



ENGL 242 E

# Cyberpunk: Past, Present, & Future

Winter 2013 | University of Washington | Edmond Chang

ENGL 242  
Section E  
MTWTh  
1:30-2:20 PM  
CDH 110B  
Winter 2013  
University of  
Washington  
Dr. Edmond Y.  
Chang



"The Singularity denotes an event that will take place in the material world, the inevitable next step in the evolutionary process that started with biological evolution and has extended through human-directed technological evolution. However, it is precisely in the world of matter and energy that we encounter transcendence, a principal connotation of what people refer to as spirituality."  
—Ray Kurzweil

BRUCE STERLING argues in the introduction of the 1986 anthology *Mirrorshades* that "cyberpunks are perhaps the first SF generation to grow up not only within the literary tradition of science fiction but in a truly science-fictional world" (xi). Even as cyberpunk looked to the future, according to the introduction, "a final oddity of our generation in SF" is that, for writers like Sterling, William Gibson, and others, "the literature of the future has a long and honored past" (xv). It is this past, present, and future of cyberpunk fiction and culture that will be the occasions for close reading, thoughtful exploration, and critical analysis. What might cyberpunk reveal to us, reveal about us, and reveal about the world we live in? We will consider a "long history" of cyberpunk that stretches the whole of the twentieth century, looking back at cyberpunk's predecessors, up through cyberpunk's heyday, and into the twenty-first century, what might be called post-cyberpunk. Readings will include in whole or in part: Aldous Huxley, Vannevar Bush, George Orwell, William S. Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, James Tiptree, Jr., Vernor Vinge, William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, Maureen McHugh, Larissa Lai, and Ernest Cline.

A REQUIREMENT for this class is a well-developed curiosity about the world, about the culture we live in, and about the cultural productions we imagine, produce, and consume. In other words, this class is about reading, critiquing, and analyzing our culture through literature. Our understandings of identities, meanings, and power, as well as the intersections of cultural and social locations like race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality, can be excavated through the analysis of the texts we create and consume. This class will spend the quarter reading, thinking, writing about various fictions and how and what these texts argue, reveal, narrate, hide, perpetuate, and complicate the world we live in.

FINALLY, as a class, we will engage the techniques and practices of reading and enjoying literature. We will identify and develop different ways to read different kinds of texts—from fiction to scholarship to visual and digital—and understand and develop strategies, habits, and perspectives of reading, thinking, and writing. Foremost, we will read with pleasure and for pleasure. We will also rhetorically read, close read, read for analysis. And lastly, we will read and deploy literature as theory, as dramatizing the concerns, wonders, struggles, and politics of lived life and experience. The class counts for W credit, requiring you to complete 10-15 pages of revised writing including a set of short response papers culminating in a longer major paper project.

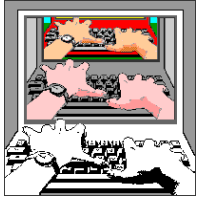
"First sentences are doors to worlds."  
—Ursula K. Le Guin

"The future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed."  
—William Gibson



## Required Course Texts & Materials

- ENGL 242 E Course Reader (available at Ave Copy, 4141 Univ. Way NE @ 42nd)
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*.
- Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*.
- Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*.
- Lai, Larissa. *Salt Fish Girl*.
- Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*.
- Web access and an active UW email account



## Course Requirements

- Response Papers (40%)
- Critical Review (10%)
- Final Project (20%)
- Class Participation (30%)

"Politicians should read science fiction, not westerns and detective stories."  
—Isaac Asimov

"The future is unwritten. There are best case scenarios. There are worst-case scenarios. Both of them are great fun to write about if you're a science fiction novelist, but neither of them ever happens in the real world. What happens in the real world is always a sideways-case scenario. World-changing marvels to us, are only wallpaper to our children."  
—Bruce Sterling

## Requirements & Grading

Your grade should not be the sole exigence or motivation for this class. It is the hope of the course that you walk away from English 242 with something more. Find some pleasure and some edification and some knowledge from this class (or any class really) and success is usually not far behind. With that in mind, your grade will be a reflection of engagement, effort, close reading, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

### Response Papers (40%)

The majority of the writing you will do for this class is in the form of short, critical, analytical response papers. These single-spaced, one-page writings serve as reactions to, close readings of, analyses of, and articulations of the texts and connections you see, read, and talk about in class. These responses are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be graded on clarity, focus, coherence, critique, and your ability to concisely formulate arguments. You will be required to generate a response paper approximately every week for a **total of 7**. See the response paper prompt for more details.

### Critical Review (10%)

You will be required to write a short, 500-750 word, single-spaced critical review of a text not covered by the course that you believe fits the critical, theoretical, and intellectual stakes of this class. You will locate a text, close read the text, and generate an academic critique and assessment of the text's value for study. In other words, what text might you include in a class like ours? You **must** have your text **approved** by the instructor. The critical review will be turned in and published on the course blog and is due by the last day of class.

### Mash-Up "Mixed-Paper" Final Project (20%)

Your final paper project will be a "mixed-paper," a mash-up that collects together four of your short response papers, revises them, and incorporates the addition of images, verse, and other kinds of evidence, all of which is framed by an introduction and conclusion, both one page each. The "mixed-paper" asks you to think critically about the course questions and texts, to make connections, and to create an argument across texts and different kinds of evidence. See the "mixed-paper" final project prompt for more details and explanations.

### Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Again, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class, 4) your **engagement** in group work, 5) your care and use of the class blog (bookmark the address, check and comment regularly, think of the blog as an extension of class):

<https://catalyst.uw.edu/gopost/board/changed/30719/>

and 6) your interactions with me and other students. Finally, failure to turn in homework, incomplete assignments, or late papers will negatively impact your participation grade.



"Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without ever noticing it, live your way into the answer."  
—Rainer Maria Rilke

"I don't pretend we have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about."  
—Arthur C. Clarke

"The real origin of science fiction lay in the seventeenth-century novels of exploration in fabulous lands. Therefore Jules Verne's story of travel to the moon is not science fiction because they go by rocket but because of where they go. It would be as much science fiction if they went by rubber band."  
—Philip K. Dick

## Attendance

**Attendance is strongly recommended.** If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to play and participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and we will mark you as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your overall participation grade for the class. If you know you are going to miss class, please let me know ahead of time (via email), if you can, and make any necessary arrangements. And when you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes and see me in order to make up missed work in a timely manner.



### Response Paper Formatting

- 1) 1" margins top, bottom, left, and right on each page.
- 2) Single-spaced block header with your name, date, course, my name.
- 3) Response (week) number and title.
- 4) Response papers are single-spaced, block paragraph format.
- 5) Standard Times Roman Font, 12 point only.
- 6) Correct MLA citation and bibliographic format. Bibliography if necessary.

## Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format; if you do not have access to Word, then save your documents in RTF or Rich Text Format.

All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. **All papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions.** All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and should not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format. Response Papers have their own format, and the Critical Review and "Mixed-Paper" Final Project will have different manuscript guidelines detailed by their assignment prompts.

**Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in,** lest you be one of the unhappy people whose paper is eaten by the computer. You may even want to take the precaution of e-mailing your paper to yourself as an attachment at least a couple of times during the drafting process and certainly BEFORE you exit the document for the last time and leave the computer. This way, even if you lose your disc or your paper gets mysteriously erased, you still have a copy in your e-mail files.

## Evaluation Rubric

Over the course of the quarter, your assignments will receive feedback and comments that will identify what you are doing well and what still needs improvement. Your grades assess your fulfillment of the assignment, the quality of work, detail, analysis, and argumentation, overall effort, and finally, style, polish, and risk taking. Consider the following evaluation rubric as signposts or a kind of legend to your progress and evaluation:

- **Outstanding (3.7-4.0):** Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
- **Strong (3.1-3.6):** Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), which could be further enhanced with revision, additional support, and creativity.
- **Good (2.5-3.0):** Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associate with the course or assignment goal(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).



## Late Assignments

All assignments must be done completely and turned in on time. Lateness will subtract from your assignment's final grade and work must be turned in by the next class meeting after the original due date. Note that I will not comment on late work. However, you still need to complete late work or you will receive a zero. If you miss class on the due date of a paper, you must notify me and make arrangements to get the paper to me as soon as possible. **Unless previously arranged, I DO NOT accept assignments via email.** Furthermore, all work must be seen and checked by my to be eligible for your final project! Remember that a paper has not been officially handed in until it is in my hands. Never turning anything in late is always the best policy.

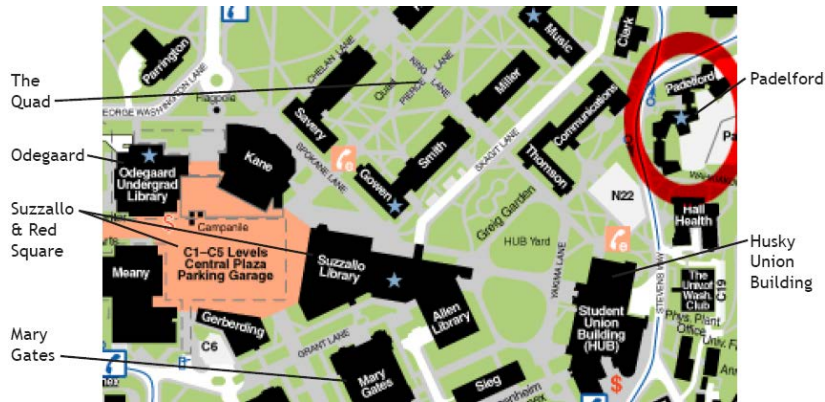


- **Acceptable (2.0-2.4):** Minimally meets the basic course or assignment requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.
- **Inadequate (1.0-1.9):** Does not meet the course or assignment requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.



## Finding Help

My office and office hours are listed in the left sidebar. I am available during that time and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see early in the quarter even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located on the third floor of the A-Wing of Padelford Hall (northeast of the HUB), Room A-312. See <<http://www.washington.edu/home/maps/northcentral.html?pd1>>.



### Contact Ed

Office:  
A-312 Padelford  
Office Hours:  
TTh 10 AM-12 PM or  
by appointment  
E-mail:  
[changed@uw](mailto:changed@uw)  
AIM or Google Talk:  
EDagogy

"SF is the literature of the theoretically possible, and F is the literature of the impossible."  
—Piers Anthony



I am also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting me. I will do my best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually within twenty-four hours. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the Undergraduate English office in A-2H&G Padelford. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via AOL Instant Messenger or Google Talk (nickname: EDagogy); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation for the first time, please identify yourself to me; also, be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

"For me, the best thing about Cyberpunk is that it taught me how to enjoy shopping malls, which used to terrify me. Now I just imagine the whole thing is two miles below the moon's surface, and that half the people's right-brains have been eaten by robotized steel rats. And suddenly it's interesting again."  
—Rudy Rucker

You can find additional writing help at the Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC) is a good resource for this class and other classes. OWRC is located on the third floor of Odegaard Library and offers a variety of services including help with papers, brainstorming ideas, help with reading, and research. See <<http://depts.washington.edu/owrc/>> for more information.

Moreover, the Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment (CLUE) is also a good resource. CLUE is located in Mary Gates Hall Commons and offers tutorial sessions for most freshman lecture courses, skills courses, access to computer labs, and drop-in centers for math, science and writing. See <<http://depts.washington.edu/clue/>> for more information.

"If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities."  
—Maya Angelou

Further resources, both on- and off-campus can be found on the Links page of the course website:

<<http://staff.washington.edu/changed/242/links.html>>.

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."  
—Albert Einstein



- 1) We are those, the Different. Technological rats, swimming in the ocean of information.
- 2) We are the retiring, little kid at school, sitting at the last desk, in the corner of the classroom.
- 3) We are the teenager everybody considers strange
- 4) We are the student hacking computer systems, exploring the depth of his reach.
- 5) We are the grown-up in the park, sitting on a bench, laptop on his knees, programming the last virtual reality."  
—"The Cyberpunk Manifesto"

## Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing — as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions about these matters at any time. Plagiarism includes:

- a student failing to cite sources of ideas
- a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- a student failing to cite sources of specific language and/or passages
- a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
- a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. It is always better to be safe than sorry. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review. For further information, please refer to UW's Student Conduct Code at <<http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>>. **Play it smart, don't plagiarize!**

## Accommodations

If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please see me immediately. If you have a disability and have not yet registered it with Disability Resources for Students in 448 Schmitz Hall, you should do so immediately. Please contact DRS at 206-543-8924 (Voice) or 206-543-8925 (V/TTY) or 206-616-8379 (FAX) or via their website at <<http://www.washington.edu/admin/ada/dss.htm>>. I will gladly do my best to provide appropriate accommodation you require.

## UW SafeCampus

Preventing violence is everyone's responsibility. If you're concerned, tell someone. For more information visit the SafeCampus website at <<http://www.washington.edu/safecampus>> and keep the following in mind:

- Always call 911 if you or others may be in danger.
- Call 206-685-SAFE (7233) to report non-urgent threats of violence and for referrals to UW counseling and/or safety resources. TTY or VP callers, please call through your preferred relay service.
- Don't walk alone. Campus safety guards can walk with you on campus after dark. Call Husky NightWalk 206-685-WALK (9255).
- Stay connected in an emergency with UW Alert. Register your mobile number to receive instant notification of campus emergencies via text and voice messaging. Sign up online at <<http://www.washington.edu/alert>>.

"I was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in and there was no human condition that you were stopped from examining."  
—Octavia Butler



"Every time I see an adult on a bicycle, I no longer despair for the future of the human race."  
—H. G. Wells

**syl-la-bus: n 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements  
2: subject to change**

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Mon 1/7  
First Day of Classes

**January**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

**Week 1: January 7-11**

Introduction to the Course & Syllabus  
Bruce Sterling, "Preface," *Mirrorshades*  
Thomas Foster, "Introduction," *The Souls of Cyberfolk*  
Jenny Wolmark, "Cyberpunk, Cyborgs, and Feminist Science Fiction"

Week 1 or 2 Critical Response (CR) is recommended.

**Week 2: January 14-18**

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1931)

**Week 3: January 21-25**

Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think" (1945)  
George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949, excerpt)  
William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (1959, excerpt)

Mon 1/21  
MLK, Jr. Birthday

**Week 4: January 28-February 1**

Ray Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950)  
Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968)

**February**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28		

Week 5 or 6  
Response is recommended.

**Week 5: February 4-8**

James Tiptree, Jr., *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* (1974)  
Vernor Vinge, *True Names* (1981)  
*Blade Runner* (1982)

**Week 6: February 11-15**

Bruce Bethke, "Cyberpunk" (1980)  
William Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981), "Burning Chrome" (1982)  
William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)

Mon 2/18  
Presidents' Day

**Week 7: February 18-22**

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (cont.)  
Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (1992)

**Week 8: February 25-March 1**

Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (cont.)  
*The Matrix* (1999)

**March**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

**Week 9: March 4-8**

Maureen McHugh, "A Coney Island of the Mind" (1993)  
Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* (2002)

**Week 10: March 11-15**

Ernest Cline, *Ready Player One* (2012)

**Week 11: March 18-22 Finals Week**

Mash-Up Mixed-Paper Final Project Due  
Critical Review Due