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Title: Living the Dream: Anna Starobinets' *The Living* as the Cyberpunk Novel

Abstract:

This paper will examine how Anna Starobinets' cyberpunk novel *The Living* (2012) incorporates the two seemingly disparate discourses, utopian and dystopian, and will discuss how these discourses coexist in a dialogic setting. I aim to show that the distinct characteristics of cyberpunk genre, evident in this novel, afford an ideal medium for the simultaneous presence of utopian and dystopian domains. The utopian and dystopian realms in the text stem from the intrinsic tension between the two main constituents of cyberpunk—"cyber" and "punk"—that harbor opposing attitudes towards the newly developing digital technologies such as cyberspace. The "cyber" component explores the capacity of virtual reality to annihilate the physical borders of time and space, allowing humans to transcend the limitations of the corporeal body, thereby demonstrating the promising advantages of the technological progress. The "punk" part refers to the punk culture that undermines the status quo, exposing potentially damaging consequences of the technological advancement if it is controlled by the corporations or government. It is this ambivalent attitude towards the information technologies that prompts the emergence of both utopian and dystopian discourses in *The Living*.

Specifically, the novel's "cyber" element, manifested in the creation of "Socio," a social network that everyone in this society must be plugged into, in which people literally "reside" by designing their own virtual slots perceived as their homes, stands to exemplify the utopian discourse since it evokes the idea of the unification of humankind, leading to the creation of the collective consciousness, that will restore wholeness in society (somewhat resonating with ideas of Russian Cosmism). However, this utopian discourse is gradually deconstructed ("punked") by suggesting that the unifying qualities of cyberspace can be, in fact, used to manipulate the collective mind, spawning one pliable docile public mass that can be easily controlled and regulated.