

Spring 2024

## HSS 404-020: Cyberpunk on Page and Screen

Catherine Siemann

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## HSS404.020 ENG Seminar: Cyberpunk on Page and Screen

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Siemann

Office: Central King Building G17B

Office Hours: M 3-4 & T 2:30-3:30

Or by appointment in person or via Webex

Email: [siemann@njit.edu](mailto:siemann@njit.edu)

Phone: 973-596-3271

Classroom: CKB 223

Meetings: MW 10-11:20

**Course Description:** Cyberpunk has been defined as a science fiction genre focusing on a blurring of distinctions between humans and machines in bleak dystopias with lawless subcultures (*Oxford Reference*). It has evolved from its origins in the 1980s as an iconoclastic movement among science fiction writers to its current popularity in gaming, anime, and more. Originating in the early days of the Internet, cyberpunk's relevance to current anxieties about AI, Neuralink, and the ubiquity of social media ensures its continued relevance. The class will read long- and short-form fiction by William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, Pat Cadigan, and others, as well as essays by Bruce Sterling, N. Katherine Hayles, and others. We will explore films, including *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, and *Ghost in the Shell* as well as more recent iterations like the videogame *Cyberpunk 2077*, the related anime *Cyberpunk Edgerunners* and Janelle Monae's concept album *Dirty Computer* and its companion story collection, *The Memory Librarian*.

**Prerequisites:** HUM102/ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

**Instructional Objectives:** As a senior capstone class, we will focus both on the substantive material we'll be reading and viewing, and on your communications skills as demonstrated in our various course activities:

- To examine cyberpunk in connection with contemporary and potential future technologies, and the social impact that's presented.
- To discuss your ideas with your classmates and your professor.
- To do a class presentation on an aspect of cyberpunk or one of the texts, films, games, etc.
- To write a mid-term critical essay and either a final research paper or researched video essay centered on cyberpunk as presented in science fiction texts, film/tv show, or videogames.

### **Assignments and Assessment:**

20% - class participation and attendance (including in-class writing)

10% - class presentation

20% - pre-writing assignments (topic proposal, research proposal, annotated bibliography, draft)%

20% - mid-term paper

30% - final paper or video essay

**Please note that while your individual grades will be recorded in the Canvas Gradebook, your grades will be calculated according to the percentages given above.** (In other words, the Canvas Gradebook is a place where your grades are collected, but does not accurately represent totals.)

Grades will be calculated according to the University's grading scale:

A=100-90	B+ = 89=87	B = 86-80	C+ = 79-77	C = 76-70	D = 69-60	F = 59-0
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**You must turn in all formal writing assignments in order to earn a passing grade for the course.**

### **Class Policies:**

*Participation:* You are required to participate in all class activities in a timely manner. There is a point allotment for each assignment and for in-class exercises.

*Courtesy:* You must be respectful of your classmates and of me. That does not mean you may not disagree with them or with me, but rude or disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.

*Lateness:* All assignments, including any Canvas discussions, the online class presentation, and the final paper, must be submitted on or before the specified deadline. **Points will be deducted for late assignments. I will be unable to grant extensions on your final research paper.**

### **Attendance:**

1. Attendance is critical to your success in this class. Participation in in-class activities, discussions, and workshops will contribute to your knowledge, ability, and performance. At a minimum, this means showing up on time, being prepared, and contributing to class discussions. Your level of engagement with the material will subsequently impact how much you get from the class.
2. You may miss up to one week of class without penalty. Students who expect to miss class for religious observances must submit to me a written list of dates by the end of the second week of class (per university policy). More than six unexcused absences (three weeks of the course) will have an impact on your participation grade. Illness must be reported to the Dean of Students' Office at dos@njit.edu to be excused. You must keep in touch with me and make arrangements to make up the missing work.

### **NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:

<https://www.njit.edu/dos/code-student-conduct-article-11-university-policy-academic-integrity>

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing, or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu)

**Artificial Intelligence Policy:** AI (artificial intelligence) usage will be permitted for certain assignments in this course. DO NOT ASSUME AI IS PERMITTED UNLESS THE ASSIGNMENT PROMPT SPECIFICALLY INDICATES THAT IT IS THE CASE. I designed this course to specifically appeal to the interests of NJIT

students, and I want to hear your opinions of the things we will be reading and viewing, **not** what Chat-GPT thinks. However, since it is a class dealing with cyberpunk, we can hardly ignore AI, so there will be *certain assignments* where you'll have an opportunity to use AI. If you do choose to use it for those assignments, the AI must be cited as it shown in the [NJIT Library AI citation page](#) for AI. Use of AI outside of those parameters will be considered academic dishonesty.

**Assignment Submission:** All assignments must be submitted to the appropriate Canvas forums. *I will not accept emailed work.* (Exception: if Canvas is down and you are concerned about lateness, you can email but must then submit to Canvas as soon as possible.) Assignments are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. There will also be some in-class writing done with pen and paper, so make sure to always have a notebook & writing implement with you in class.

Specific formatting guidelines will vary according to each assignment, so please follow the explicit guidelines found on individual assignment sheets.

### **Late Work**

Late work will not be accepted (except in the case of an excused absence). Should you know in advance that you have having trouble completing an assignment, please contact me in advance.

### **Technology**

If you need to contact me, please use email. (Messages sent through Canvas will also be forwarded to my NJIT email address.) I will generally respond to your emails within 24 hours. Please plan accordingly. Remember to include an appropriate SUBJECT line and your NAME in all emails and to indicate WHICH CLASS you are in. I will not respond to emails that do not include the sender's name. Please use your NJIT email address – if I need to find your email at a later point, it makes the search much easier.

*Laptops and cell phones should be used during class only for specific class-related activities.* Please set your phones to silent as a courtesy to your classmates and instructor.

### **Office Hours**

My scheduled office hours are M 3-4 and T 2:30-3:30. As the Director of the NJIT Writing Center, I may sometimes have conflicts with those specific times, but I can meet with you most weekdays in person or via Webex by appointment. Email me at [csiemann@njit.edu](mailto:csiemann@njit.edu) or catch me after class to schedule.

### **REQUIRED Books:**

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. NY: Ace Books (1984), 2000.

Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. NY: Spectra (1992), 2003.

*Note: I've listed the editions I am using; you may use any edition, print or ebook.*

A notebook.

All other readings will be posted to Canvas; films assigned as homework are readily available on multiple streaming services. *Altered Carbon* and *Cyberpunk Edgerunners* are available on Netflix.

### **Resources:**

- You should be familiar with and use the Purdue OWL, an excellent online source for issues of grammar, style, citations, etc. It can be found at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

- You will be required to use standard APA in-text citations and works cited list for your research paper.

**Accommodation Needs:** Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

**Writing Center:** The NJIT Writing Center will be available for both in-person and synchronous online appointments. We are open M-F. For more information, please go to our website at <https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/>. Appointments can be scheduled via Navigate, which can be reached through NJIT Pipeline or directly at <https://njit.campus.eab.com/>. While Writing Center consultations are valuable for all writers, if you have not written a research paper since (or before) your first year in college, working with the Center is particularly recommended. There is no charge for these services.

***Schedule of Assignments:***

**Week 1: Introduction**

1/17: What is cyberpunk?

**Week 2: Cyberpunk Classics**

1/22: *Blade Runner* (1982)

1/24: Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic"

Cadigan, excerpt from *Synners*

Sterling, Introduction to *Mirrorshades*

**Week 3: Neuromancer (1984)**

1/29: ch. 1-4

1/31: ch. 5-7

**Week 4: Neuromancer**

2/5: ch. 8-12

2/7: ch. 13-18

**Week 5: Neuromancer & The Matrix**

2/12: ch. 19-24

2/14: *The Matrix* (1999)

**Week 6: Snow Crash (1992)**

2/19: ch. 1-12

2/21: ch. 13-24

**Week 7: Snow Crash 2**

2/26: ch. 25-40

2/28: ch. 41-57

**Week 8: Snow Crash & Miscellaneous**

3/4: ch. 58-70

3/6: Essay Due

**Spring Break****Week 9: Ghost in the Shell; Uploading Consciousness**

3/18: *Ghost in the Shell* (anime, 1995)

3/20: Gibson, "The Winter Market"; Cadigan "Pretty Boy Crossover"

**Week 10:**

3/25: *Altered Carbon* s. 1 episode 1 (2018)

3/27: *Cyberpunk 2077*

**Week 11: Cyberpunk 2077**

4/1: *Cyberpunk 2077*

4/3 *Cyberpunk Edgerunners*, ep. 1 & 8

**Week 12:**

4/8: Rambo, "Memories of Moments, Bright as Falling Stars" (2007); QNTM, "Lena" (2021)

4/10: Video Essays Workshop

**Week 13: Contemporary Cyberpunk**

4/15: Monae, *Dirty Computer*, "an emotional picture" (view on YouTube or Amazon Prime)  
Monae, "Save Changes," from *The Memory Librarian* (2022)

4/17: Satifka, "Acts of Providence" (2021); Liu, "The Life Cycle of a Cyber Bar" (2021)

**Week 14: Class Presentations**

4/22: Presentations

4/24: Presentations

**Week 15: Class Presentations**

4/29: Presentations

Final Paper/Video Essay due