

# Introduction to Cultural Studies: Winter 2008

## Cyberculture

### General Information

Class Meets: TTH, 1:30-3:20 p.m., Gould 435  
Instructor: Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges  
Office: Padelford A305  
Office Hours: TTH, 12:00-1:00 p.m., or by appointment  
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### Description

In this course, we will analyze how the Internet, digital media and computer technologies have altered the contemporary cultural landscape. To do so, we will employ the methodologies of cultural studies, focusing on the social, cultural, and political interactions that occur online, the ways in which electronic media convey and contest particular ideologies, the possibilities and limitations of virtual communities, the economics of participation in cyberculture, and technology's influence on our notions of the human. Course readings include literary and cinematic representations of cyberspace as well as theoretical writings. Students will also examine digital artwork, social networking platforms, virtual reality environments, blogs and online gaming sites.

Students in the course work toward several goals: distinguishing the social, political, economic, and ideological factors that shape the development and use of digital technologies; developing an understanding of how the virtual and "real" worlds influence one another; appreciating the aesthetic dimensions of art depicting or produced within cyberspace; and recognizing how online environments both expand and circumscribe identities and interactions. They will also hone their critical thinking and writing skills. Course activities promote active learning, with most class sessions including a mix of mini-lectures, discussion, short writing exercises, and group work. My role is to provide the tools and resources you will need to advance your own thinking and writing. I will pose questions, design activities to help you think through these questions, and respond to your ideas. Your role is to do the hard work—the critical reading, discussion, and writing. You will analyze texts, generate ideas in electronic and face-to-face discussions, develop presentations with your peers, construct written arguments, and revise those arguments.

### Requirements

#### Class Participation

Class discussion constitutes one key method of developing your analytical skills. Thus, I expect prompt, regular attendance and active participation in discussions of course texts. You should come prepared for each class session, with assigned reading completed. You should also plan to ask questions, make comments, summarize theoretical arguments, analyze texts, paraphrase your electronic postings, or contribute to small-group discussions. Like all skills, speaking in class becomes easier with practice. I do not expect fully polished commentary in class discussion; rather, your contributions represent ideas for further expansion. To generate discussion, I will frequently ask you to write short responses to assigned readings, films, or Web sites.

#### Electronic Discussion

Students will use the class discussion board to reflect on course texts, describe and analyze online experiences, and engage peers' ideas. I will provide initial questions or guidelines to help you structure your remarks. Each week, you will submit a 200- to 250-word response to the discussion prompt. Alternate weeks, you will post a 100-word reaction to one of your peer's ideas. The electronic posting board site allows us to extend class conversations, raise issues for in-class discussions and

generate ideas for papers or projects. Your postings receive points on a credit/no credit basis, with full points granted to on-time postings that meet the length requirement and demonstrate serious engagement with the discussion prompt or peers' thoughts.

To access the electronic discussion board, go to the course Web site, click on "Discuss," and follow the instructions. I have divided the class into two groups to keep discussion manageable:

- ❖ Group One: Students with last names A-L
- ❖ Group Two: Students with last names M-Z

#### Group Article Presentation

Students will work together in groups of two or three to craft a 15- to 20-minute lecture that summarizes an article from *The Cultural Studies Reader* and applies the author's insights to a course novel, film, or digital text.

#### Cyberculture Artifact Analysis

Students will author a 1,000- to 1,250-word analysis of a cyberculture "artifact"—a novel or film that depicts an aspect of cyberculture, a digital artwork, or an online text. Incorporating insights from *The Cultural Studies Reader*, you will examine how your artifact constructs a virtual world, deconstructs the human/machine boundary, or explores the influence of cyberspace on our notions of the body or self.

You may submit your work as a traditional essay or a Web site. For essays, please title, paginate, type and double-space your submission, using one-inch margins. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, include your name, the course number and the due date; this information should be single-spaced. You may use a 10 or 12 point Arial, Century Schoolbook, Garamond, or Times New Roman font. When citing sources, use MLA format. For Web sites, include a title, contact information, and a creation date. Students will use Collect It to electronically turn in their essays or Web page URLs.

#### Final Project

Students will complete a final project focusing on virtual identity, Web communities, online social interaction or user-authored texts. The project includes three stages: a proposal, an in-class poster presentation in which you will answer viewers' questions, and a final draft. You will receive feedback from me on all stages. As with the artifact analysis, the final project may take multiple forms.

## Policies

#### Lateness Policy

I will not accept late electronic postings, presentations, or project proposals. Late artifact analyses and final projects will receive a 10-point deduction per day late, including weekends. Failure to submit a final project proposal or poster presentation will result in a 20-point deduction, as responding from feedback constitutes an essential part of the assignment. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency.

Technology glitches do not constitute valid excuses for lateness. To avoid computer problems, you should save frequently while working, and you should back up work saved to a hard drive on a memory device or your Dante account. To avoid problems submitting work via Collect It, give your files distinct names so that you do not upload the wrong document. If the posting board or Collect It breaks down, email your work directly to me.

#### Plagiarism Policy

In your presentations and written work, you may draw upon the ideas and words of other writers. However, you must make clear to your audience that you are incorporating another's work by placing quotation marks around exact words and citing the author's name whenever you quote, summarize or paraphrase. Failure to credit sources may result in a failing grade for the assignment, a failing grade

for the course, or expulsion from the university. The course Web site contains information on when and how to cite sources.

## Email and Access to Course Web Site

You must have a UW Net ID, a working email account and a way to access the course Web site. I frequently upload schedule changes, assignment guidelines and grading criteria to the Web site. The site also contains links and sample student work not distributed in class.

## Texts

### Films

All course films are on reserve at the Odegaard Media Library. While you may not check out reserve films, you may view them at the Media Library.

- ❖ *AI* (Steven Spielberg, 2001, 146 min.)
- ❖ *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982, 117 min.)
- ❖ *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999, 97 min.)
- ❖ *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999, 136 min.)

### Textbook

- ❖ Bell, David and Barbara M. Kennedy, eds. *The Cybercultures Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- ❖ Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984.

### Web sites and online texts

The schedule on the course Web site contains links to selected digital texts.

## Grading

Grades in English 207 will be computed by points, with 400 points equaling a 4.0, 300 points a 3.0, and so on. If your total falls between grades, I will round up if you score one to five points below the higher grade and round down if you score one to four points above the lower grade. For example, 274 points equals a 2.7 and 275 points a 2.8. Students who score less than 65 points total will receive a 0 for the course, as the UW grading system does not scale grades lower than .7.

Apart from postings, which are graded on a credit/no credit basis, points for each assignment will be awarded based on quality of work submitted. I will distribute grading criteria for each assignment early in the term. Each component of the course is worth the following number of points:

- ❖ Class Participation: 60 points
- ❖ Electronic Postings: 80 points
- ❖ Group Article Presentation: 40 points
- ❖ Cyberculture Artifact Analysis: 80 points
- ❖ Final Project (including proposal and poster presentation): 140 points

## Schedule

This schedule may be altered at any point in the term at the instructor's discretion. Students must complete readings by the time class meets on the dates indicated. The designation (CR) indicates a selection from *The Cybercultures Reader*; (O) indicates an online reading. Please note that there are several film screenings outside of class. If you cannot attend the screening, you must view the film on your own.

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading	Due
1/8	Course introduction		
1/9			Complete online student survey by 10:00 p.m.
1/10	<i>Neuromancer</i>	Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> , Chapters 1-5 (3-79)	
1/15	<i>Neuromancer</i>	Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> , Chapters 6-16 (81-199)	
1/16	Screening: <i>The Matrix</i> (Kane 019, 2:00-4:30 p.m.)		Posting on <i>Neuromancer</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
1/17	<i>Neuromancer</i>  Student presentation on McQuire article	Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> , Chapters 17-24 (201-271); McQuire, "Space for Rent in the Last Suburb" (CR, 66-79)	Response to peer's <i>Neuromancer</i> posting due by 10:00 p.m.
1/18	Screening: <i>Blade Runner: The Director's Cut</i> and <i>AI</i> (Kane 019, 12:00-4:30 p.m.)		
1/22	Defining and deconstructing humans and machines  Student presentations on Hayles, Lupton and Turkle articles	Hayles, "Computing the Human" (CR, 557-576); Lupton, "The Embodied Computer/User" (CR, 422-432); Moravec, "The Universal Robot" (CR, 508-515); Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (O); Turkle, "Cyborg Babies and Cy-Dough-Plasm" (CR, 547-556)	
1/23			Posting on chatbot experiment due by 10:00 p.m.
1/24	Cinematic cyborgs: <i>Blade Runner</i> , <i>The Matrix</i> , and <i>AI</i>  Student presentation on Haraway article	Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (CR, 34-64); <i>AI</i> (Spielberg, 2001); <i>Blade Runner</i> (Scott, 1982/1992); <i>The Matrix</i> (Wachowski Brothers, 1999)	
1/29	Cyberart and digital media  Student presentations on Manovich and Stelarc articles	Manovich, "From DV Realism to a Universal Recording Machine" (CR, 174-182); Stelarc, "From Psycho-Body to Cyber-Systems" (CR, 456-471)	

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading	Due
1/30			Posting on digital art work due by 10:00 p.m.
1/31	Cyberart and digital media Student presentations on Ayers and Held articles	Ayers, "Serene and Happy and Distant" (CR, 472-483); Held, "Gene(sis)" (CR, 717-730)	Response to peer's artwork posting due by 10:00 p.m.
2/5	Identity in cyberspace Student presentations on Cheung and Nakamura articles	Cheung "Identity Construction and Self-Presentation" (CR; 273-285); Nakamura, "Race in/for Cyberspace" (CR; 297-304); selected Web sites (TBA)	
2/6			Posting on virtual identity due by 10:00 p.m.
2/7	Identity in cyberspace Student presentations on Curtain and Stone articles	Curtain, "Promiscuous Fictions" (CR; 321-328); Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?" (CR, 433-455); selected Web sites (TBA)	
2/8	Screening: <i>eXistenZ</i> (Kane Hall 019, 2:30-4:30 p.m.)		Cyberartifact essay due by 10:00 p.m. via Collect It
2/12	Gaming	<i>eXistenZ</i> (Cronenberg, 1999), Avant Game (O); Game Research (O); "How to Survive in Any RPG" (O)	
2/13			Posting on game experience due by 10:00 p.m.
2/14	Gaming and game fandom Student presentation on Rehak article	Rehak, "Mapping the Bit Girl" (CR, 174-182); selected Web sites (TBA)	Response to peer's game experience posting due by 10:00 p.m.
2/19	Defining and critiquing virtual community Student presentations on Uncapher and Willson articles	Uncapher, "Electronic Homesteading on the Rural Frontier" (CR, 191-212); Willson, "Community in the Abstract" (CR, 213-226)	
2/20			Posting on virtual community due by 10:00 p.m.
2/21	Defining and critiquing virtual community Student presentations on Bakardjieva, Bell, and Robins articles	Bakardjieva, "Virtual Togetherness" (CR, 236-253); Bell, "Webs as Pegs" (CR, 254-264); Robins, "Against Virtual Community" (CR, 227-235)	

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading	Due
2/26	Politics and activism in cyberspace  Student presentations on Jordan, Kahn and Kellner, and Sassen articles	Jordan, "Technopower and Its Cyberfutures" (CR, 594-601); Kahn and Kellner, "Technopolitics and Oppositional Media" (CR, 618-637); Rheingold, "Smart Mobs" (O); Sassen, "Digital Networks and the State" (CR, 577-581)	
2/27			Posting on cyberpolitics due by 10:00 p.m.
2/28	Politics and activism in cyberspace	Holcomb, Bakelaar and Zizzamia, "The Internet in the Aftermath of the World Trade Center Attack" (CR, 638-650); selected Web sites (TBA)	
2/29			Final project proposal due by 10:00 p.m. via Collect It
3/4	Web 2.0	Britannica Blog Web 2.0 Forum (O); developerWorks Interviews: Tim Berners-Lee (O); "What is Web 2.0" (O)	
3/5			Posting on Web 2.0 due by 10:00 p.m.
3/6	Web 2.0	Selected blogs, wikis, social networking/bookmarking, and photo-sharing sites (TBA)	Response to peer's Web 2.0 posting due by 10:00 p.m.
3/11	Final project poster presentations		
3/13	Final project poster presentations		
3/18			Final project due by 10:00 p.m. via CollectIt