

Cyberspace

Concept: Cyberspace

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Description Cyberspace is a form of virtual reality. Generated by computers, it has no physical existence outside of a network of servers. The term "cyberspace" was coined by William Gibson in a 1982 short story "Burning Chrome" and later described in his novel *Neuromancer* (1984, 51) as a "consensual hallucination... [a] graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system." Sometimes treated synonymously with the Internet, cyberspace is more properly understood as the where rather than the what — the virtual space of electronic information flow. While the Internet serves as a convenient shorthand for the gridding of the world by a web of interrelated communication technologies and information systems, cyberspace refers to no place in particular because it exists as the perceptual effect of these rapidly evolving, material processes.

As the mediator between the increasingly sophisticated technologies of the Internet and its exponentially growing user base, cyberspace remained a largely theoretical construct accessible only to those versed in arcane programming languages until it was melded with another technological innovation: the graphical user interface. Replacing command line input with point-and-click icons radically downshifted the degree of expertise required to negotiate one's way through primitive cyberspace. As a result, web literacy grew exponentially, reaching a critical mass by the late 1990s. This opened cyberspace for commercialization as well as (potentially) radically democratizing the media and communications technology that had hitherto been the province of the wealthy or well-connected. A notional environment, cyberspace is constrained only by human imagination and the limitations of the datasphere (namely, processing power and bandwidth).

Work Cited: **Gibson, William.** 1984. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace.