

READING MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND THEORY
English 465-001
Spring 2010
TTh 2:00-3:15 pm, 216 Daniel

Dr. Brian Croxall

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Office Hours: TTh 3:30-5:00 pm and by appointment

Digital Office Hours: MW 11 am – 12 pm or whenever I'm shown as available on [the class wiki](#)

* I reserve the right to modify this syllabus.

Course Description

In the age of Google, iPhones, and the World of Warcraft, it may seem self-evident that, as Friedrich Kittler claims, “media determine our situation.” But it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that media began to be considered as important as the messages they conveyed. With this realization and the continued development of the computer came more thinking about the importance of media in our lives. How do media proliferate and become interconnected? How do media affect our perception of political and cultural events? How can we best represent our experiences within different media? To what extent does digital computing affect the media ecology in which we find ourselves today? About these and related questions, a body of media theory has arisen. This course will introduce you to some of the important texts in this field. At the same time we will consider both print and electronic literature—including novels about the Internet, virtual reality, and gaming—that engage these questions. We will consider how literature is determined by and at the same time extends the theories of media. Along the way, you and I will do our own share of writing—both print and digital.

Course Goals

- To become familiar and conversant with important concepts in recent theories about media and technology
- To analyze contemporary literature's intersection with and response to/writing of media theory
- To become more skilled writers through an engagement with writing as a continuing process
- To collaborate as a class through the use of various social media

Texts

The **required** texts for this course are

- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (Harper, 978-0060931674)
- Rudy Rucker, *The Hacker and the Ants*, 2nd edition (Four Walls Eight Windows, ISBN: 978-1568582474)
- Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Indiana University Press, ISBN: 978-0253210036)
- Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden* (Eastgate Systems, ISBN: 978-1884511035)
- Charles Stross, *Halting State* (Ace, ISBN: 978-0441016075)
- Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Pantheon-Random House, ISBN: 978-0375703768)
- Jeanette Winterson, *The PowerBook* (Vintage, ISBN: 978-0375725050)
- Course packet, available at the Clemson University Bookstore

Finally, there will be a few texts that will only be available on [the course wiki](#). **You are required to bring a hard copy of these texts to class with you on the day that we will discuss them.**

Important Note: Campus bookstores exist as a convenience, not as a final resource. As such, you might consider purchasing some of your texts from another source (which might be cheaper). But be sure that you have your copy of the text by the assigned dates.

Assignments

Papers: There will be two essay assignments throughout the semester. I will distribute the assignments before the due dates. I am happy to discuss drafts, outlines, or ideas in office hours. I am unlikely to respond helpfully to an email message sent the day before the paper is due.

Summaries: Throughout the semester, we will be reading several theoretical texts about media, technology, and/or literature. This assignment asks you to write summaries of and responses to the theoretical texts we read throughout the semester and to turn them in *before* we discuss the texts in class.

Wiki-Wave Class Notes: Class notes are, to borrow from a colleague of mine, “epistemologically weird.” On the one hand, they are an individual account of what you learned during a class. On the other hand, if your notes are too individualized or idiosyncratic it means you will have likely missed what was most important. To be effective, in other words, class notes should reflect the collective experience of the classroom. To this end, you will be working in groups this semester to create class notes using the [course wiki](#) and [Google Wave](#). I will provide examples for the first few days of class.

Grades

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Participation: 15%
Paper 1: 15%
Paper 2: 20%
Article Summaries: 10%
Annotated Zotero Group Bibliography: 15%
Wiki-Wave Class Notes: 15%
Twitter: 5%
The Nethernet: 5%

Course Policies

Attendance: You can miss three class sessions without penalty. After three, I reserve the right to lower your final grade; after six absences you risk failing the course. Note that this policy does not distinguish “excused” from “unexcused” absences—such a distinction puts me in a role I don’t want to play. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining the relevant notes and information from your classmates. Also, be on time to class. I make note of when people are late, and being late three times is akin to an absence. Finally, if you do not have a hard copy of the text that we are discussing (except in the case of *Victory Garden*), you cannot participate effectively in our discussion, and I will mark you absent.

Preparation and Participation: This is a class based on collaborative discourse. As such, being prepared to participate in discussions is a course requirement. This entails having **read, annotated, and thought** about the complete assignment carefully before class starts. Furthermore, you **must** bring your copy of the text to class every day. Since we will be engaged in closely examining the texts we read and the language that they use, if you don’t have your text then you aren’t prepared for class, even if you have read the assignment. Naturally, this admonition applies to the texts that you will find online.

More broadly speaking: Ask questions. Be curious. You are more than welcome to have a different interpretation of a text than a classmate or me; just be sure to share your perspective in a productive and supportive manner. Since the course will be conducted as a seminar—and not a series of lectures—the substance of our class meetings will primarily consist of **your responses** to the course texts (such as general questions, impressionistic responses, or interpretations of particular passages) and, secondarily, my engagement with your responses. Your thoughts and questions will provide the starting point for our discussions. **Your active participation will be consequently factored into your final grade for the course.** If you're reluctant to speak up, please talk to me and we'll figure out a way for you to participate.

Office Hours: As noted above, my office hours are from 3:30-5:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I consider this *your* time, and I encourage you to make use of it. Please don't think of meeting with me as something to do only as a last resort but rather as an important and integral part of your learning. While you are welcome to just show up during office hours, given my schedule this year and the number of students I have, you might be best served by letting me know ahead of time that you are coming. Additionally, feel free to chat with me online during my digital office hours, the link to which you can find on [the course wiki](#). I've been known to be there at times around the clock. If it says I'm available, I am.

Papers:

- Writing assignments will be graded on the strength of the argument, the structure in which that argument is conveyed, the use of evidence to support the argument, and the clarity of the essay's style. **Hard copies** of papers are due **at the beginning of class**. If you will miss class the day a paper is due it is still your responsibility to turn in **a hard copy** of that paper **before** class. **Late work will not be accepted**, except at my discretion (with a significant grading penalty). Assignment deadlines are not flexible.
- The **one** exception to the rule about hard copies will be for your final paper, **which you will email to me**.
- Papers must be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins and must be in standard MLA style format. Furthermore, the pages should be numbered in the upper right corner and must be stapled together. I know, I know: I'm picky. As Kurt Vonnegut has it in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, "So it goes."
- You may not turn in work to me that you originally completed for another course (including one of mine). Should you wish to draw on a paper that you have written or are currently writing for another course, please discuss the matter with me.

Late Instructor: In the unlikely event that I am late to class, you may feel free to leave 10 minutes after the scheduled start of the class. Don't count on this happening, though.

Technology Problems: This course relies heavily on access to computers, specific software, and the Internet. At some point during the semester you WILL have a problem with technology: your laptop will crash, a file will become corrupted, a server will go down, or something else will occur. These are facts of life, not emergencies. Sadly, technological excuses ("my printer died," etc.) cannot be accepted under any circumstances. Always make back-ups for your work, and plan ahead so that you will have time to use the on-campus computers and printers if necessary. You may **not** submit papers by e-mail. If for some reason you feel you have to do this, you must ask permission first; furthermore, you may **not** consider an e-mailed paper to be submitted until you have received a reply from me confirming that I have received it.

Academic Integrity: When writing, one needs to give credit when one uses the ideas of others. It is important, therefore, to not only give citations for direct quotations but also summaries or paraphrases. Thus, not only are you expected to avoid stealing others' ideas, but you are also expected to know how to

cite your sources in your papers. Please see me if you have any questions about proper citation of sources. Plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the course.

What follows is Clemson University's official statement on academic integrity:

“As members of the Clemson University community, we have inherited Thomas Green Clemson's vision of this institution as a ‘high seminary of learning.’ Fundamental to this vision is a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form.”

“When, in the opinion of a faculty member, there is evidence that a student has committed an act of academic dishonesty, the faculty member shall make a formal written charge of academic dishonesty, including a description of the misconduct, to the Associate Dean for Curriculum in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. At the same time, the faculty member may, but is not required to, inform each involved student privately of the nature of the alleged charge.”

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who need accommodations should make an appointment with Arlene Stewart, Director of Student Disability Services, to discuss specific needs within the first month of classes. Students should present a Faculty Accommodation Letter from Student Disabilities Services when they meet with instructors. Student Disability Services is located in G-20 Redfern (telephone number: 656-6848; e-mail: sds-1@clemsun.edu). Please be aware that accommodations are not retroactive and new Faculty Accommodation Letters must be presented each semester.

Counseling Services: Confidential and free (for students paying the health fee) counseling services are available from Clemson's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Call (864) 656-2451 for more information or see <http://www.clemson.edu/studentaffairs/redfern/caps/care.php>.

Writing Center: The Writing Center in 305 Daniel is an excellent resource for writers of all skill levels. It offers assistance with all aspects of writing, including brainstorming, organization, thesis formation, style, wording, and revision. I strongly encourage each of you to schedule a meeting at the Writing Center at least once this semester. It is a good idea to secure appointments as far in advance as possible, especially towards the end of the semester, when the Writing Center is busiest. You can schedule appointments by calling 656-3280.

Paper Grading Criteria

Your papers should make a compelling argument based upon convincing interpretation of textual evidence. When reading your papers, I employ the entire scale of letter grades. These are my grading criteria:

- A** The “A” paper makes an original argument and does so persuasively. It is the product of work of consistently high quality and occasional brilliance. It uses this argument to open up new avenues of interpretation, including some avenues that it does not have time to explore. It cites evidence, but does not rely too heavily upon quotation. It anticipates the criticisms and questions that a skeptical reader might have, and it uses those criticisms and questions to make its argument even more complex. The paper does not merely prove an argument; it develops an argument in a provocative and logical manner. Of course, an “A” paper is free of grammatical errors. In addition, it meets the criteria described directly below.
- A-, B+** These grades are awarded to careful and engaged work combining concise and accurate interpretation with analysis. The paper explains its insights carefully and addresses the implications of those insights. The essay states a clear thesis, but does not repeat its own conclusions unnecessarily. The central argument is narrow and well-defined, and the writer has begun to consider the new questions that this argument raises. The essay is written with clarity, style, and grace.
- B** The “B” paper puts forward a persuasive argument and successfully marshals evidence to support it. The paper is largely cohesive and coherent. Each paragraph develops a single point, and the transition from one paragraph to the next makes logical sense. The “B” paper often fails to question its own reasoning in a consistently rigorous manner and sometimes lacks a provocative conclusion. It may also linger too long over points that could be made more concisely — or may move too quickly past points that require further explanation.
- B-, C+** These are the highest grades that a paper relying extensively on summarization or quotation will receive; these are also the highest grades that I will award any paper with serious grammatical errors, such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments. This grade is often awarded to papers that address too broad a topic and/or that contain a major organizational flaw. These papers often look at problems too superficially and try to solve them too simplistically; a paper in this range usually fails to engage questions that naturally follow from its own argument.
- C** The “C” paper puts forward a cogent thesis but usually fails to argue its merits in a persuasive manner. It too heavily relies on quotation and summarization, and it stretches out points that do not require so much attention. It often fails to notice important objections to its argument and/or the important implications of its argument. Its logic is not as coherent as it could be, and the writer often fails to make his or her argument as clear as it needs to be. Its structure is generally clear, though perhaps rigidly mechanical: there is an introduction, body, and conclusion (the dreaded “five-paragraph theme”); points are arranged in a perceptible way; and paragraphs are adequately structured, though there may be irrelevant points or nonfunctional digressions, an unsteady sense of “movement,” or lapses in the writer/reader contract. Improvement is desirable, but you should remember that a “C” grade does indicate average college work.
- D** The “D” paper rarely articulates a clear and defensible thesis and usually suffers from either a lack of supporting evidence and/or serious organizational problems. It may also be an argument whose intelligibility is seriously flawed—it may read as a mere “collection of thoughts” or as a rant. The writer has not been able to make his or her ideas accessible to the reader, and the paper does not adequately support its argument. The paper does not engage the issues that are most important to its focus. The paper may also suffer from important grammatical and syntactical problems.
- F** The “F” paper does not meet the requirements of the assignment: the paper is not completed or not handed in; or it falls significantly short of the minimum length requirement; or it addresses no topic under discussion; or it seriously violates common standards of civility and argumentation; or it is plagiarized or involves self-plagiarism (modification of a paper used for a different class).

Reading Schedule

Complete all assigned reading before coming to class. Please keep in mind that all reading assignments are **subject to change**. All page numbers refer to the editions/ISBNs that I have ordered. For some readings, you will download and print the text, which is available on [the course wiki](#).

Jan. 7 Th Introductions, Syllabus

Unit 1: Understanding Media

Jan. 12 T McLuhan, excerpts from *Gutenberg Galaxy* in *Essential McLuhan* (packet)
Read the 11 sections that start on the following pages: 113; 117; 119; 121; 127; 128;
131; 137; 139; 142; 144

Jan. 14 Th McLuhan, excerpts from *Understanding Media* in *Essential McLuhan* (packet)
“Introduction” and “The Medium is the Message,” 149-161
“The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis”
“Hybrid Energy,” 174-179
“Is It Natural...,” 180-182

Jan. 19 T Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chapters 1-2

Jan. 20 W *Last day to drop classes*

Jan. 21 Th *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chapters 3-4

Jan. 26 T *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chapters 5-6

Jan. 28 Th Rucker, *The Hacker and the Ants*, 1-156

Feb. 2 T *The Hacker and the Ants*, 157-308

Unit 2: The Desert of the Real

Feb. 4 Th Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*
“The Gulf War will not take place,” pages 23-28
“The Gulf War: is it really taking place,” out of a total of 38 sections, read the following:
1-4, 6-7, 12-16, 20-21, 23, 25-26, 28, 32, 35, 38
“The Gulf War did not take place,” out of a total of 23 sections, read the following: 1, 8,
17-18, 21, 23

Feb. 9 T Virilio, excerpts from *Desert Screen* (packet)
“The Squared Horizon,” 16-20
“Interview,” 31-34
Borges, “Garden of Forking Paths” ([on wiki](#))

Feb. 11 Th Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden*, reading highlights TBA (read at least 2 hours)

Feb. 16 T *Victory Garden* (read for at least 2 hours)

Feb. 18 Th *Victory Garden* (read for at least 2 hours)

Feb. 23 T Rose, "[Secret Websites, Coded Messages](#)"
Start playing [The Nethernet](#)
Paper 1 Due

Feb. 25 Th Charles Stross, *Halting State*, 1-98

Mar. 2 T *Halting State*, 99-212

Mar. 4 Th *Halting State*, 213-324

Mar. 9 T Moulthrop, "[From Work to Play](#)" (packet)
Jane McGonigal, "[Why I Love Bees](#)" (packet)

Unit 3: Remediation and Media-Specific Analysis

Mar. 11 Th *House of Leaves*, front cover - 24 (Read all material: prefatory, cover, appendixes, footnotes, exhibits **as you come to them**)

Mar. 15-19 **Spring Break**

Mar. 23 T *House of Leaves*, 24-79 (don't miss the footnote on p. 72 that asks you to read a large chunk of the appendix, 584-644)

Mar. 25 Th Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, excerpts from *Remediation*
"Introduction," 2-15 (packet)
"Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation" 21-50 (packet)
"Mediation and Remediation," 53-62 (packet)
"Digital Photography," 105-112 ([on wiki](#))

Mar. 30 T *House of Leaves*, 80-245

Apr. 1 Th Winterson, *The PowerBook*, 1-141

Apr. 6 T Jacques Derrida, "The Book to Come" (packet)
N. Katherine Hayles, excerpt from *Writing Machines* (packet)
"Material Metaphors, Technotexts, and Media-Specific Analysis," 18-33

Apr. 8 Th *The PowerBook*, 143-end

Apr. 13 T *House of Leaves*, 246-346

Apr. 15 Th *House of Leaves*, 347-422

Apr. 20 T *House of Leaves*, 423-528

Apr. 22 Th *House of Leaves*, catch-up
Course Conclusions

Apr. 26 M **Paper 2 Due by 5pm EST to bcroxal@g.clemson.edu.**

Course Packet

1. Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone. Basic Books. ISBN: 978-0-465-01995-3
 - a. Excerpts from *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: pages 113-123; 127-133; 137-145
 - b. "Introduction" and "The Medium is the Message," pages 149-161
2. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. MIT Press. ISBN: 978-0262631594
 - a. Chapter 4, "The Gadget Lover," pages 41-47
3. Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone. Basic Books. ISBN: 978-0-465-01995-3
 - a. "Hybrid Energy" and "Is It Natural That One Medium Should Appropriate and Exploit Another?," pages 174-182
4. Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen*, trans. Michael Degener. Continuum. ISBN: 978-0826479341
 - a. "The Squared Horizon," pages 16-20
 - b. "Interview," pages 31-34
5. Stuart Moulthrop, "From Work to Play." *electronic book review*.
 - a. This is an open access journal, available online. The URL for the article that I would like included in the packet is <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/molecular>.
6. Jane McGonigal, "Why I Love Bees." Self-published essay
 - a. This essay is found on McGonigal's website, <http://avantgame.com/writings.htm>. The URL for the specific essay is http://avantgame.com/McGonigal_WhyILoveBees_Feb2007.pdf.
7. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press. ISBN: 978-0-262-52279-3.
 - a. "Introduction," pages 2-15
 - b. "Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation," pages 21-50
 - c. "Mediation and Remediation," pages 53-62
 - d. "Digital Photography," pages 105-112; available on the [class wiki](#)
8. Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford UP. ISBN: 978-0804746205
 - a. "The Book to Come," pages 4-18
9. N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*. MIT Press. ISBN: 978-0-262-58215-5
 - a. "Material Metaphors, Technotexts, and Media-Specific Analysis," pages 18-33