

ENGL 6008/6062 & WGST 6050

New Media: Gender, Culture, Technology

Spring 2021

Dr. Aaron A. Toscano (atoscano)
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Class: Synchronous online Tuesdays 6:00 – 8:45 pm
Office hours: Virtual by appt.

Course Description and Purpose

The term “new media” is a contested and evolving subject for the twenty-first century student. Traditionally, new media refers to the digital technologies that have inundated contemporary society—video games, webpages, digital photography, and social media platforms. This course will explore the ways in which new media reflect larger cultural myths, values, and attitudes. We will approach the study of new media by analyzing various media (TV, films, commercials, printed texts, webpages, video game sequences, etc.) and locating the cultural values incorporated within media to help us evaluate capitalism, militarization, fragmented realities, patriotism, the individual hero, gender roles, and even manifest destiny. Recent scholarship on new media reveals complex narratives that complicate traditional notions of textuality, so our study will not be just about the technologies behind new media, but about how cultures mediate these new “texts.”

Course Objectives and Biases

I have a bias that drives my pedagogy, and I want to make this absolutely clear: **I believe that education for the sake of education is good in and of itself.** I don't make any claim that you will learn anything practical that you may directly apply to a 9-to-5 job, and I hope we engage only in abstract theoretical endeavors. This is a theory-rich course that questions the “truths” we hold; truths that are culturally mediated. There are no correct answers, but, as a rhetorician, I have a bias that your discussions will be sound, well-thought out, and resemble a commitment to logical reasoning. Another huge bias I have is that a university education is not about reinforcing student beliefs; instead, students should consider how their own biased perspectives/experiences have constructed their tastes, convictions, and opinions as they synthesize a new (preferably broader) intellectual appreciation of new (and traditional) media texts and technologies. In this course, students should push themselves to engage in critical thinking by developing their analytic faculties as well as field-specific vocabularies for talking about new media and theories surrounding new media. All students will have to articulate an understanding of the material that reflects the rhetorical sophistication and level of commitment to pursuing knowledge expected in graduate-level courses. Ideally, students will contemplate the role of media consumer or “critic” as that position relates to socially constructed norms and tastes.

Texts and Materials

- Required** Barker, Chris and Emma A. Jane. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 5th ed., Sage, 2016. {9781473919457}
- Fisher, Mark. *Capitalism: Is There No Real Alternative?* Zero Books, 2009. {978-1846943171}
- Curran, James, Natalie Fenton, & Des Freedman. *Misunderstanding the Internet*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2016. {9781138906228} eBook available here: <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.librarylink.uncc.edu/books/9781317443513>
- Selected Readings on [Canvas](#)
- Recommended** Malpas, Simon. *The Postmodern*. New York: Routledge, 2004. {978-0415280655} eBook here: <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.librarylink.uncc.edu/books/9781134463237>
- Films to watch:
- *The Matrix* (1999)—at least the first one
 - *Inception* (2010)
 - *Social Dilemma* (2020)—I will ridicule our social media practices throughout the semester

Expectations

You might be aware that there's a pandemic that has altered our plans to be face to face. I understand that it's not ideal to be online, but it's the responsible thing to do. Ideally, we'd be in a small, cozy classroom discussing the readings and considering ways to interpret media based on the theoretical lenses we develop. Even though we'll be meeting virtually, I expect students to be prepared when they come to class. **There is quite a bit of reading in this course, but it's manageable if you plan your school-work-life needs appropriately. Again, there is quite a bit of reading in this course.** Have the readings completed for the class meeting prior to coming to class and post a reflection on [Canvas](#) (weekly) after class by **Fridays at 11:00 pm**. This is a graduate-level seminar that demands active, critical engagement with the texts. Although one's tastes and convictions, often mistaken as "opinions," are appropriate for personal ways of knowing, we will emphasize identifying (as accurately as possible) broader cultural patterns that will help guide our analyses of "texts." Our experiences should help us (re)think our assumptions about culturally mediated knowledge. Critical thinking is expected. **Also, I expect you to point to specific passages in our discussions.** Be ready to do so every class period. In a lot of ways, this is a crash course on cultural studies, and you won't get everything on the first reading. Consider this a stop along the way in your educational career that helps you think critically about media.

This 3-credit course requires 3 hours of classroom or direct faculty instruction* and 6 hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks. Out-of-class work may include but is not limited to the following: reading, researching, doing assignments, learning software, and studying for exams. The above outside-of-class work expectations are derived from Academic Affairs: <https://provost.uncc.edu/policies-procedures/academic-policies-and-procedures/academic-credit-hour> (see III. Definitions; the above link uses aggregate hours for the entire semester).

*Obviously, the pandemic is governing our "direct faculty instruction," which means we're 100% online. The readings, website notes/exercises, and [Canvas](#) resources fulfill what would have been 3 hours of face-to-face class meetings. If you feel you do not have enough work to do, please let me know, and I'll quickly correct that.

Work Requirements

Students in this course are expected to be able to compose unified, coherent documents nearly free of mechanical, logical, or structural errors. Students should also strive for writing clear and concise prose. The ability to read advanced college-level texts critically is also a requirement. I will provide additional requirements on the class website. The final exam period will be used as a presentation day for students to present their projects. Time (limits) will be based on enrollment. Our final exam meeting day/time is Tuesday, May 11, 2021, from 6:00-8:45 pm. Please let me know ASAP about any exam conflicts.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Assignments	pts.	Grading Scale
Critical Analysis of Culture Essay	100	A= 90 – 100
Critical Media Analysis Essay	200	B= 80 – 89
Leading Class Discussion	100	C= 70 – 79
Final (Multimodal?) Project	100	D= 60 – 69
Final Project Presentation	50	F= Below 60
Participation	150	
Canvas Posts	300	
Total	1000	

Definition of A, B, C, D, and F Grades

Remember, your final grade is a combination of the seven assignments above. An 'A' means your work was excellent—not mediocre, average, or just good. A 'B' means your work was good—not quite excellent but definitely above average and

thoughtful. A 'C' means your work was barely adequate enough to satisfy the assignment—showing a lack of effort or thought for the assignment guidelines. A 'D' or 'F' usually means assignments were late, missing, or incomplete—often this work does not demonstrate appropriate college-level work for a 6000-level course.

Late Work

An assignment is due at the beginning of the class for which it was assigned. Honestly, there is no excuse for assignments being late in a 6000-level class, but I have a policy anyway: All late work will reduce the assignment by 10% (an entire letter grade) for each class period it is late. Therefore, an assignment worth 100 points that is one class meeting late will not be able to have a grade higher than 90. If Canvas issues come up, don't panic. I anticipate many problems with the online systems we'll use this semester. I'm very reasonable and will work something out, so you don't lose any credit because of a system-wide glitch. If an issue arises, **please do not attach the assignment to an e-mail**. Send me an e-mail that explains the issue as best you can, and I'll reply with a solution. Remember, you are responsible for making up all work missed. Late Canvas posts will not be accepted.

Participation

This is not a drill-and-skill type of course. I expect everyone to be involved in class discussions, which are extremely important for critical thinking. You must contribute to class discussions. Fifteen percent (15%) of your grade is based on participation. There is no alternative for engaging in class discussions. If you're concerned about your participation grade because you're shy, get over it now, or reconsider your enrollment in this course. Telling me at the end of April that you didn't participate because you're the quiet type or because you didn't understand what "thoughtful" meant will be too late. Even worse, e-mailing me after the semester is over to complain that participation isn't a "valid" class assignment is too late. The purpose of discussions is for students to have control over their own learning and to reinforce critical thinking generally and dialogic exchange of ideas specifically. Participation is an extremely important component of critical thinking. Taking good notes on the reading (which is required in this class) will help you recall important aspects of the text to discuss in class.

Attendance

Work out all connectivity issues, so you can meet during our synchronous class. I realize there can be issues beyond your control; however, I have Spectrum, and they've only had two outages in my area during the pandemic, and they fixed them very quickly. Do yourself a favor and figure out a way to hardwire into your router during class for the best possible connection. Wi-Fi is often not as stable as a direct connection.

Important Dates and Administrative Information

The syllabus schedule on the last two pages has important dates for readings and assignments. Students are responsible for not only knowing course deadlines but also knowing UNC Charlotte deadlines (drop/add, billing, vacation, etc.). Please visit the following link for the registrar's calendar: <http://registrar.uncc.edu/calendar>.

Academic Integrity

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is an academic community dedicated to teaching, scholarship, service, inclusion, and the holistic development of Students. Academic integrity is a cornerstone value of the University's intellectual community. It is important to nurture an atmosphere of honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and **mutual responsibility. Integrity is essential because it ensures that Students fairly benefit from their educational experience and pursuits of knowledge.** Violating the principles of academic integrity damages the reputation of the University and undermines its educational mission and goals.

The University recognizes that Academic Misconduct detracts from the value of a UNC Charlotte degree and has influence beyond the University community, including relationships with employers, other educational institutions, the business community, the UNC system, and the community at large.

The purpose of the Code is to:

1. support and promote an ethical learning environment;
2. create consistent standards for all members of the academic community;
3. **assist Students in learning responsibility for one's own academic work;**
4. protect the academic environment of the University community; and
5. **clarify Student values and how they relate to the behavior in question.**

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty (From University Policy: 407, Ch. 6—<https://legal.uncc.edu/policies/up-407#c6>)

- A. **Cheating** means using or attempting to use materials, or giving assistance or materials without Authorization to another in any academic exercise that could result in gaining or helping another to gain academic advantage.
- B. **Fabrication** means providing fabricated information, including inventing or counterfeiting information, in any form in an academic exercise.
- C. **Falsification** means altering without Authorization any data or information, regardless of communication method (e.g., e-mail or other electronic communication), in an academic exercise.
- D. **Misuse of Academic Materials** means sharing, distributing, altering, acquiring, damaging, or making inaccessible academic materials without Authorization, that could result in gaining or helping another to gain an academic advantage.
- E. **Multiple Submission** means submitting academic work or substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) in more than one academic exercise without Authorization.
- F. **Plagiarism** means presenting the words or ideas of another as one's own words or ideas, including failing to properly acknowledge a source, unless the ideas or information are common knowledge. Plagiarism includes self-plagiarism, which is the use of one's own previous work in another context without indicating that it was used previously.
- G. **Unauthorized Collaboration** means sharing the work or effort in an academic exercise with another Student or Students without Authorization.
- H. **Research Misconduct** means a determination that Research Misconduct has occurred under [University Policy 309, Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Scholarship](#) and its [Supplemental Procedures](#). (See Chapter 3, Section III of the Code.)

If you try to pass off any work in full or part as your own without proper credit being given to the original source—you will receive an 'F' in this course. If you use non-sanctioned resources (e.g., other classmates) to complete tests and exams, you will receive an 'F' in this course.

Title IX Mandated Reporting

{This section may change on January 21st or shortly after sanity is restored to the Department of Education. We will abide by any new regulations.}

UNC Charlotte is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. UNC Charlotte has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that many UNC Charlotte employees, including all faculty members, are considered [Responsible Employees](#) who are required to relay any information or reports of sexual misconduct they receive to the Title IX Coordinator. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must [report the information to the Title IX Coordinator](#). Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can contact any of the following on-campus resources, who are not required to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator: (1) University Counseling Center (counselingcenter.uncc.edu, 7-0311); (2) Student Health Center (studenthealth.uncc.edu, 7-7400); or (3) Center for Wellness Promotion (wellness.uncc.edu, 7-7407). Additional information about your options is also available at titleix.uncc.edu under the "Students" tab.

Safety and Security Information

UNC Charlotte's Department of Safety and Security offers the following safety tips:

- Ensure your cell phone number is in the Banner Self-Serve system (Emergency Text Phone Number box) to receive text message NinerAlerts. NinerAlerts are sent via a variety of methods when there is a threat to campus safety or a change in operating condition.
- For every NinerAlert that is issued, an action directive is also included in the body of the message. Action Directives can include run, hide, fight; seek shelter; or evacuate. Visit emergency.uncc.edu for more information on what each directive means.
- Download the Livesafe app. This connects you to campus police via phone or text 24/7.
 - 911 dialed from a mobile phone connects to CMPD and can slow down response.
 - Alternatively, you can put the UNC Charlotte Police emergency number in your phone: 704-687-2200.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and know the quickest escape routes: exit doors, windows, etc.
- Safety and Security offers a variety of trainings to students For more information, visit: <https://police.uncc.edu/crime-prevention-safety>
- Remember: Personal pepper spray is allowed on campus. However, guns and knives are not.

Action Directives included in NinerAlerts:

Run-Hide-Fight is the individual's Action Directive for an active assailant.

- **RUN:** If outside or in a building and it is safe to flee, run and leave the campus if possible.
- **HIDE:** If you are in a building and unsure of where the threat is, find the closest room in which to hide. Close, lock and/or barricade doors if they do not lock. Do not huddle in one location. Remain quiet.
- **FIGHT:** This is a last-resort option. Do not seek the assailant. If you come into direct contact with the individual, use any means necessary to defend yourself.

A **Seek Shelter** directive is normally issued during severe weather or hazardous material releases.

If a Seek Shelter is ordered:

- Stay inside if you are indoors.
- If outside, quickly go to the nearest building.
- Once indoors, find a fitting room or space in the building to shelter. Stay away from windows.

An **Evacuation** can be for either a single building, area, or the entire campus. Further information and direction will be included in the NinerAlert.

Statement of Academic Freedom

I strongly encourage students to use class as a place for free inquiry and intellectual growth. Although we as a class will not always agree or be comfortable with the views of others, every student has the right to his or her own tastes and convictions (but don't mistake those for sound, well-reasoned opinions). I promise to be fair and always support your right to look at the world from your own position, but I encourage all students to branch out and consider multiple perspectives. If you think texts have single, objectively reasoned meanings...well, you're about to get a radical new perspective in this course. Our biases filter our interpretations of the world around us. Family, culture, media, law, religion, etc. influence how we perceive the world. Your perspectives might be similar to those close to you, but your worldview isn't universally held. **I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning. Remember, harassment isn't just verbal—making harassing or abusive posts won't be tolerated.**

Instructional Modifications

Students who have a condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with professionals to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. Please inform me about circumstances as soon as possible. I don't need specifics, but I do need to know what accommodations to make. For information and assistance, contact the Disabilities Resource Center:

<http://ds.uncc.edu/>.

Inclement Weather/Building Issues/Apocalypse

Although we're not meeting in a classroom, it's possible that system-wide outages, including end-of-the-world scenarios, will make it impossible to access Canvas, the class website, and e-mail. If this occurs, continue to keep up with the class webpage, readings, and [Canvas](#). I'll adjust the course calendar, and we'll pick up where we left off on the syllabus.

Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or to make our lives easier.

Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(have readings and assignments done before class)

January 26*	<p>Introduction to the Course. Go over the syllabus. Discuss the following readings (on Canvas):</p> <p>Asimov, Isaac. "Cult of Ignorance." <i>Newsweek</i>, 21 Jan 1980, p. 19.</p> <p>Conniff, Richard. "In the Name of the Law: How to Win Arguments without Really Trying." <i>Smithsonian</i> 38.7 (Oct. 2007): 128.</p> <p>McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message." <i>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</i>. Signet, 1964, pp. 7-21.</p>
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*January 27th—Big day for the semester:

- Last day to add, drop with no grade * 11:59 PM
- If you're not registered, you will not be allowed to continue in the course
- Last day to submit a grade replacement request * 11:59 PM

February 2	Barker & Jane, Ch. 1 & 2
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Feb 8th – Feb 14th: No Class—Spring Recess...enjoy Cancun
Notice that this is a very odd time to have Spring Break

February 16	Curran, James, Natalie Fenton, & Des Freedman. <i>Misunderstanding the Internet</i> . 2 nd ed. 2016.
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February 23*	<p>Habermas, Jurgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article." <i>Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords</i>. Eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Keller. Trans. Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001. 102-107.</p> <p>Fraser, Nancy. "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender." <i>Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory</i>. Eds. Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991. 252-256.</p> <p>Mervin, David. "The News Media and Democracy in the United States." <i>Democratization and the Media</i>. Ed. Vicky Randall. London: F. Cass, 1998. 6-22.</p> <p>Jefferson, Thomas et. al. "The Declaration of Independence" 4 July 1776. National Archives Online</p>
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*February 24th— Deadline for ALL students to apply for Spring 2021 graduation

March 2	Barker & Jane, Ch. 3 & 4
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March 9 **DUE**	Critical Analysis of Culture Essay Due Barker & Jane, Ch. 5 & 6
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March 16*	Barker & Jane, Ch. 7 & 8
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*March 18th: Last day to withdraw from courses with a "W" grade
Please review the [Withdrawal Policy](#) before considering withdrawing from any course.

March 23	<p>Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." <i>Theatre Journal</i> 40.4 (Dec. 1988): pp. 519-531.</p> <p>Barthes, Roland. "Novels and Children." <i>Mythologies</i>. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. pp. 50-52.</p> <p>Barker & Jane, Ch. 9 "Sex, Subjectivity, and Representation"</p>
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March 30	<p>Eco, Umberto. "Travels in Hyperreality." <i>Travels in Hyperreality: Essays</i>. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt, 1990 (originally published 1968).</p> <p>Barker & Jane, Ch. 10 "Television, Texts, and Audiences"</p>
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April 6	Fisher, Mark. <i>Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?</i> Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009. Fisher, Mark. What Is Hauntology? <i>Film Quarterly</i> 66.1 (2012): 16-24.
April 13 **DUE**	Critical Media Analysis Essay Barker & Jane, Ch. 11 & 12
April 20	Bay, Jennifer. "A Rhetoric and Poetics of New Media." <i>JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition</i> . 28.3/4 (2008), pp. 759-769. Werner, Courtney L. "How Rhetoric and Composition Described and Defined New Media at the Start of the Twenty-First Century." <i>College Composition and Communication</i> 68.4 (June 2017): pp. 713-741.
April 27	Barker & Jane, Ch. 13 & 14
May 4 th ... be with you.	Depending on your Final Project, choose one of the following groups (on Canvas): Group 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean, Jodi. "Introduction." <i>Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics</i>. Duke UP, 2009, pp. 1-18. • Dean, Jodi. "Technology: The Promises of Communicative Capitalism." <i>Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics</i>. Duke UP, 2009, pp. 19-48. Group 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." <i>Screen</i> 16.3 (1975): 6-18. • Toscano, Aaron. "Phallogentrism in Video Games." <i>Video Games and American Culture: How Ideology Influences Virtual Worlds</i>. Lexington Books, 2020, pp. 93-112. Group 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jameson, Fredric. "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." <i>Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</i>. Durham: Duke UP, 1991, pp. 1-54
May 11 Final Exam	Final (Multimodal?) Projects and Presentations DUE Unless we have to change it, please come during the regular class time, 6:00-8:45 pm https://registrar.uncc.edu/printable-calendar?field_semester_tid=9&field_school_year_tid=29

Commencement May 14th & 15th