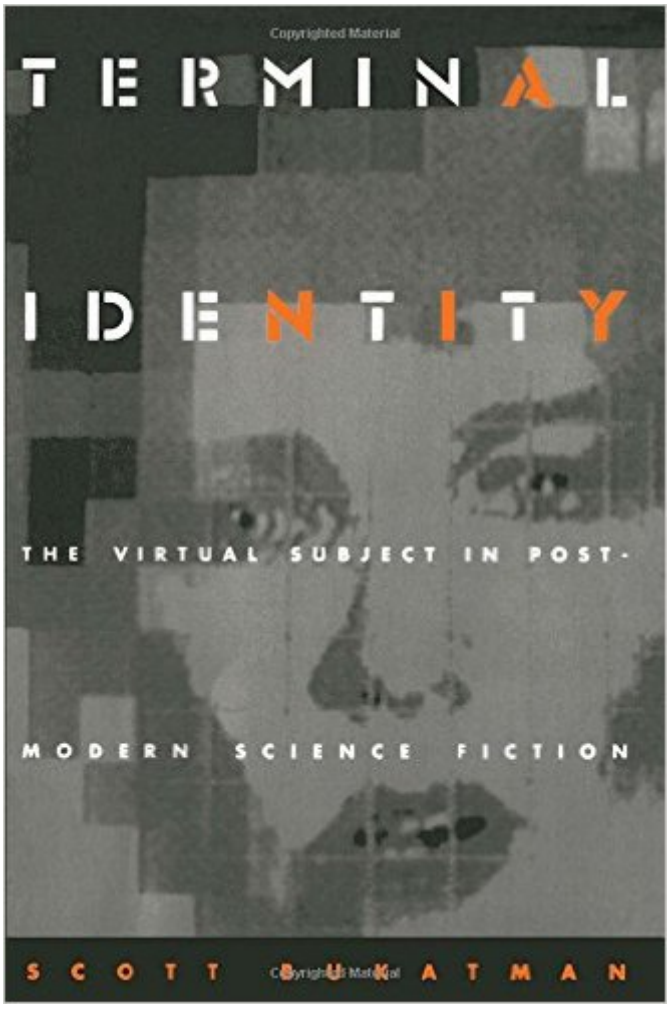
Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject In Postmodern Science Fiction



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Synopsis

Scott Bukatman’s Terminal Identityâ ”referring to both the site of the termination of the conventional "subject" and the birth of a new subjectivity constructed at the computer terminal or television screen--puts to rest any lingering doubts of the significance of science fiction in contemporary cultural studies. Demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge, both of the history of science fiction narrative from its earliest origins, and of cultural theory and philosophy, Bukatman redefines the nature of human identity in the Information Age. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary theories of the postmodernâ ”including Fredric Jameson, Donna Haraway, and Jean Baudrillardâ ”Bukatman begins with the proposition that Western culture is suffering a crisis brought on by advanced electronic technologies. Then in a series of chapters richly supported by analyses of literary texts, visual arts, film, video, television, comics, computer games, and graphics, Bukatman takes the reader on an odyssey that traces the postmodern subject from its current crisis, through its close encounters with technology, and finally to new self-recognition. This new "virtual subject," as Bukatman defines it, situates the human and the technological as coexistent, codependent, and mutally defining.Synthesizing the most provocative theories of postmodern culture with a truly encyclopedic treatment of the relevant media, this volume sets a new standard in the study of science fictionâ ”a category that itself may be redefined in light of this work. Bukatman not only offers the most detailed map to date of the intellectual terrain of postmodern technology studiesâ ”he arrives at new frontiers, providing a propitious launching point for further inquiries into the relationship of electronic technology and culture.

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Customer Reviews

One of _the_ important books for anyone interested in Science Fiction's engagement with cultural issues. I've yet to find someone who had done any important work at the time of the books' publication who isn't in there somewhere. It's been called "interminable identity" by some but that's just because people don't have the patience to wade through the good stuff. an Important Book..

As dense as it is deep, Bukatman's work is essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in science fiction, postmodern theory, or the relationship between technology and human culture. The glowing reviews by Bruce Sterling and Larry McCaffery were well-deserved, and this book will have a permanent place on my bookshelf (right next to Storming the Reality Studio). I had never heard of Scott Bukatman before finding this book, but I now look forward to reading anything he writes in the future.

Fans of the science fiction genre (whether in film, comic book, or novel form) will enjoy these collected essays on how societal issues and fears have been represented. It includes discussions on authors such as Philip K Dick, William Gibson, Neil Gaiman, Alfred Bester, and many others.

My interest in this book was piqued by Napier's reference to terminal identity in her article 'When the Machines Stop,' and this work certainly provides a comprehensive and compelling analysis of postmodern (mostly cyberpunk) science fiction. The titular concept of 'terminal identity'--the state in which human subjectivity is defined by the objects of our technology--is both elegant and useful; there is so much that is invaluable here that a short review couldn't do it justice. In particular, I was impressed by his analyses of fractals, the overlapping discourses on computer viruses and biological ones such as AIDS, and his discussion of the attempts to humanize certain technological objects (such as motherboards) by casting them in the guise of art. Additionally, his writing is accessible but never dumbed-down and for a work of analysis this is a remarkably enjoyable read. Overall I would say that anyone serious about studying cyberpunk as a genre or even with a general interest in how postmodernism operates in science fiction would find this book invaluable.

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