



## Reading

*In preparation for our event on 15 January 2019, we have put together a reading list. The list serves as inspiration and to extend the discussion. Read more about the event, which is part of the Geneva Internet Platform's Geneva Digital Talks series, [here](#).*

### Books

#### **Roger M Allen (1993) Isaac Asimov's Caliban**

A roboticist is apparently assaulted by one her robots, which causes widespread concern. The novel, set in a future in which humanity has become an interplanetary species, explores Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics.

#### **Isaac Asimov (1950) I, Robot**

This is a collection of short stories that include Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics. Other books related to this are: The Caves of Steel (1953); The Naked Sun (1955); The Robots of Dawn (1983); and Robots and Empire (1985).

#### **Karel Čapek (1921) R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)**

This is a play that explores what happens when robots designed for menial work develop consciousness and raise demands for better treatment. Čapek is credited with coining the term 'robot'.

#### **Ted Chiang (2010) The Lifecycle of Software Objects**

In this novella, we follow the main character over a 20 year period in which she raises an AI to a human-like level of consciousness.

#### **Arthur C Clarke (1968) 2001: A Space Odyssey**

Astronauts are on a mission to Saturn to investigate the origin of an alien radio signal. Their ship is maintained by an AI named HAL 9000. On their journey, HAL begins to cause trouble, raising the question whether or not we can trust something that we do not fully understand. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick worked on the script for the film of the same name, which many call a cinematic masterpiece.



### **Philip K Dick (1968) Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?**

The novel is set in post-apocalyptic San Francisco. It follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter who is on the hunt for escaped androids in order to 'retire' them. It explores the rights of androids and the fine line that distinguishes between human and android life. The novel is the inspiration behind the films Blade Runner (1982) and Blade Runner 2049 (2017).

### **Cory Doctorow (2003) Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom**

<https://craphound.com/category/down/>

Set in 22nd century Walt Disney World, the main character is on a path to fight the virtualisation of the park. The novel explores concepts such as digital social reputation, which replaces money, and AI simulations that interact with people and each other.

### **William Gibson (1984) Neuromancer**

This book is considered to be 'the archetypal cyberpunk work'. The story follows a troubled hacker, and deals with questions such as AI consciousness, super-computers, and virtual reality. The book inspired the 1999 movie The Matrix.

### **Ursula Le Guin (1974) The Dispossessed**

A physicist is unable to advance his scientific ideas on his home planet. He travels to the neighbouring planet to develop his ideas further. The novel develops a utopian vision of an anarchist society, and explores this idea in relation to a hierarchical, capitalist world.

### **Neal Stephenson (1992) Snow Crash**

In the near future, corporations have taken over from states. We follow a programmer, who navigates this world between government agencies and anarcho capitalism, to investigate the spread of a datafile named Snow Crash. Part of the story takes place in the Metaverse, a virtual reality imagined as the successor of the Internet.



## **Sun Ra (2011) This Planet is Doomed: The Science Fiction Poetry of Sun Ra**

Sun Ra is considered to be an early pioneer of the Afrofuturist movement due to his music, writings, and other works. Sun Ra's poems thread together mythology, mysticism, and sci-fi, offering his audience a unique glimpse into the mind of a visionary.

## **Terry Pratchett and Stephen Baxter (2012) The Long Earth**

This is a journey through the parallel Earth-like worlds, made possible by a benevolent corporation and an artificial intelligence that claims to be a reincarnated Tibetan motorcycle repairman.

## **Short stories**

### **Adrienne M Brown and Walidah Imarisha (eds.) (2015) Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements**

This is a collection of speculative fiction - encompassing sci-fi, horror, magical realism, and other genres - short stories that explore social change and offer a critique of current political practices.

### **Ted Chiang (2000) The Evolution of Human Science / Catching Crumbs From the Table**

<https://www.nature.com/articles/35014679>

Science has been taken over by machines, and humans are left with a kind of metascience that mainly consists of hermeneutics of the recent scientific advances.

### **Ted Chiang (2000) Seventy-Two Letters**

Steeped in Kabbalah mysticism, the story explores the creation of life from lifeless objects. Words (code) play a crucial role in this transformation.



### **Liu Cixin (2014 / 2016) The Circle (translated from Chinese)**

Set in 227 BC China, a king's advisor comes up with a clever but resource consuming method to calculate more and more digits of Pi. The story is great for those interested in computer science and concepts such as Boolean algebra and random access memory.

### **Cory Doctorow (2018) False Flag**

<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/false-flag/>

In light of the recent EU copyright directive, this story explores the implications of copyright and activism.

### **Cory Doctorow (2018) Sole and Despotic Dominion**

<https://reason.com/archives/2018/11/17/sole-and-despotic-dominion>

The story does not stray far from the present by reimagining a customer service interaction in a world tightly controlled by multinational corporations.

### **Wired (2018) Collection of Short Stories on the Future of Work**

<https://www.wired.com/story/future-of-work-sci-fi-issue/>

The stories cover a wide range of topics including automated smart contracts, health care and AI, relationships that are both real and fake, machine-controlled publishing and journalism, the library of the future, waste problems of the future, and murderbots.

### **John Wyndham (1954) Compassion Circuit**

<http://ow.ly/9Lcy30n2KLj>

In the story, empathetic robots, designed to react in a caring way to human suffering, cut off a sick woman's head and attach it to a robot body.



## Sci-fi reflections

### **Octavia E Butler (no date) NPR Interview with Butler**

<http://ow.ly/iaQE30n4Xi6>

In this interview Butler shares her critical reflections on creating a more peaceful, tolerant society - in fiction and reality.

### **Ursula Le Guin (2012) Still Battling the Powers That Be**

<https://www.wired.com/2012/07/geeks-guide-ursula-k-le-guin/>

In this interview, the author reflects on social protest, taking on Internet companies, and the role of sci-fi in all of this.

### **Donna Haraway (1985) Cyborg Manifesto**

In this essay, Haraway develops the concept of 'cyborg' as a rejection of rigid boundaries, notably those separating 'human' from 'animal', and 'human' from 'machine'.

### **Srđan Tunić (2018) Science Fiction Between Utopia and Critique**

<http://ow.ly/G31v30n4Xmf>

This essay offers reflections on sci-fi between escapism and critique, literary techniques and perspectives, and the 'blank canvas' of sci-fi.

### **Ytasha Womack (2014) Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture**

Comprising elements of the avant-garde, science fiction, cutting-edge hip-hop, black comix, and graphic novels, Afrofuturism spans both underground and mainstream pop culture. This book serves as an introduction to the artists creating Afrofuturist works.

### **Paul Walker-Emig (2018) Neon and corporate dystopias: why does cyberpunk refuse to move on?**

This article is a reflection on the lack of evolution in the cyberpunk works of art and our acceptance of its dystopian predictions becoming part of our reality.