



Book Reflections
for **Feed**
by Matthew T. Anderson

May 30, 2022

Summer is here, and I've found myself with more time to tackle my backlog of unread books. This reflection focuses on "Feed", a book originally published in 2002 that largely follows a guy and his close friends having bouts of fun against the dystopian backdrop of a hyperconnected future. I found this book to be an interesting recommendation because there were clear parallels to modern technologies and the ongoing conversations surrounding those technologies.

Though I enjoyed this book, it was a peculiar read. On the surface, the story was about a fun-loving teen and his spring/summer romance set in a familiar – yet strange – future. Through the fabric of "Feed" were pinholes regarding society's decay due to hyper-consumerism. For example, the protagonist's friends would gather to chant advertiser jingles, dinner tables and chairs were as disposable as the plastic utensils accompanying them, and a person's value was driven by the strength of their connection to the 'Feed', which was a version of the internet intricately tied to the brain. The book's 'Feed' was extensively abused to push products onto those who used it, a theme so critical to the story that 'Feed' advertisements were spliced into the writing. The modern equivalent of the 'Feed' or 'Feednet' would be a partially realized (and terribly flawed) version of Elon Musk's ambitions for his Neuralink Corporation.

In the book, so much environmental damage has been done that air factories are needed to replace trees due to trees not being efficient enough and global powers are trying to push against The United States of America's severely detrimental thirst for consumption. Only one member of the protagonist's friend group seems to understand the importance and gravity of the situation society has created for itself. That friend, with their limited influence, attempts to be an avenue and advocate for change, but it results in a series of unfortunate events and a form of occasional ostracism from the rest of the friend group.



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In essence, the book highlights facets of several challenges that need to be addressed in the present and for the future. It does this in a quirky way, but after getting sufficiently far into the book, the gap between the protagonist's world and ours seems harrowingly closer than society might like to admit. In the age of big data, the 2002 novel reads as something especially prescient on some fronts. I can only hope that it's not spelling out the entirety of our future. Or, to close with sprinklings of a scene from "Feed", I hope the boat adrift in the painting does in fact have captains – captains with the willpower to steer the boat in the right direction. I hope the boat does in fact have passengers aboard it – enough passengers that are able and willing to see the horizon. And, I hope they can work together to move away from a "Feed"-like future.