

# Introduction to Science Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

November 13, 2023. Gibson.

## announcements

- ▶ Scarlet Letterpress “makerspace,” Murray 309
  - ▶ print anything on a hand press
  - ▶ learn about binding, inking, papermaking
  - ▶ open studio hours every week
  - ▶ run by the Rutgers Book Initiative [book@cca.rutgers.edu](mailto:book@cca.rutgers.edu)
- ▶ Writers @ Rutgers: Angie Cruz, November 29
- ▶ ...Paper 2 exercise due this Friday

## review: Lem

- ▶ SF without genre: “certain mental experiments”
  - ▶ proximity to European experimental literature
  - ▶ the game: empty or meaningful
- ▶ “The Seventh Voyage”
  - ▶ there are rules, but they change
  - ▶ it’s all just silly...
  - ▶ or society is silly
  - ▶ scarce things: steak, chocolate, spacesuit

## creation stories

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it* was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Genesis 1:1–5, King James Version.

And neither one nor the other succeeded in wresting from matter its secrets, though they schooled it in thought and equipped it with a mouth besides, yet before the crucial conversation came about, this misfortune intervened, a misfortune that some fools in their ignorance call the creation of the world. (“Microx and Gigant,” 53–54)

## ...some stories are true

✓ Everything that is—the nebulae, the galaxies, this tars—is receding in all directions and as a result of this unending flight the Universe has been expanding now for billions of years. (48; Big Bang)

✓ [Microx:] “everything that is, is energy”... [Gigant:] “everything that is, is mass” (49–50; Einstein)

✓ Wherever he looks he sees a red glow, and runs there at once, but it is only the light of the nebulae receding since antiquity which glows red. (53; redshift)

✓ everything in the Universe turns upon its axis like a top (54; Stern-Gerlach)

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- 1948 b. SC  
Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics* (MIT Press)
- 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: world doesn't end
- 1967 moves to Canada to avoid Vietnam draft
- 1969 first ARPANET computers connected
- 1972 *Pong* (Atari)
- 1977 BA, English, UBC  
Apple II personal computer introduced
- 1980 *Pac-Man* (Namco)
- 1981 "Johnny Mnemonic," *Omni* (May)  
IBM PC introduced
- 1982 "Burning Chrome," *Omni* (July)
- 1984 *Neuromancer* (New York; Ace; Hugo, Nebula)
- 1986 "The Gernsback Continuum," in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*,  
ed. Bruce Sterling (Westminster, MD: Arbor House)
- 1990 Gibson and Sterling, *The Difference Engine* (London: Gollancz)  
World Wide Web invented at CERN
- 1993 *Virtual Light* (New York: Bantam Spectra)
- 2003 *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Putnam's)
- 2007 iPhone introduced by Apple
- 2014 *The Peripheral* (New York: Putnam's)
- 2020 *Agency* (New York: Penguin)
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## definitions

I am, by trade, a science-fiction writer. That is, the fiction I've written so far has arrived at the point of consumption via a marketing mechanism called "science fiction."

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- ▶ What is cyberspace, in "Burning Chrome"?



## nonspace, the final frontier

The matrix is an abstract representation of the relationships between data systems. Legitimate programmers jack into their employers' sector of the matrix and find themselves surrounded by bright geometries representing the corporate data.

Towers and fields of it ranged in the colorless nonspace of the simulation matrix, the electronic consensus-hallucination that facilitated the handling and exchange of massive quantities of data. Legitimate programmers never see the walls of ice they work behind, the walls of shadow that screen their operations from others. (549)

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## other frontiers: the street

I knew every chip in Bobby's simulator by heart; it looked like your workaday Ono-Sendai VII, "the Cyberspace Seven," but I'd rebuilt it so many times that you'd have had a hard time finding a square millimeter of factory circuitry in all that silicon. (548)

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Clinically they use the stuff [Vasopressin] to counter senile amnesia, but the street finds its own uses for things. (562)

## style

- ▶ Find a sentence or two that tells you how Gibson works and why it matters.

## being cool is not about what you know

Hammett [Dashiell Hammett, the hard-boiled crime novelist] may have been the guy who turned me on to the idea of *superspecificity*, which is largely lacking in most SF description. SF authors tend to use generics—“Then he got into his space suit”—a refusal to specify that is almost an unspoken tradition in SF... I think Hammett may have given me the idea that you don't have to write like that, even in a popular form.

(I have no grasp of how computers *really* work—it's been a contact high for me.) Anyway, it wasn't until after the book [*Neuromancer*] came out that I met people who knew what a virus program actually was.

William Gibson, interview by Larry McCaffery (1986), in *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Authors* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 135, 136.

“You looking to pawn that?” He prodded the Duralumin wrist joint with the chewed shaft of a felt-tip pen. “Maybe get yourself something a little quieter?” (551)

Chrome’s castle is dissolving, sheets of ice shadow flickering and fading, eaten by the glitch systems that spin out from the Russian program, tumbling away from our central logic thrust and infecting the fabric of the ice itself. The glitch systems themselves are cybernetic virus analogs, self-replicating and voracious. (553)

## other frontiers: hardware

- ▶ What is the significance of Automatic Jack's prosthetic arm?
- ▶ How about Rikki's eyes?



## other frontiers: sexuality

The customers never got to complain that she was faking it, because those were real organisms. (565)

I thought about Chrome, too. That we'd killer her, murdered her, as surely as if we'd slit her throat... Something came up inside me the way the killer program had risen above Chrome's data. (564)

next: a lot of Butler

- ▶ “Bloodchild” (via Canvas; print out)
- ▶ “Speech Sounds” (*Wesleyan*)
- ▶ “Positive Obsession” (Canvas: print out)
- ▶ Canavan excerpt: recommended but optional