

# english

## intro to cultural studies

section b autumn 2008  
mtwth 11:30-12:30

# 2007

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### cultural studies in excess: technoculture and the senses

Course site: <http://staff.washington.edu/jentery/207/>

Welcome to English 207, Introduction to Cultural Studies!

Course Theme: "Cultural Studies in Excess: Technoculture & the Senses"

It's rather easy to get distracted these days, and we have the keywords to prove it: "on demand," "hyperattention" and "multitasking," to name but a few. Of course, these keywords aren't empty. They are associated with practices—embodied practices, cultural practices, technological practices. That's quite a complex mix, the analysis of which demands an array of texts and contexts. In this course, we will attempt such an analysis by, first, historically locating Cultural Studies and learning how it emerged as a critical framework. We will then follow a series of trajectories, unpacking how technology is culturally embedded and unfolding its effects on sense experience. These trajectories will explore conversations about animation and what is implied by "being animated," in tandem with inquiries into technology-enhanced perception, human-technology relations, the senses and consumer culture, and digitizing race, gender and sexuality. Along the way, we'll also consider how Cultural Studies, which tends to situate and make sense of bodies as socially or discursively constructed, might address some more transitional aspects of embodiment (including sensation, movement and affect) that are difficult to pin down. But for now, one thing is certain: we'll entertain—and even get distracted by—matters in excess of thought.



#### What Will We Be Reading, Watching, and the Like?

First, the required texts that are available for purchase at the University Bookstore:

Bruce Sterling, *Shaping Things* (2005, ISBN: 0262693267): This little book about everything will be our vehicle into conversations about the future of human-technology relations, the blurred distinctions between subjects and objects, and how to sense and make sense of it all.

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966, ISBN: 006091307X): "Shall I project a world?" In relation to technology and the senses, as well as in the context of Norbert Wiener's work in cybernetics, we'll consider the critical potential of that question and the affordances of projected worlds. We might also take a moment to talk about how emotion and affect function in Pynchon's novel.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818, first published anonymously, ISBN: 0393964582): "After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter." We'll

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read this classic as an intertext with both Donna Haraway's cyborg imagery and Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*. We might also ask how it might function as a key text in a technoculture studies archive.

Moore, Alan, Steve Bissette, and John Totleben. *Swamp Thing, Vol. 1: Saga of the Swamp Thing* (1984, ISBN: 0930289226): "Don't you see, General? The implication is that consciousness and intelligence can be passed on as foodstuffs!" We'll likely approach this text from two angles. First, how does it function as part of the "popular" in a Cultural Studies project? Second, we might map it onto our conversations about affect, consciousness, cybernetics, and the senses in order to unpack new trajectories for technoculture studies and the senses.

Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995, ISBN: 1884511236): As an intertext with Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we'll read this work of electronic literature specifically with the perception of digitization, embodiment, and gender in mind. In relation to the senses, too, we might ask what it means (or how it feels) to get lost in this non-linear text.

The balance of possible course material, which will ultimately be determined on a week-by-week, or even a class-by-class basis—depending upon our conversations, your interests, and the trajectories of course—is available (or will emerge) on the course site at: <http://staff.washington.edu/jentery/207/texts.html>. These texts are (or will be) digitized or digital, most often uploaded to the course e-reserves: <https://eres.lib.washington.edu/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=6600>.

### **Where's the Syllabus?**

Since the course is in many senses emergent (see that previous paragraph), I provide the syllabus via a Google calendar, which is embedded at: <http://staff.washington.edu/jentery/207/syllabus.html>.

During class, I will generally announce what we'll be looking at (or listening to) in the next few classes. I often follow-up that in-class announcement with an email to the class listserv. In advance, thanks for your willingness to be flexible here. As an instructor, I find that it pays off for both students and me.

### **What's a Project-Based Approach to English 207?**

When I say that English 207B is a "project-based approach to cultural studies," I am implying that you will pursue a quarter-long inquiry into a particular topic, using a certain approach to cultural studies, in particular, and to the humanities, broadly speaking. The project will allow for feedback, revision, and attention to process. That said, below are the three prompts for projects you might pursue during the course.

Of the three, please select one. Based upon your selection, I will place you in a working group (of five students). You are welcome to pursue your project—in part or in whole—individually or collaboratively; and, as a group, you will meet with me at least twice this quarter.

While you don't have to solidify your selection until week four of the course, I encourage you not to waffle too much. I also encourage you to be creative with your approach to these rather broadly framed prompts.

Throughout the quarter, you will be blogging toward your final project. For each of your blog entries, I will prompt you to think about your project in relation to the course material we are working through at that time. That way, your project emerges (and is revised) over the course of the quarter, rather than during the final week or two.

And, before you select your project, I'll give you the opportunity to comment on these prompts, which I will then revise accordingly. That way, we are on the same page in terms of expectations, assessment, and workload.

### **>>> Option 1: The Digital Humanities: Texts, But How to Perceive Them?**

This approach to English 207 asks you to mobilize digital technologies in a humanities context. For this project, you should select some material (from or related to the course) and “remediate” it in your own innovative digital project. Possibilities include, but are certainly not limited to, Flash animations of a journal article, mapping a novel using Google Maps or Google Earth, and visualizing a text differently through WordsEye or Wordle.

Whatever the technologies you choose, the ultimate goal is—to borrow from Andrew Ross—for your project to understand technology as “a lived, interpretive practice for people in their everyday lives.” It should not only suggest new ways of reading and engaging the English 207 course material, but also pose new questions about how people perceive it.

For this project, at the end of the quarter, you will be asked to submit:

- A file or URI for your digital project,
- A project description (of no more than 250 words),
- A statement of methodology (of no more than 250 words),
- An analysis (of no more than 500 words) of your project, to include how it engages the course material and to what effects, and
- A bibliography of works consulted.

The project will be evaluated on:

- How persuasive are its intersections with the course material, especially our conversations about technoculture studies and the senses.
- The degree to which it enables new ways of reading, engaging and perceiving your selected material.
- How your writing demonstrates both an awareness of your methodology and a complex analysis of that methodology.
- The stakes of your project, or the degree to which it makes your material matter in new ways.
- How your project understands its audience—both for the digital project and the writings associated with it.

### **>>> Option 2: Humanities Research: Practices, But How to Contextualize Them?**

For this approach to English 207, you are asked to select a topic related to the course material and research it extensively over the course of the quarter. Through the lens of cultural studies as your critical framework, your research should contextualize and—to quote Meaghan Morris—unpack “the historical and social constraints on interpretation.” The interpretation of what, exactly, is the next question, one which you are free to answer. Still, to facilitate the process and augment our conversations about technoculture studies, you might attend to how technology is culturally embedded, for whom, how, and for what purposes. Example topics include the digitization of race and sexuality, the historical gendering of technology, and—per Miriam Hansen—the “political ecology of the senses.”

This project is essay-based. That said, at the end of the quarter, you will be asked to submit:

- An academic print paper or an academic webtext of approximately 2200 to 2500 words in length,
- A works cited page, and
- An annotated bibliography of at least ten works consulted (at least five of which cannot be from the assigned course material).

The project will be evaluated on:

- How persuasive are its intersections with the course material, especially our conversations about cultural studies and technoculture studies.
- The degree to which it contextualizes (and politicizes) the issues relevant to your material.
- The complexity of both your research and your argument.
- The stakes of your project, or the degree to which it makes your material matter in new ways.
- How your writing understands its academic audience.

### **>>> Option 3: The Applied Humanities: Theory, But How to Make It Move?**

As an approach to English 207, this project asks you to propose institutional or social change—to, in the words of Ien Ang, conduct cultural research that has the “capacity for conjunctural questioning,” through which people can “invent common grounds within which social futures can be imagined and worked towards.” That said, this project should be motivated by theory, but with practice in mind. For it, you are asked to identify a cultural issue that you think warrants more attention in the Seattle area (or, if you prefer, on the UW-Seattle campus). You should then research that issue—perhaps, in tandem with the course material, through interviews, archival work, and/or community-based inquiry—and articulate how, with collaboration and new partnerships in mind, that issue might be addressed, problematized, and unpacked. The proposal may emerge from community-based work that you are already doing, have done, or want to do.

The aim here is to generate conversations about an issue and how it matters for different people differently.

For this project, at the end of the quarter, you will be asked to submit:

- A statement of motivation (of no more than 250 words),
- An articulation of relevant background material and events (of no more than 250 words),
- A statement of theoretical framework for cultural research (of no more than 500 words),
- A statement of methodology or “intended course of action,” (of no more than 500 words),
- A statement of concerns and questions (of no more than 250 words), and
- A bibliography of works consulted.

This proposal can assume the form of print or a webtext and can be augmented with media (e.g., sound files, images, and video).

The project will be evaluated on:

- How persuasive are its intersections with the course material, especially our conversations about cultural studies and cultural research.
- The degree to which it contextualizes and problematizes your issue.
- The complexity of your research, motivation, and methodology, how your concerns and questions demonstrate awareness, and the plausibility of your proposal.
- The stakes of your project, or the degree to which it makes your issue matter in new ways.
- How your writing understands its audience and context.

### **How Are Student Work and Participation Evaluated?**

Your final grade (on a 4.0 scale) will be determined using the following percentages and criteria:

#### **>>> In-Class Participation (30% of your grade)**

Participation in English 207 is about a network of ideas – sharing your thoughts and talking with, supporting, and listening to others. Class time will often be spent in large group conversations and workshops. I also

think that collaborative learning and collaborative teaching add interest, excitement, and investment to the classroom experience. Each helps you brainstorm for your projects, unpack concepts, learn from others, and develop proficiency in how to constructively critique other people's work. That said, all of these aspects of in-class participation will be included in your participation grade.

**>>> Final Project (40% of your grade)**

See the previous pages for details, including how your project will be evaluated.

**>>> Blogging (20% of your grade) (Blog URL: <http://www.jenterysayers.com/autumn207/>)**

You will be asked to blog once each week, always in response to a particular prompt. Evaluation of your blog entries will include: timeliness, quality of questions posed, relevance of the entry to the course material, persuasiveness and complexity of inquiry, and constructiveness of commentary on peers' posts.

**>>> Class Presentations and Co-Facilitations (10% of your grade)**

Twice during the quarter, you will be asked to co-facilitate the class with me and a peer (or two). During those co-facilitations, you will be responsible for actively participating in class conversations and relating those conversations to your project. Each time you co-facilitate, you will also be asked to briefly (in about a minute) tell the class how your project is going.

At the end of the quarter, you will also give a brief presentation of your project. That presentation can assume the form of reading a short paper, a multimedia presentation, or a combination of the two.

**What Are the Course Policies?**

**>>> Participation**

Since conversations are essential to the quality of this class, I expect that we shall work together to create an atmosphere of respect. College level discourse does not shy away from sensitive issues, including questions of race, gender, class, sexuality, politics, and religion, and neither will we. There are going to be differences in opinions, beliefs, and interpretations when we question texts and cultural issues. You need not agree with the arguments in what we read or with what others have to say – in fact, it is important to think critically and question texts. Still, you must do so intelligently and with respect. Respect for difference is instrumental to creating a classroom in which a variety of ideas can be exchanged and points of view can be explored.

What is crucial to English 207 is that you are enjoying and are comfortable in the course. If, for whatever reason, you are not, then please visit me during my (online) office hours or by appointment. I understand that some people are more comfortable speaking in front of the class than others. That said, participation in (online) office hours will also improve your participation grade.

If you are not comfortable bringing your concerns directly to me or are not satisfied with my response to your inquiries, then I encourage you to contact Professor Miceal Vaughan, Director of Undergraduate Programs, at [miceal@u.washington.edu](mailto:miceal@u.washington.edu).

**>>> Plagiarism**

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing – as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. It includes:

- A student failing to cite the source of an idea
- A student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- A student failing to cite courses of specific language and/or passages, and
- A student submitting someone else's work as her or his own.

If you have doubts about whether to cite or acknowledge another person's writing, just let me know. Better safe than sorry. And think about it – Google, databases galore, and the fact that I am a student, too, make it really, really easy for me to spot plagiarized work. So don't do it. For more information, you might also refer to UW's Student Conduct Code.

### **>>> Attendance**

While I do not take attendance, attending English 207 will greatly enhance your chances of submitting a persuasive final project, learning about the material, collaborating with others, and sharing your ideas.

### **>>> Drops**

You can withdraw from courses during the first two weeks without an entry being made on the transcript. After that time, fees ensue. See the University's withdrawal policy for more information and dates.

I will update and revise these policies if the quarter so requires.

### **How Can I Find Help with 207?**

#### **>>> Office Hours and Appointments**

My office is located in ART 347, and my autumn 2008 office hours are:

- Monday: 10 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.
- Tuesday: 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

If my office hours are not amenable to your schedule, then please don't hesitate to ask for an appointment. I'm around. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. I am happy to meet with you whenever you have questions, concerns, or suggestions.

#### **>>> Online Office Hours**

I will also be holding online office hours - at english3000 at gmail.com – on Tuesday: 6-7 p.m. At that time, if you wish, you can communicate with me via Google talk. I will also log into english3000@gmail.com at other times outside of my online office hours. If you see that I am logged on, then feel free to send me a message. The sole purpose of english3000@gmail.com is for English 207. I log on with the intent to speak with students. However, please do not send e-mail to english3000 at gmail.com. The function of the address is for Google talk only. I will not necessarily – in fact, I generally will not – be in my office during online office hours.

#### **>>> E-mail and Class Listserv**

You can also e-mail me at jentery at u.washington.edu. I will generally respond to e-mail within twenty-four hours, unless I am out-of-town for a conference or the like.

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The course listserv is:engl207b\_au08 at u.washington.edu . When you send an e-mail to it, all of English 207B will receive your message. Remember: if I send a message via the listserv (which I will do about twice per week), reply to me (jentery at u.washington.edu ) and not the listserv, unless you want everyone on the list to read your e-mail.

**>>> The Writing Center**

You can find additional writing help at the English Department Writing Center located in B-12 Padelford Hall. E-mail: wcenter at u.washington.edu with questions or to make an appointment. If you make an appointment to see a writing center tutor, then you will receive extra participation credit.

**>>> The DSO**

Please let me know if you need accommodation of any sort. I can work with the UW Disability Service Office (DSO) to provide what you require. I am very willing to take suggestions specific to this class to meet your needs. The course syllabus and policies are available in large print, as are other class materials.

**How Do I Contact You?**

UW Department: English ~ UW Office: ART 347

Autumn Office Hours (in Art 347):

- Monday: 10 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.
- Tuesday: 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Online Office Hours: Tuesday, 6-7 p.m. via Google Talk (english3000 at gmail.com )

E-mail: jentery at u.washington.edu

Class Listserv: engl207b\_au08 at u.washington.edu

Website: <http://students.washington.edu/jentery/>

Mail: Department of English \* Box 354330 \* University of Washington \* Seattle, WA 98195-4330

Office phone: (206) 616-6156

Thanks! And please let me know what questions or concerns you have! In the meantime, I'm looking forward to this quarter!