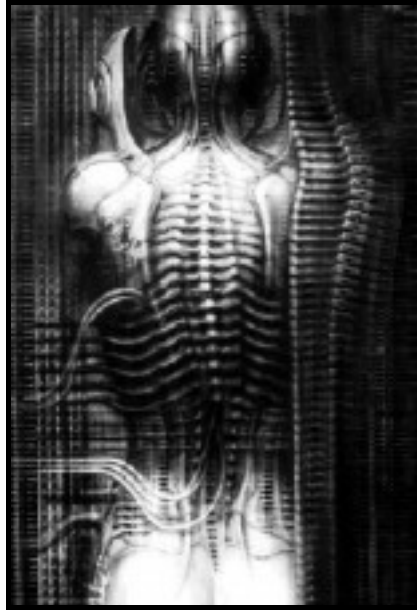


# Cyberculture



Free speech, free software, MOOS, MUDs, anime and cyberpunk. All of these are elements of a broad set of social, technical and political phenomena generally associated with the emergence of a nascent “cyberculture.” In this seminar we explore the ways in which recent developments in information technology - the computer and the Internet in particular-relate to changing contemporary notions of community, identity, property, and gender. By looking at an eclectic collection of popular and scholarly resources - including film, fiction and the World Wide Web - we will situate the development of “cyberculture” into the larger history of the complex relationship between technology and Western society.

Science, Technology, and Society  
STSC 260 • Spring 2008

## STSC 260: Cyberculture

Professor Nathan L. Ensmenger

[nathanen@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:nathanen@sas.upenn.edu)

Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:30 pm, 362 Logan Hall

Teaching Assistant: Jessica Martucci

Office Hours: Thursday, noon-1:30pm

[\(jmartucc@sas.upenn.edu\)](mailto:jmartucc@sas.upenn.edu)

**Course Format:** The seminar meets only once a week. This means that attendance is particularly important. If you do need to miss class please let me know in advance. Grading will be based on three components: class participation (30%), a series of short response papers (40%), and a final paper (30%). Your class participation grade will be based on attendance and your ability to actively demonstrate your mastery of the readings during in-class discussions. The short papers will be 2-3 page responses to specific readings that emphasize synthetic and analytical thinking. The final project will be developed over the course of the second half of the semester, and will allow you to research a topic of individual interest. The final product will be a 10-15 page research paper or a combination paper/presentation (depending on the particular project that you choose – some projects are better suited to a multi-media presentation than a traditional research paper).

**Required Readings:** The books for this course are available at the Penn Bookstore. All other readings listed on the syllabus will be handed out in class or made available in electronic form. Short supplemental readings may be added occasionally in response to issues raised in our discussion.

Coupland, Douglas. *Microserfs*. Regan Books (1996).

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. Ace Books (1984).

Goldsmith, Jack and Wu, Timothy. *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Simon & Schuster (1997)

## **Course Schedule:**

### **I Introduction**

January 17: First Meeting. No readings.

### **II The Lost Episode**

January 24: I am out of town. You, however, will be screening the film *Blade Runner*. No readings.

**Now showing:** *Blade Runner*

### **III Neuromancer**

January 31: Cybernetics. Cyberspace. Mind-body relationship. Razor girls and meat machines. Gender. Biotech. Crime. Regulation. 1980s culture.

**Now showing:** *Ghost in the Shell*

#### **Readings**

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer* (1984). A useful reading guide is available on the course website.

### **IV NERDS!!!**

February 7: The origins of computing subculture. The Hacker Ethic. Gender/Identity/Body issues. Hackers as heroes/villians. Lusers.

**Now showing:** *Dr. Strangelove, Wargames*

#### **Readings**

Levy, Steve. "The Model Railroad Club," and "The Hacker Ethic," Chapters 1,2 in *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*.

Douglas, Susan. "Popular Culture and Populist Technology," in *Inventing American Broadcasting* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), Chapter 6.

Turkle, Sherry. "Hackers: Loving the Machine for Itself" from *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

### **V Brave New World**

February 14: Electronic Frontiers. Virtual communities. MUDS & MOOS. *Special Valentine's Day bonus topic: 'Lectronic Luvin'.*

## Readings

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Selected chapters TBA. Available on the web at:  
<http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/2.html>

Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace: or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society."

## VI Microserfs

February 21: Nerd culture goes mainstream. Community revisited. More body/gender issues. Working in the wired economy. Amazon.cult.

### Readings

Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs* (1995).

## VII On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog ...

February 28: Or a man/woman... Or short/tall ... Or good-looking/ugly ... Or rich/poor ... You get the picture...

Or do they?

### Readings

Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Simon & Schuster (1997). Selected chapters.

## VIII Where did all the women go?

March 6: Race, Class, Gender.

### Readings

Millar, Melanie Stewart. *Cracking the Gender Code: Who Rules the Wired World?* (New York: Second Story Press, 2000). Chapters 4, 5.

Cohn, Carol. "War, Wimps and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War." In Miriam Cooke and Angela Wollacott (eds.) *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

Eglash, Ron. "Race, Sex and Nerds: from black geeks to Asian American hipsters." *Social Text* 71(20), 49-64.

## IX Spring Break

March 13: Party on.

## **X I know what you did last summer . . .**

March 20: Privacy. Surveillance. Anonymity. Web 2.0. Social Networking. Facebook. Cyber-bullying. Tin-foil hats.

### **Readings**

Veronica Pinero, “On Panopticism, criminal records, and sex offender registries.”

Available [online](#)

Other readings TBD.

## **XI Free as in speech, free as in beer . . .**

March 27: Wikipedia. Open Source Software. Linux. Intellectual property. Digital music. Moral economies.

**Now showing:** *Revolution OS*

### **Readings**

Bill Gates, “An Open Letter to Hobbyists”

<http://www.blinkenlights.com/classiccmp/gateswhine.html>

Richard Stallman, “Why Software Should Be Free.”

<http://www.gnu.ai.mit.edu/philosophy/shouldbefree.html>

Eric Raymond, “The Cathedral and the Bazaar.” <http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/cathedral-bazaar/>

## **XII One World. One People. One World.**

April 3: Global economies. The history of the future. Digital Divides. Outsourcing. Group polarization/fragmentation. Digital diasporas.

### **Readings**

Cass Sunstein, “The Future of Free Speech.” Available [online](#).

Others readings TBD.

## **XIII Code is Law.**

April 10: Regulating the Internet, part I. Who am I? Who are you? How do I know? Self-authenticating identity. Strong cryptography. The Mark of the Beast.

### **Readings**

Lessig, Lawrence. *Code, and Other Laws of Cyberspace*. Basic Books, 1999.

Excerpts.

Other readings TBD.

### **Readings**

Goldsmith, Jack and Wu, Timothy. *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World*. Oxford University Press, 2006. Read the first half.

### **XIV Nailing jello to the wall.**

April 17: Regulating the Internet, part II. Who controls the Internet? Nazis, anorexics, and steroid users. How falls for those Nigerian e-mails anyway? Ask not what the Internet will do to China, but what China will do to the Internet.

### **Readings**

Goldsmith, Jack and Wu, Timothy. *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World*. Oxford University Press, 2006. Read the rest.

### **XV Big Finish**

April 24: In which all is made clear.

**Wrap-up/presentations.**