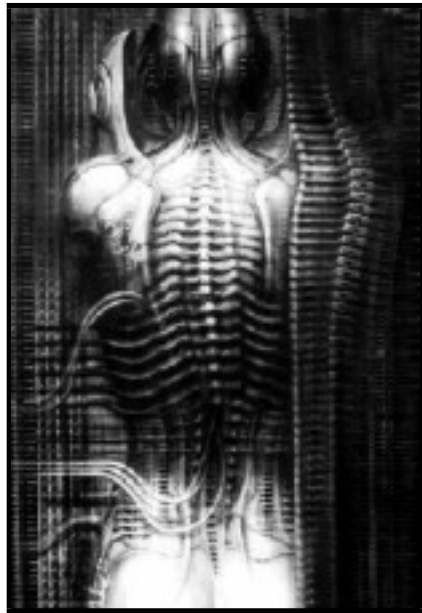


# Cyberculture



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**

Professor Nathan Ensmenger  
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## **STSC 260: Cyberculture**

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Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:30 pm

### **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. The readings in this course are, for the most part, (reasonably) short, provocative, and (generally) enjoyable. You will need to do the reading, and are expected to show up to class prepared to discuss them in an informed manner.

Your grade in this course will be based on four components: class participation (30%), a series of short assignments (20%), two short book/film reviews (30%), and a final paper/project (20%).

Your class participation grade will be based on attendance and your ability to actively demonstrate your mastery of the readings during in-class discussions. You will want to discuss the issues raised in this class: the question is how well you discuss them, and what insight and resources you bring to the table. More so than most undergraduate seminars, you will be active contributors to the research/teaching process. What you say matters, and you will be collectively responsible for making the seminar a success.

The short assignments are short, and typically involve a hands-on exploration of some contemporary phenomenon. For example, you might be asked to spend some time in an online community, or informally interviewing your friends or roommates about their Facebook usage, or to analyze the user interface of your favorite website. The focus here is on experience and analysis, although on occasion you will be asked to write up a brief (1-2 page) response paper.

You will be required to write two short (5-6 page) media reviews. For the most part, you get to choose what book/film/whatever you would like to review, although you will need to get approval in advance. These reviews are an opportunity for you to explore your own intellectual interests, and will allow us as a seminar to cover a much broader range of topics than would otherwise be possible during a single semester. We will talk more about the options for your reviews in our first meeting, and I will provide you with an extensive list of possible sources and topics.

The final project will be developed over the course of the second half of the semester, and will allow you to research, in more substantial depth, 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:**

Most of the 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. There are a few books that you must purchase (or borrow):

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)

Zittrain, Jonathan. *The future of the Internet and how to stop it*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008.

We will also be reading Jaron Lanier's *You are not a Gadget*, but only the e-book version.

### **Other Important Information:**

There will be no final exam for this class. You will be writing a final paper instead.

There is a course Blackboard site, which will contain important information. You are responsible for monitoring it.

There are no prerequisites for this course. Other than basic computer literacy, there are no particular technical skills required. You need not be a nerd, or a technophile, or even be on Facebook, to enjoy or benefit from this seminar.

## **Course Schedule:**

September 9

### **I Introduction:**

First Meeting. No readings. Show up. Say smart things.

September 16

### **II NERDS!!!**

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

#### **Readings**

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

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

Nugent, Benjamin. *American Nerd: the story of my people*. Excerpts.

**Now Showing:** *Second Skin*

September 23

### **III Cyborgs**

The Future Looks Just Like Darryl Hannah. Cybernetics. Cyberspace. Mind-body relationships. Razor girls and meat machines. Gender. Biotech. Crime. Regulation. Computer culture meets Reagan's America.

#### **Readings**

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

**Now showing:** *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*

September 30

### **IV IT Guys**

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

## Readings

Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs* (1995).

**Now Showing:** *Triumph of the Nerds. The IT Guys*

October 7

## V Visionaries

On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog ... Or a man/woman ... Or short/tall ... Or ugly/beautiful ... Or rich/poor ... Or young/old ...

Or do they?

## Readings

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

October 14

## VI Utopians

Electronic Frontiers. Virtual communities. MUDS & MOOS. Social networking. Facebook. Web 2.0.

## Readings

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Selected chapters.

boyd, danah. *Taken Out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics*

Various short online articles: "If Facebook were a dinner party"; "Public' online spaces don't carry speech, rights"; "Girls and young woman are now the most prolific web users"; "The blogosphere risks putting off everyone but point-scoring males"; "The Not-So-Hidden Politics of Class Online"

October 21

## VII Freedom Fighters

Free as in speech, free as in beer. Wikipedia. Open Source Software. Linux. Intellectual property. Digital music. Moral economies.

## Readings

Stallman, Richard "Why Software Should Be Free."  
<http://www.gnu.ai.mit.edu/philosophy/shouldbefree.html>

Kelty, Christopher. *Two bits: the cultural significance of free software* (Duke University Press, 2008). Excerpts.

Anderson, Chris. *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*. Excerpts. Ironically, this book is not free.

October 28

## **VIII Addicts?**

Geeks, Hipsters, Gamers, and Net-Grrlls. Videogames. Getting a ("real") life. Your on-line love life. World of Warcraft.

Natasha Schull. "Digital gambling: The coincidence of desire and design." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 597:65–81, 2005.

Nicholson Baker. "Painkiller deathstreak." *New Yorker*, August 9, 2010.

Andrew Hinton. "We live here: Games, third places, and the information architecture of the future." *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 32(6):17–21, 2006.

November 4

## **IX One World. One People. One Future.**

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.

Hargittai, E. & Walejko, G. "The Participation Divide: Content Creation and Sharing in the Digital Age." *Information, Communication and Society* 11:2 (2008)

Various short online articles: "How Sticky Is Membership on Facebook? Just Try Breaking Free"; "Facebook can ruin your life . . ."; "Oh Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook"; "Psychologist finds Wikipedians grumpy and closed-minded"; "Angry online divorcee 'kills' virtual ex-hubby"

November 11

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

Privacy. Surveillance. Anonymity. Who am I? Who are you? How do I know? Self-authenticating identity. Strong cryptography. Web 2.0. Tin-foil hats. The Mark of the Beast.

## Readings

Veronica Pinero, "On Panopticism, criminal records, and sex offender registries." Available online

Various short online articles: "Why Health Insurers Want to Read your Facebook Page"; "SEXTORTION AT EISENHOWER HIGH"; "Judges fear dangers of online 'rat' database"; "Teen Tests Internet's Lewd Track Record"; "E-Mail Surveillance Renews Concerns in Congress"; "Stop the Internet, I want to get off!"; "How Google Earth Ate Our Town"; "China's All-Seeing Eye"; "U.S. corporations massively read employee e-mail"; "The Invasion of Privacy Through Your Mobile Phone"; "Tips for budding politicians on how to avoid embarrassment on Facebook"; "When Young Teachers Go Wild on the Web"; "Facebook, Twitter Revolutionizing How Parents Stalk Their College-Aged Kids"

**Now Showing:** The Star Wars Kid

## XI Brave New World

November 18

Nazis, anorexics, and steroid users. Idiots. Trolls. Criminals. Cyber-bullying. Who falls for those Nigerian e-mails anyway?

Jaron Lanier, *You are not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (2010)

## XII Regulating the Internet

December 2

Code is law. Nailing jello to the wall. The Mark of the Beast. Ask not what the Internet will do to China, but what China will do to the Internet.

## Readings

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

## XIII Big Finish

December 9

In which all is made clear . . .

## Readings

Jonathan Zittrain. *The future of the Internet and how to stop it*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008.