



**CYBERPUNK!**

**SCIENCE  
FICTION  
VISIONS**

**HALLAM STEVENS**

**SPRING 2011**

**WEDNESDAY  
2-4PM**

## **Course description:**

Science fiction has had a profound influence on recent developments in science and technology. Fields such as virtual reality, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and the development of Internet and communications technologies have been inspired and transformed by our cultural imaginaries. Our fears, hopes, and understandings of these domains are written into texts. Through reading science fiction, role-playing games, hypertext fiction, and MMORPGs, this class will explore the interfaces between science, technology, and fiction, examining how these imaginaries affect science and technology and how science and technologies affect these imaginaries. Through such analysis we will arrive at a deeper understanding of how our culture comes to terms with the dangers, threats, and complexities of contemporary technologies.

## **Assessment and expectations:**

Class participation: **30%**

Creative project (~10pp): **30% (Due in last class before spring break)**

Final research paper (12-15pp): **40% (Due Thursday May 5<sup>th</sup>, 5pm)**

### *Class participation:*

In order for you to participate in the class, completing the reading is an absolute necessity. Apart from the novels (and other texts) themselves, I have kept additional reading to a minimum. These additional readings are intended to provide a starting point for discussion of the texts, so it is crucial that you make time to read them.

### *Movies:*

There are three movies scheduled during the semester:

**Tron (Week 3)**

**Blade Runner (Week 6)**

**Repo Men (Week 12)**

Attendance at the movies is compulsory so please make sure you keep these dates and times free.

### *Creative project:*

During the semester you will complete one creative project. The nature of the topic is open-ended and collaboration is encouraged. The project may take the form of written work or a class presentation or a website. The amount of work required is roughly the equivalent of a ten page paper (per person involved in the project). Some suggestions and ideas for the project include:

- Write a cyberpunk short story inspired by a particular technology or scientific breakthrough
- Develop a cyberpunk role-playing game (table-top or online)
- Write a script for a cyberpunk computer game
- Develop an online story space or hypertext narrative related to cyberpunk
- Explain a particular technology or scientific or engineering concept we have encountered in the class in a creative presentation

The project may be completed and turned in any time in the first seven weeks of class. The final deadline for turning in the project is the **last class before spring break (Wednesday March 9)**.

*Final paper:*

At the end of the semester you must complete a 12-15pp. research paper related to some aspect of the class. The choice of topic is up to you, but you should consult with me at some point during the semester in order to get approval for your topic. Since this is primarily a history class, the paper should be broadly historical in nature. It should engage with both primary and secondary sources.

Due date: **Thursday May 5<sup>th</sup>, 5pm.**

**Other policies:**

*Getting the material:*

The assigned short articles that are not already available online will be made available through the course website. You should purchase the books for the course online – many should be available as cheap paperbacks or used copies. In the final week of the course, you will need to spend a significant amount of time playing a computer game, *Deus Ex*. You will need to purchase this – it is over ten years old so it is not very expensive (less than \$20). You will need to make sure you purchase a version which works on a computer that you can get access to, which probably means getting access to a PC of some sort. Obviously, you can get together with other members of the class to play together; I will also try to make a version available on a computer accessible to everyone in the class.

*Collaboration:*

**Week by week:**

*Week 1 (Wednesday January 26): Introduction*

**Bring your laptop to the first class in order to play *Colossal Cave Adventure*. You can download the game from: [ftp://ftp.ifarchive.org/if-archive/games/pc/adv\\_crowther\\_win.zip](ftp://ftp.ifarchive.org/if-archive/games/pc/adv_crowther_win.zip) [Windows] or: <http://www.lobotomo.com/products/Adventure/index.html> [Mac]**

Bruce Bethke (1983) 'Cyberpunk' Available at: <http://project.cyberpunk.ru/lib/cyberpunk/>

*Week 2 (Wednesday February 2): Androids*

**Philip K. Dick, *Do androids dream of electric sheep?* (1968)**

Alan Turing (1950) 'Computing machinery and intelligence', *Mind* 59: 433-460.

*Week 3 (Wednesday February 9): Hackers and crackers*

**John Brunner, *The shockwave rider* (1975)**

**Watch: *Tron* (1982)**

Douglas Thomas (2002) 'Hacking culture' in *Hacking culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press): 5-46.

*Week 4 (Wednesday February 16): Cyberpunk*

**William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)**

Timothy Lenoir (2000) 'All but war is simulation: the military-entertainment complex', *Configurations* 8: 289-335.

*Week 5 (Wednesday February 23): Grey goo*

**Greg Bear, *Blood music* (1985)**

Hannah Landecker (2000) 'Immortality, in vitro: a history of the HeLa cell line' in *A reader in medical anthropology: theoretical trajectories, emergent realities*, Byron Good, Michael Fischer, Sarah Willen, Mary-Jo Delvecchio-Good ed. (Wiley-Blackwell): 353-366.

*Week 6 (Wednesday March 2): Beyond the West*

**George Alec Effinger, *When Gravity Fails* (1986)**

Leonard P. Sanders (2008) 'Postmodern orientalism', pp. 43-91 in 'Postmodern orientalism: William Gibson, cyberpunk, and Japan', Doctoral dissertation, English, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.

**Watch:** *Blade Runner (1982)*

*Week 7 (Wednesday March 9): Networks*

**Bruce Sterling, *Islands in the net (1988)***

Peter Ludlow (2001) 'New foundations: on the emergence of sovereign cyberstates and their governance structures', pp. 1-24 in Peter Ludlow, ed. *Crypto anarchy, cyberstates, and pirate utopias* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Timothy C. May (2001) 'The crypto anarchist manifesto', pp. 61-64 in Peter Ludlow, ed. *Crypto anarchy, cyberstates, and pirate utopias* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Eric Hughes (2001) 'A cypherpunk's manifesto', pp. 81-84 in Peter Ludlow, ed. *Crypto anarchy, cyberstates, and pirate utopias* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

**Spring break!**

*Week 8 (Wednesday March 23): Nanoworlds*

**Neal Stephenson, *Diamond age (1995)***

Lawrence Person (1999) 'Notes towards a postcyberpunk manifesto', Available at: <http://slashdot.org/features/99/10/08/2123255.shtml>

Bill Joy (2000) 'Why the future doesn't need us', *Wired* (August 4) 8.04. Available at: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html>

*Week 9 (Wednesday March 30): Artificial intelligences*

**Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2 (1995)***

Marvin Minsky (1988) *The society of mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster): Chapters 1, 2, and 18.

Steven Levy (2011) 'The A.I. revolution' *Wired* 19.01. Available at:

*Week 10 (Wednesday April 6): Hypertext fiction*

**Mark Amerika, *Grammatron (1997)***

N. Katherine Hayles (2007). Electronic literature: what is it? Available at: <http://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html>

Sherry Turkle (1995) *Life on the screen: identity in the age of the Internet* (New York: Touchstone): Introduction: "Identity in the age of the Internet" and Chapter 10: "Identity crisis."

*Week 11 (Wednesday April 13): Role-playing games*

### **Shadowrun (role playing game)**

[Note: to get a sense of the game, we will read the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the rulebook. It's available from amazon.com here:

<http://www.amazon.com/Shadowrun-20th-Anniversary-Catalyst-Game/dp/1934857319/>

However, since this a little more expensive than most of the paperbacks in the course, I'll make some relevant sections available on the website]

Tom Boellstorff (2008) 'The virtual,' pp. 237-249 in *Coming of age in Second Life: an anthropologist explores the virtually human* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

*Week 12 (Wednesday April 20): Ribofunk*

### **Paul De Filippo, Ribofunk (1996)**

Paul De Filippo (1998) 'Ribofunk: the manifesto'. Available at:

<http://www.streettech.com/bcp/BCPtext/Manifestos/Ribofunk.html>

Phil McKenna (2009) 'Rise of the garage genome hackers' *New Scientist* (2689 – 7 January).

**Watch:** *Repo Men* (2010)

*Week 13 (Wednesday April 27): Gameworlds*

### **Deus Ex (2000)**

[Note: for this week, you'll actually have to play the game. In order to be able to do this without me violating copyright, you'll have to buy it! You can get a version cheaply from Amazon. I recommend: <http://www.amazon.com/DEUS-EX-COMplete-Pc/dp/B002FL50UM/>

This is only \$12.50. It has the original version of the game, plus the sequel. Note that there is now a third game in the trilogy (Deus Ex: Human Revolution). We will only be discussing the original game from 2000. Also, you'll need to install this on a PC. If you don't have one and can't use a friend's or roommates' then I'll make one available somewhere that's available to as many people as possible. But this access will be limited, so please buy it and install it if you can.]

John Lanchester (2009) 'Is it art?' *London Review of Books* 31(1): 18-20. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n01/john-lanchester/is-it-art>

Ray Kurzweil (2005) *The singularity is near: when humans transcend biology* (New York: Penguin): 149-157, 194-205, 226-259, 299-342.