

The Anthropology of Cyberspace

FSP 124-04

Fall Semester, 2011

Wednesdays 5:30-8:20 pm

Social Sciences Building room 131

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Course Description

Science fiction writer William Gibson coined the term “cyberspace” in 1982, long before the development of the Internet. Whether it is, as Gibson termed it in *Neuromancer*, “A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators,” or merely where you go to find music and keep track of friends, cyberspace is a ubiquitous aspect of daily life. In this class we utilize a wide variety of media (e.g. social networking tools, scholarly research, science fiction, popular film) and employ the anthropological technique of participant-observation to gain analytical distance and address some fundamental questions. What do we mean by “cyberspace”? How did it come to be, and how could it have been different? How has it affected your ability to find and process information and create new knowledge? Are you more isolated or more sociable because of your cyber-interactions? We also explore these questions through our own interactions, researching and writing in small collaborative groups and conducting some of our discussions on online wikis. Similarly, we screen and discuss *The Social Network* in conjunction with conducting interviews and critical self-reflection about the role of social media such as Facebook in our daily lives. Rather than conveying a set body of knowledge, this class is a shared, multimedia exploration of the origins, experience, and future of cyberspace.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course includes assignments that support two very distinct styles of writing, research and analysis:

1. The analytical, reflective essays require you to develop a distinctive, individualized perspective and analysis. Although your analysis and argument needs to be appropriately supported by scholarly sources, the essay assignments require you to develop and present your own unique perspective on an assigned topic. You will be writing three short essays and a final reflection paper which summarizes and synthesizes your experiences in this class.
2. This class is also participating in the [Wikipedia: United States Education Program](#). Since this class is about the anthropology of cyberspace, it seemed appropriate that you have the experience of working collaboratively in an online setting and contributing to the publically-available store of human knowledge. Each student will establish an individual

Wikipedia user account and will be assigned to a group of three students. Each of the six groups will be assigned an existing Wikipedia article to extensively expand and revise. This work will be assisted by Wikipedia online ambassadors (one of whom will lead an on-campus Wikipedia editing workshop) and by other Wikipedia editors. Although this assignment will require you to develop and deploy traditional scholarly research skills, all articles must conform to the bedrock Wikipedia principle of “neutral point of view” ([NPOV](#)). Although this is a collaborative assignment, you will be graded on both individual contributions and the quality of the final group product.

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the paradoxes and advantages of the anthropological research technique of participant-observation
- Use participant-observation techniques to gain analytical distance and perspective on your own experiences, particularly with Web 2.0 social media
- Understand and evaluate diverse and claims perspectives about cyberspace
- Appreciate how the practice of design ethnography can help shape, and not merely analyze, cyberspace experiences
- Evaluate the quality and reliability of information sources, including Wikipedia articles
- Incorporate scholarly sources and research into both the personal, analytical essay and encyclopedic Wikipedia contexts.
- Appreciate the contributions of literary and popular culture sources in our understandings of cyberspace
- Work effectively in both small group and individual settings.

Required Textbooks

- [*Little Brother*](#), by Cory Doctorow (Doctorow always makes his books freely available online as soon as they appear in print. This [page](#) offers a variety of download formats.)
- [*Neuromancer*](#), by William Gibson (Please purchase this edition. The afterword by Jack Womack is important)
- [*My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*](#), by Bonnie Nardi.
- [*You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*](#), by Jaron Lanier
- [*Studying Those Who Study Us: An Anthropologist in the World of Artificial Intelligence*](#), by Diana E. Forsythe

Additional readings are listed in the syllabus and will be available either in SOCS or as freely-available downloads.

Course Schedule

Week 1 August 31 Course introduction and overview

Week 2 September 7 The Paradoxes of Participant-Observation

- *Little Brother* pp. 1-180
- *Studying Those Who Study Us* Editor's Introduction and Chapter 7
- [From MySpace to Homeland Security: Privacy and the Totalitarian Urge](#) Cory Doctorow talk at Duke U (59:17)
- Nardi "Cyberspace, Anthropological Theory, and the Training of Anthropologists" [SOCS]
- Rosaldo 1989, Introduction and Chapter 1 from [Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis](#) [SOCS]
- Screen [Learning in context: Probing the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky](#) (in class)

Week 3 September 14 New Wine in Old Skins: Surveillance and Information Revolutions

- *Little Brother* pp. 181-end
- Jeremy Bentham [Panopticon](#) [see selection in SOCS]
- ABC Redux: Or Literacy Matters. And How!, by Barry Sanders, Chapter 9 in [The Challenges of Ivan Illich](#) [SOCS]. (Illich and Sanders co-authored [ABC: Alphabetization of the Popular Mind.](#))
- [The Lindisfarne Gospels](#) (in class)

Week 4 September 21 *Meet in Library Room 002* Design Ethnography hands-on session.

John Oliver (TCNJ Information Literacy Librarian) and

Sharon Whitfield (TCNJ Emerging Technologies Librarian) guest instructors

- Chapter 1 of [Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die](#) [SOCS]
- Usability Testing 1 & 2 [SOCS]
- *Studying Those Who Study Us* Chapter 1
- [Our Designs and the Social Agendas They Carry](#), Barab, et al.
- Please review these sample usability test so that we may begin our discussion on how to design a usability test:
 - http://www.indiana.edu/~audioweb/T284/krug_questions.html
 - <http://www.k-state.edu/publications/webtutorial/parent.pdf>
 - <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/11944/Web%20Usability%20Survey%20and%20Script.doc.pdf?sequence=4>

Week 5 September 28 Social Media and You: Are All Those People Really Your Friends?

- **Essay 1 Due**
- Sherry Turkle [Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other](#) Introduction, Chapters 9-11 in SOCS]
- *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning With New Media* Introduction, Chapters 1&2 [[pdf](#) of the entire book]
- *You Are Not a Gadget* Chapters 1-3
- [What Students Don't Know](#) article about the Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries (ERIAL) project

Week 6 October 5 *Meet in Library Room 005* Wikipedia hands-on session

[David Goodman](#), Guest Instructor

- **Wikipedia Assignment 1 (research brief) due**
- [The Charms of Wikipedia](#), Nicholson Baker
- The Argument Engine (pp. 14-33) by Joseph Reagle, author of [Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia](#) and Questioning Wikipedia (pp. 191-202) by Nicholas Carr, author of [The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains](#). Both articles are available in [Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader](#).
- *You Are Not a Gadget* Chapters 4-8
- Steven Colbert – [Wikiality](#) (just for fun)

Week 7 October 12 Social Media and Social Transformation

- screen [The Social Network](#)
- *You Are Not a Gadget* Chapters 9-end
- [Legends in disagreement: Kevin Kelly vs. Jaron Lanier](#) (TED Talks) Kelly wrote [What Technology Wants](#)
- [Is Google Making Us Stupid?](#) by Nicholas Carr
- [Eli Pariser: Beware online "filter bubbles"](#) (9:05 TED Talk). Pariser wrote [The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You](#)
- Personal, Communal, Public, Civic, Chapter 6 of [Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age](#), by Clay Shirky
- [Clay Shirky: How social media can make history](#) (15:48 TED Talk)
- [Evgeny Morozov: How the Net aids dictatorships](#) (11:54 TED Talk) Morozov wrote [The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom](#)

Week 8 October 19 The Blue Pill or the Red Pill: Cyberspace, Sci-Fi, and Reality

- **Essay #2 Due**
- *Neuromancer* pp. 1-131
- screen [The Matrix](#)
- Selections from: [Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real](#) and/or [Philosophers Explore The Matrix](#) [SOCS]

Week 9 October 26 The Blue Pill or the Red Pill: Cyberspace, Sci-Fi, and Reality (cont.)

- **Wikipedia Assignment #2 Due**
- *Neuromancer* pp. 132-end
- On William Gibson and Cyberpunk SF, by Darko Suvin, from [Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction](#) [SOCS]

Week 10 November 2 Work and Play in Cyberspace

- Anthropology and Play: The Contours of Playful Experience, *New Literary History* 40(1):205-218, by Thomas M. Malaby, author of [Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life](#) [TCNJ Resource]
- screen [Life 2.0](#)

Week 11 November 9 Second Life demonstration and discussion *meet in Library Auditorium*
Katy Ells, TCNJ Library, Guest Presenter

- **Essay #3 Due**
- In-class screening of [Second Skin](#) (portion)
- *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, Chapters 1-5
- *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning With New Media* Chapter 5 [[pdf](#) of the entire book]

Week 12 November 16 Work and Play in Cyberspace (cont.)

- **Wikipedia Assignment #3 Due**
- *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, Chapters 6-end
- Biopower Play: World of Warcraft, Chapter 5 of [Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games](#), By Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greig De Peuter (SOCS)
- [The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer](#)

November 23 No class—Thanksgiving Vacation

Week 13 November 30

- **First Draft of Reflection Paper Due**
- Instructor consultation, Wikipedia peer-review and editing workshop

Week 14 December 7

- Instructor consultation, Wikipedia peer-review and editing workshop

Final draft of reflection paper and Wikipedia article are due when final exam is scheduled

Grading & Student Assessment

A maximum total of 300 points can be earned as shown below. Please note that the individual essay and Wikipedia components carry equal weight. The grades for the Wikipedia component will be weighted one-half for individual contribution and one-half for the quality of the final group project. Note also that classroom and online participation count for 40 points. Detailed rubrics and assignment guidelines will be presented as the class progresses.

Essay 1 (due 9/28/11)	20
Essay 2 (due 10/19/11)	20
Essay 3 (due 11/16/11)	20
Final Reflection Paper (due at final exam time)	70
Subtotal Essay assignments	130
Wikipedia 1 (due 10/5/11)	20
Wikipedia 2 (due 10/26/11)	20
Wikipedia 3 (due 11/9/11)	20
Final Wikipedia article (due at final exam time)	70
Subtotal Wikipedia assignments	130
Classroom and online participation	40
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	300
Grade distributions	
270-300 points	A
240-269 points	B
210-239 points	C
180-209 points	D
Below 180 points	F

Attendance and Class Participation

Your engaged presence and participation are essential for individual and collective success in this class. I will track attendance and if you disappear at break without prior clearance you will be counted as absent for the entire class. I anticipate civil and cheerful participation in both informal discussion and structured classroom activities. Cell phones and other distracting devices must be silenced in class. Please see the College attendance policy at:

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/attendance.html>

Academic Integrity

The College of New Jersey is a community of scholars and learners who respect and believe in academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at The College of New Jersey. Each student must do his or her own work and behave in an ethically responsible manner. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following behaviors:

- Using another author's words without enclosing them in quotation marks, without paraphrasing them, and/or without citing the source appropriately
- Concealing, destroying, or stealing research or library materials with the purpose of depriving others of their use
- Falsifying bibliographic entries
- Submitting any academic assignment which contains falsified or fabricated data or results
- Submitting the same term paper or academic assignment to another class without the permission of the instructor
- Feigning illness or personal circumstances to avoid a required academic activity
- Sabotaging someone else's work
- Collaborating on homework or take-home exams when instructions have called for independent work
- Attempting intimidation for academic advantage
- Inappropriate or unethical use of technologies to gain academic advantage
- Submitting a falsified document

For a complete description of the college's policy, including the adjudication process and possible sanctions, please see: <http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/integrity.html>.

Differing Abilities

Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609.771.2571). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. For additional information and guidelines for registering with the Office of Differing Abilities, please see <http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu/>