



Technoculture from Frankenstein to Cyberpunk English/CCT 691

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This course takes as a premise that the worldwide technological revolution of our own era--the digital, networked, information age-- provides a context for a retrospective analysis of the cultural meaning of technology. We are in the midst of an economic, political, and cultural transition as far-reaching as the Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century and as long-term as the emergence urban print culture in the 15th. Unlike earlier technological transitions, the current one will occur within one generation and in our own lifetime. As witnesses to this important social moment, we have a vantage point from which to review the cultural impact of technology--ways in which technology is imagined, represented, and/or resisted--over the past two centuries.

Our theme is the social reception and

Literary and popular culture from the Romantic era to the most recent science fiction and Hollywood techno-conspiracy thrillers contain a series of familiar discourses, arguments, and styles for representing technology, power, and the body.

Major traditions of representation include:

- ◆ fantasies about the body and technology and human/machine or organic/inorganic combinations;
- ◆ monsters of technology;
- ◆ the imagined autonomous power of machines, electricity and (later) computers;
- ◆ the 'mad' scientist or technologist;
- ◆ the power alliance conspiracy in technology, big corporations, and government;
- ◆ the general gendering of technoculture.

The representations appear in both dystopian/apocalyptic and utopian/progressive forms.

representation of technology in literature and popular culture from the Romantic era (early 19th century) to the present. We will analyze and critique some dominant themes and forms of representation in fiction, film, and video from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the contemporary fantasy of the cyborg and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*.

Our studies will include all media, including film, TV, and recent video animation and Web 'zines. The focus will be mainly on American culture and the way in which machines, computers, and the body have been imagined. We will draw on a variety of historical and theoretical sources to conduct a cultural archaeology of current discourse on, and media representations of, the Internet and the cyborg.

We will also explore theories and strategies for reading in the new networked hypermedia environment of the **Web**.

Four **main topics** will be interwoven through the course:

- ◆ the cultural reception/interpretation of **new technology**
- ◆ the social function of **monsters** generated by techno-fantasies (from Frankenstein's nameless monster to recent cyborgs and androids)
- ◆ **postmodernism** and **postmodernity** as framing ideas and theory for our current moment
- ◆ **cyberpunk** and recent speculative SF as a post-modern literary form.

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Requirements and Expectations

Prerequisites:

- ◆ The written component of this course will be conducted entirely in digital and networked form; *no paper "papers" will be submitted or accepted.*
- ◆ Students must know how to use email and the Web, and have signed up for Web space with their GUSUN account.
- ◆ Students must follow the contents of the dynamic course hypersyllabus for text and Web-based readings. The hypersyllabus will change as the course develops and students add materials.

Student Work and Grading:

- ◆ Class participation and contribution to Web-based discussion forum as a response to the readings in each unit. Each unit in the syllabus has a link to a class discussion forum (requiring password for access), and students are required to contribute at least one response/interpretation/discussion for each unit (the equivalent of a one-page paper). (Additional discussion, criticism, questions, and interpretation will count toward extra credit.) 20% of grade.

◆ Group presentation. We will form working groups of three students who will collaborate on a presentation on the second (and sometimes third) day of each unit. Use of the Web and audio/video is encouraged. 20% of grade.

◆ Final group Web project. The working groups will develop a collaborative research project on a topic in the course for a hypermedia Web project. The final project can be an extension of the class presentation or a different project determined collaboratively by the group. The final file must be installed on a group member's Web directory and the URL sent to the professor and class. 20% of grade. ([Student projects from Spring 1998.](#))

◆ Final essay. Each student will write a researched, interpretive essay for a final, individual project. This essay project must be submitted on the student's Web directory, and may involve multimedia content, according to the interests and abilities of each student. Grades will be based on substantive content, not media coolness. 40% of grade.

◆ A Note on Films and Videos in the Syllabus:

All students must see the [scheduled films and videos](#) by the

second class day of each unit.
Videos are available in the Audio-Visual Resources Center of Lauinger Library for individual and small group viewing.

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Required Text Readings

- Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.
- Dann, Jack and Gardner Dozois, eds. *Hackers*. New York: Ace, 1996.
- Dick, Philip K. *Blade Runner (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep)*. New York: Ballentine, 1982.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 1994.
- Irvine, Martin. *Web Works*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996
- McCaffery, Larry, ed. *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk & Postmodern Science Fiction*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: NAL/Dutton, 1983.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.
- Slusser, George and Tom Shippey, eds. *Fiction Two Thousand: Cyberpunk & the Future of Narrative*. Athens: University of Georgia Press: 1992.
- Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam, 1993.

Web readings and course packets (as distributed).

Required Film and Video Readings

- James Whale, *Frankenstein*
 - Fritz Lang, *Metropolis*
 - Terry Gilliam, *Brazil*
 - Kenneth Branagh, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*
 - Michael Radford, *1984*
 - Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange*
 - Ridley Scott, *Bladerunner*
 - David Cronenberg, *Videodrome*
 - James Cameron, *Terminator*
 - Star Trek: Next Generation, *The Best of Both Worlds* (Borg episode)
 - Robert Longo, *Johnny Mnemonic*
 - Mamoru Oshii, *Ghost in the Shell*
- Manga video (Japanese animation)
- Shinya Tsukamoto, *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*

Film Screening Schedule

Key to Hypersyllabus Icons:



Text Readings (printed books, articles, and photocopied materials)



Web Readings (hypertext and other digital media resources on the Web)



Film and Video



Links to Web discussion pages and student contributions

Syllabus Overview

Unit/Week	Readings	Film/Video	Web Resources
Intro 1/13	Course intro		
<u>1</u> 1/15,20	The Technotopia Archive, I Receptions and Interpretations of Technology	Lang, <i>Metropolis</i> (1925)	Dystopian/Utopian Fantasies
<u>2</u> 1/22,27	The Technotopia Archive, II Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i> Critical readings	Edison, <i>Frankenstein</i> (in class) Whale, <i>Frankenstein</i>	Mary Shelley and Frankenstein Cyborg History
<u>3</u> 1/29	The Technotopia Archive, III <i>Frankenstein</i> , Romanticism, reception and myths of technology	Branagh, Mary Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i>	Romanticism Sources TheoryBase
<u>4</u> 2/3,5	The Technotopia Archive, IV Orwell, <i>1984</i>	Radford, <i>1984</i>	TheoryBase
<u>5</u> 2/10,12	Intro to Cultural Theory: Postmodernism Jameson; Baudrillard	Gilliam, <i>Brazil</i>	Approaches to Postmodernism TheoryBase
<u>6</u> 2/17,19	Cyberpunk beginnings, I Burgess, <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	Kubrick, <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	Interviews with Kubrick
<u>7</u> 2/24,26	Cyberpunk beginnings, II Dick, <i>Do Androids Dream...</i> (<i>Bladerunner</i>)	Scott, <i>Bladerunner</i>	Po-Mo SF Page

<u>8</u> 3/3,17	Cyberpunk firstwave Cyberpunk short stories	Cronenberg, <i>Videodrome</i>	Po-Mo SF Page
<u>9</u> 3/19, 24, 26	Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> and " Johnny Mnemonic "	<i>Johnny Mnemonic</i>	
<u>10</u> 3/31, 4/2, 7	The Cyborg: Technology and the Body Cyborg theory and practice, cyborg fetish, sexuality	Cameron, <i>Terminator</i> <i>Star Trek: Best of Both Worlds</i> The B-Movie cyborg tradition	Cyborgs-R-Us: Cyborg History
<u>11</u> 4/14, 16	Cybernarrativity and Postmodernism: Ultrarealism, post-cyborg attitude, noir sex and violence, the Net as fantasy space	Japanese animation: <i>Ghost in the Shell</i> , other Manga video	
<u>12</u> 4/21,23,28	Stephenson, <i>Snow Crash</i>	More cyberanimation	
<u>13</u>	Discussion of final projects, class party.		

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Expanded Syllabus






Intro 1/13

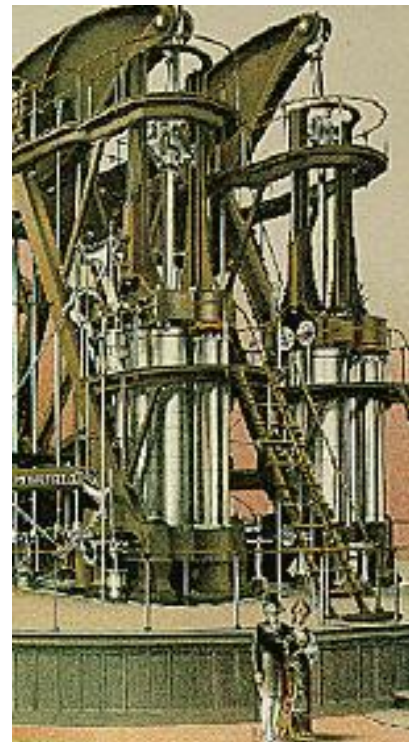
1. 1/15,20 The Technotopia Archive, I: Receptions and interpretations of new technologies: technology, culture, utopian/dystopian thought since 1800

The Memory and Effects of the Industrial Revolution:

Readings:(packet and Web)





1/15:

-  Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*(excerpts)
-  David Nye, *The American Technological Sublime* (excerpts)
-  Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 25: "The Dynamo and the Virgin"
-  Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times"
-  See Also Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, "[The Dynamo and the Virgin](#)" ("dynamo" = electric power generator) (see the [homepage](#) for this hypertext edition at UVA). Adams's reflections on new technology at the Chicago Exposition, 1894 (Adams writing in third person):



[T]o Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within arm's length at some vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring -- scarcely humming an audible warning to stand a hair's-breadth further for respect of power -- while it would not wake the baby lying close against its frame. Before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force. Among the thousand symbols of ultimate energy the dynamo was not so human as some, but it was the most expressive.

1/20:

-  Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*(excerpts), and *The Future of an Illusion*(excerpt)
-  Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*(excerpts)
-  James W. Cary, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution" (from *Communication as Culture*)
-  Leo Marx, "The Idea of 'Technology' and Postmodern Pessimism" (from *Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism*)

"How has it happened that so many people have come to take up this strange attitude of hostility to civilization (*kultur*)?"...."Long ago [man] formed an ideal conception of omnipotence and omniscience which he embodied in his gods.... [T]hese gods were cultural ideals. Today he has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, he has almost become a god himself.... Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic god. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times." (Freud [1927], 38-39)



 Film: [Lang, *Metropolis*](#) (1926)

 [Metropolis Info on the Web](#) (History, Reviews, Movie Stills)

Discussion Topics:

- Analyzing cultural oppositions: nature/culture, human/machine, nature/technology, freedom/civilization
- Technology and utopia: Utopian, anti-utopian, and dystopian origins
- Technology and power, knowledge, work.
- Technology and/as Culture: Freud and "Civilization (Kultur) and It's Discontents"

 [Technology in Literary Fiction \(overview\)](#)

 [Center for Utopian & Dystopian Studies](#)

 [Student Discussion](#)


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2.1/22,27 The Technotopia Archive, II: Reading Shelley's *Frankenstein* in Context(s)

 **Readings:** Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. (Ed. Hunter, Norton Critical Edition)


 **Criticism/Theory:** Barbara Johnson, "My Monster/My Self," and Marilyn Butler, "Frankenstein and Radical Science" in Norton Critical Edition, 241-51 and 302-313.

 **Film:** Frankenstein movies from Edison to Whale, *Frankenstein*

Discussion Topics:

- Frankenstein's nameless Monster as cultural symbol
- The Monster's "birth" scene and the horror/revulsion of birth: child-rejection
- Horror of male or asexual reproduction
- Monster as first cyborg: electricity, nature, animation, hybrid creature
- Monster and Romantic sublime
- Monster and invasion/subversion/threat of domesticity and family
- The Monster and language, writing, identity

 [Mary Shelley and Frankenstein](#)

 [Monster Theory](#) (Jeffrey Cohen; read "Preface" and "Monster Culture")

 [Electricity and the Body in *Frankenstein*](#) (text references)


 [History of Electricity and Shelley's *Frankenstein*](#) (Jack Lynch, U. Penn.)


 [History of Electricity](#) (Power/Utility Co. version)


 [Student Discussion](#)


3.1/29 The Technotopia Archive, II: *Frankenstein*, Romanticism, and myths of technology

Readings:

-  [Foundational Myths of Technology](#): Theuth, Prometheus, Daedalus and Icarus
 - How is the introduction of technology represented as a "fall" from an idealized origin?
 - How is Frankenstein a "new Prometheus"?

 Rousseau, *Emile* (excerpts) and extract from the [Confessions](#) (handouts, Web)

 William Blake, [Preface to Milton](#) (1804-09). (See Blake's [Collected Poems online](#))

 American utopian and dystopian responses: [Henry David Thoreau](#) (the railroad in Walden) and [Walt Whitman](#) (American utopian dreams of industry and technology) (Whitman's [Leaves of Grass](#) online)



Discussion Topics:

- Shelley and Romanticism: industrial revolution, electricity, machines, "man" vs. "nature", city vs. country, new technology (electricity)
- [Frankenstein's Monster as the first cyborg](#): anxieties about the Industrial Revolution, electricity, and the body
- Science and Culture schizophrenia
- Monster vs. the family
- City/Country: Monster created in city (spawn of university lab experiment), but terrorizes countryside.

 **Film:** [Branagh, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein](#); Overview of Frankenstein in film (in class)

 [Student Discussion](#)

4. 2/3,5 Technotopia Archive, III: Modern Technophobia and Dystopian Visions

Readings:

 George Orwell, *1984*

 H. G. Wells, [*The Time Machine*](#) (hypertext searchable edition) (optional; for comparison with Orwell)

 **Criticism/Theory:** Foucault, "Panopticism" (from *Discipline and Punish*)

 [Discussion topics for 1984](#)

 [Background on Orwell](#)

 [David Lyon, *From Big Brother to Electronic Panopticon*](#) (book extract)

 [Neal Stephenson on Modern Surveillance](#) (from *Wired*)

 **Film:** [Radford, 1984](#)

Discussion Topics: Technological dystopias, technology and state surveillance, panopticism

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5. 2/10,12 Postmodernism: Cultural theory framework for cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk SF

 **Readings/Theory:** Overview of Postmodernism: Stuart Hall (et al.), Benjamin, Debord (online), Jameson, Baudrillard, Foucault (packet)

 [Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*](#)

 [CCT TheoryBase](#) (see Postmodern Theory section)

 [Lecture Notes: Approaches to Po-Mo](#)

 [Jean Baudrillard, "Disneyland Company."](#) From CTheory.

 [William Gibson, *Disneyland with a Death Penalty*](#) (Gibson's Po-Mo travel piece on Singapore in *Wired*)

 [Laurie Anderson Interview](#) (in *Wired*)

 **Film:** [Gilliam, *Brazil*](#)



Discussion Topics:

- [Representation and Reality](#)
- Postmodernity and post-modernism as context for cyberpunk and current views of technology and culture.
- **Aspects of the Postmodern:**
- Recombinant culture, mixed media and materials (found objects, etc.), combinations of signifiers and/or media in new contexts previously uncombined or uncombinable in previous cultural eras, low and subculture elements mixing in mainstream and "high" art (black, lower class, gay, other ethnic subcultures)
- **Cataloguing the postmodern:**

Disneyland and the simulacrum, history as pop-nostalgia, movements against collectivism (unified cultural views) and rise of identity politics, commodity fetishism, reggae dub and rap sampling, pop art collages, hybrid genres in every domain, mixed media, low art as high art, fan culture and personality journalism, high-speed image saturation, the Web, the Web as TV...



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6. 2/17,19 Cyberpunk beginnings, I: *A Clockwork Orange*



Reading: Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*



Film: Kubrick, [A Clockwork Orange](#)



Criticism/Theory: McCaffery, "Introduction" and "Cyberpunk 101" in *Storming the Reality Studio*, 1-29.



[A Nadsat Dictionary](#) (Guide to slang in the novel)



Alexander Cohen, ["A Clockwork Orange and the Aestheticization of Violence"](#)



[Interviews with Kubrick](#) (from The Kubrick Site)



[Lecture Notes](#)

Discussion Topics:


Continuities and innovations in dystopian tradition

Other contributors to cyberpunk styles: [J. G. Ballard](#), [William S. Burroughs](#)



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7. 2/24,26 Cyberpunk beginnings, II

 **Readings:** Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (*Blade Runner*)

 [Study Guide for Dick's *Do Androids Dream...* \(*Blade Runner*\)](#)

 [Lecture Notes/Class Discussion](#)

Criticism/Theory:


 Los Angeles as Noir Dystopia: Mike Davis, "Sunshine or *Noir*" and "Fortress LA" (from *City of Quartz* [NY: Vintage, 1992]: 36-62; 224-63)

 [Bits of Cities: Utopian Visions and Social Power in Placed-Based and Electronic Communities](#), Rob Kling and Roberta Lamb



 **Film:** Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*

 [Po-Mo SF and *Blade Runner*](#) (Irvine)


 [Blade Runner Online Magazine](#) (excellent movie production information)

Discussion Topics:


 [Student Discussion](#)


8. 3/3,17 Cyberpunk Firstwave

Readings:

 Gibson, "The Gernsback Continuum" (handout), "Burning Chrome" (in *Hackers*); Pat Cadigan, "Rock On" (in *Hackers*).

Criticism/Theory:

 Larry McCaffrey, "Introduction" and Kadrey and McCaffrey, "Cyberpunk 101". In *Storming the Reality Studio*, 1-29.

 Stephen Brown, "Before the Lights Came On" Observations of a Synergy". In *Storming the Reality Studio*, 173-77.

 Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism". In *Storming the Reality Studio*, 182-93.

 Andrew Ross, "Hacking Away at the Counterculture". From Constance Penley and Andrew Ross,

eds. *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota, 1991): 107-34. (packet)

 Peter Fitting, "The Lessons of Cyberpunk". From *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota, 1991): 295-315. (packet)

 [Lecture Notes](#)

 [Film: Cronenberg, *Videodrome*](#)

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9. 3/19, 3/24, 26 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* and "Johnny Mnemonic"

 **Readings:** Gibson, *Neuromancer* and "Johnny Mnemonic"


 [Study Guide for *Neuromancer*](#)

 [Po-Mo SF and Gibson](#)

 [Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, "Johnny Mnemonic: The Day Cyberpunk Died"](#). From CTheory.

 **Criticism/Theory:**

 Lewis Shiner, "Inside the Movement: Past, Present, and Future." In *Fiction 2000*: 17-25.

 Lance Olsen, "Cyberpunk and the Crisis of Postmodernity". In *Fiction 2000*: 142-52.

 Michael Heim, "The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace" (from *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*)

 [Interview with Bruce Sterling](#) (from *Cybersphere*)

 [Film: Robert Longo, *Johnny Mnemonic*](#)

Discussion Topics:

- *Neuromancer* as post-modern hybrid novel: genres, styles, references

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10. 3/31, 4/2, 7 The Cyborg: Technology and the Body

Readings:

 "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway," with Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (from *Technoculture*)

 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*)


 Kathleen Woodward, "From Virtual Cyborgs to Biological Time Bombs: Technocriticism and the Material Body" (from *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, ed. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey)

 Selections from *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995).

 Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*(selections)

Lecture Notes

 [Interview with \(and essay about\) Donna Haraway in *Wired*](#)

 [Cyborgs-'R'-Us: A history of the cyborg as cultural icon](#) (Irvine)

 [On Cybersex](#)

 [Sandy Stone, Sex and Death among the Cyborgs](#)

 **Film:** Cameron, *Terminator*; Star Trek, *Best of Both Worlds*(Borg episode); clips from cyborg movies (in class)

Discussion Topics:

- The cyborg as technomonitor and cultural icon: hybrid identities, sex, and gender
- The body and machine/digital technology: penetration of the body by technology
- The cyborg and continuities with the Frankenstein myth
- The cyborg and fantasy/projection: violence and sexual perversion
- Cyborgs-R-Us: fetish, body modification, mainstream fashion, ubiquitous technology

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11. 4/14,16 Cybernarrativity and Postmodernism: Ultrarealism, post-cyborg attitude, noir sex and violence

 **Readings:** Video

Criticism/Theory:

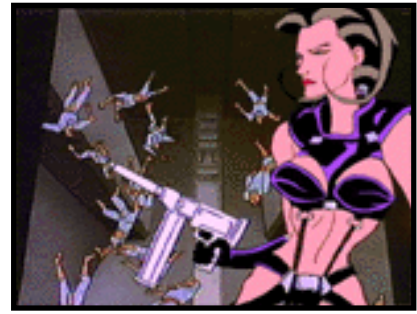
 **Film:** Japanese animation: *Ghost in the Shell*(1995), and other Manga video: *Akira*(1989), *Appleseed*(1988), *Aeon Flux*(1995)

 The Web is full of anime sites, many in the erotic genre. See [Yahoo's list of anime sources](#).

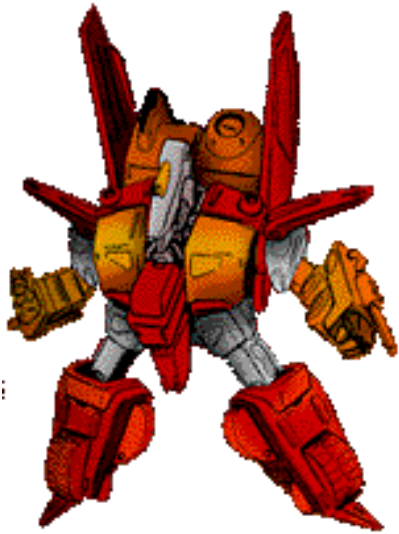
 [MTV's Aeon Flux Site](#)

 [Manga Video, Anime Genre Site](#) (See *Ghost in the Shell*)

 See newsgroup: [alt.binaries.pictures.anime](#)



Discussion Topics:



- ironic recycling of traditional narrative forms (detective/loner hero, quest-romance, Frankenstein plots) and assimilation of other styles and genres
- high-tech capitalism polarizing society (class and ethnic clashes)
- noir attitude, styles
- aestheticizing and stylizing of violence
- dystopian conventions: versions of surveillance society, disruption of official culture and power by lower or marginalized classes or groups
- ubiquity of high tech

cyborgian society: penetration of the body by technology

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12. 4/21,23,28 Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*

Readings:


 Stephenson, *Snow Crash*

 [Review of *Snow Crash*](#) by Stuart Moulthrop

 [Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, and *Beyond*](#) (Discussion Topics)

 Film: [Tetsuo: The Iron Man](#)

Criticism/Theory: Cybertheory, technoculture theory selections

 Manuel Castelas, *The Rise of the Network Society*, "Prologue: The Net and the Self" (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996).

 [Student Discussion](#)

13. 4/30 Discussion of Final Projects; Class party and celebration.

 [Student Group Projects](#)

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