

SPECIAL TOPIC:

21st CENTURY MEDIA: NOW AND THE FUTURE

COURSE SUMMARY

The year 2000 was once symbolic of “the future” — the world of tomorrow filled with utopian possibilities for art, media, technology, and human culture. Yet, two decades into the 21st century, we see a 24/7 media culture shaped by a strange mix of **technologies, contents, and behaviors**: spectacle and simulation—hypermodern and premodern—celebrity and surveillance—big data and search engines—binge-viewing and viral videos—social media and space telescopes—drones and #hashtags—clones and zombies—globalization and tribalization—the sixth extinction and the Anthropocene. And pop stars with a billion views and a reality-TV star and game show host as Prez. **The future isn’t what it used to be.**



Using a combo of critical readings and various video materials (including select scenes/episodes in *Black Mirror*), this course will decode our 21st century media culture via critical media theory applied to various media content, behavior, artifacts, and technologies. Examples will include: film and television, advertising and publicity, social media and the internet. Readings will draw from classic texts in critical media theory and cutting-edge theory. In sum, this will be an exciting course that helps you grasp and critique the key trajectories of 21st century media—now and in the near future.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

The essential goal of this course is for students to understand the deep and complex relationships between 21st century culture and the global media systems. At the end of this course, students will:

- understand the dominant cultural and media trends of the 21st century, at least so far!
- be well-versed in critical media theory as a guide for decoding the messages and meanings of media.
- be able to synthesize critical theory with their own specialized interests in theory, research, and production.
- grasp the ever-expanding social and cultural roles of media, in terms of technology, content, and behaviors.
- produce a paper and/or video for submission to a conference/publication/festival.

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Barry Vacker, Associate Professor
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Office Phone: 215.204.3623

Office Hours: To be determined Or by appointment.

Preferred methods of contact — Interpersonal: 1) come up to me before or after class; 2) drop by during office hours

Electronic: 1) send an email; 2) call on the office telephone

Email response time: Please give me 24 hours to respond to your email.



REQUIRED READINGS

Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (Routledge 2003).

ISBN: 0-415-26829-X.

Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times* (Polity 2005)

ISBN: 0-7456-3421-4.

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Univ. of Michigan 1994).

ISBN: 0-472-06521-1.

Angela Cirucci and Barry Vacker, *Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory* (Lexington 2018; in press).

- these readings will be provided as PDFs by your professor.

Additional reading: Reading packet from University Readers; packet purchased online; information provided at the beginning of semester.

GRADING, PAPERS, PRESENTATIONS

Students must complete the following list of projects to successfully complete and pass this course. The grades for this course will be determined according to the following breakdown:

Note: This breakdown may be revised for Spring 2018.

Weekly Reading/Video Summary	= 30%	(due dates throughout semester)
Class Presentations/Discussions	= 30%	(3 @ 10% each, due dates throughout the semester)
Final Paper/Project	= 20%	(May 7)
Final Class Presentation	= 10%	(May 7)
<u>Attendance</u>	= <u>10%</u>	
TOTAL	= 100%	

The due dates for Class Presentations/Discussions will be set once the class enrollment is finalized. Once the dates are set, they cannot be changed. The due dates for the Final Paper cannot be changed. No reasons are acceptable. This is only fair to those fellow students who turn in papers as scheduled. Grades will be assigned according to the criteria of:

100-93 = A	89-86 = B+	79-76 = C+	69-66 = D+	59-0 = F
92-90 = A-	85-83 = B	75-73 = C	65-63 = D	
	82-80 = B-	72-70 = C-	62-60 = D-	

What these grades mean

- An "A" means your work is outstanding. "A" work goes above and beyond expectations and shows an astute intellect.
- "B" work is better than average and demonstrates excellent effort and satisfactory understanding of coursework. "B-" work meets expectations and demonstrates a general understanding of material and an average effort.
- A "C" represents seriously flawed work, according to graduate school standards. This might mean a misunderstanding of fundamental concepts, presenting them unacceptably in writing, and/or a lack of constructive participation in class discussion.
- A "D" cannot be assigned in graduate course.
- An "F" illustrates a failure to adhere to policies of academic honesty

Note: Regarding any questions you have about a grade on a paper or presentation, you have one week (7 days) from the date you receive the grade to discuss the questions with your professor. After one week, all grades are final. You have until April 21 to discuss any questions regarding your attendance records. **All summary, presentation, and attendance grades are final after April 30. All total grades are final after May 14.**

Reading Summaries

You will receive a handout that provides the necessary details. These summaries will begin in Week 4 and function to help you gather your thoughts for the week's discussion. They should be typed in essay format, but should not to exceed 1.5 pages, single-spaced. All summaries are due at the beginning of class; no late critiques will be accepted. You will complete ten reading summaries; each one will be worth 3% of your grade for a total of 30%.

Weekly Presentations

Beginning Week 4, one student will be responsible for initiating the class discussion on that week's readings. The presentation should be no longer than 15-20 minutes. Students are expected to introduce and analyze the major themes of that week's readings and address questions posed by fellow class members. You will receive a handout that provides the necessary details. Presentations and class discussions are worth 30% of your grade.

Final Paper and Presentation

For your final paper, you can produce an essay based in critical analysis or a work that summarizes research you conducted over the semester. You will receive a handout that provides the necessary details. The final paper should be 15-20 pages, double-spaced, including tables, charts, endnotes, reference list. The paper should in some significant way relate, in depth, to one or more of the theories and themes that we discuss in the seminar. The final paper is worth 20% of your final grade, accompanying Powerpoint presentation 10%. Your final presentation will be on April 28.

Class Discussion

Your attendance and participation in class discussions is essential and expected. This is a graduate seminar, meant to inform you on this topic but to also teach you to articulate your own opinions with confidence. All readings should be completed before the assigned date, and you should come to class prepared to talk.

Attendance

In graduate seminars, an active and vibrant class discussion is essential. To encourage attendance, I have established an attendance policy. Simply put: the more classes you attend, the more points you earn toward your final grade. Excluding the first week, there will be a total of 13 class meetings.

Classes	Points	Classes	Points	Classes	Points
<u>Attended</u>	<u>Earned</u>	<u>Attended</u>	<u>Earned</u>	<u>Attended</u>	<u>Earned</u>
13	10	11	5	9 or less	0
12	8	10	2		

Note: It is your responsibility to ensure you sign your name on the attendance sheet; otherwise you will be counted absent. If you need to miss class for a religious holiday, please let the professor know in writing and verbally (before or after class, or in office hours). If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate and watch any film clips on your own time. Video clips cannot be loaned out for private viewing. Anything said in class will be assumed to have been heard by everyone.

Academic Dishonesty

Regarding academic dishonesty, this class will abide by the rules of Temple University. Cheating on exams will get you dropped from the class — NO EXCEPTIONS. The Temple Student Handbook states:

Temple University strongly believes in academic honesty and integrity. Plagiarism and academic cheating are, therefore, prohibited.

There is nothing wrong with citing the works of others, just make sure you give them credit. In return, you get credit for doing so, and citing them can enhance your learning. If you are not certain that you are using or citing materials properly, then please check with Dr. Vacker. Academic honesty and plagiarism:

Adapted from the Temple University policy statement on academic integrity, passed by the Academic Senate on April 19, 1989. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor: another person's ideas, words, or assistance.

There are many forms of plagiarism: repeating another person's sentence as your own, adopting a particularly apt phrase as your own, paraphrasing someone else's argument as your own, or even presenting someone else's line of thinking in the development of an idea as though it were your own. Academic writing is built upon the use of other people's ideas and words — this is how ideas are developed — but appropriate credit must always be given to the originator.

In general, all sources must be identified as clearly, accurately, and thoroughly as possible. When in doubt about whether to identify a source, either cite the source or consult your instructor. Here are some specific guidelines to follow:

- Quotations. Whenever you use a phrase, sentence, or longer passage written (or spoken) by someone else, you must enclose the words in quotation marks and indicate the exact source of the material, including the page number of written sources.*
- Paraphrasing. Avoid closely paraphrasing another's words. Substituting an occasional synonym, leaving out or adding an occasional modifier, rearranging the grammar slightly, or changing the tenses of verbs simply looks like sloppy copying. Good paraphrasing indicates that you have absorbed the material and are restating it in a way that contributes to your overall argument. It is best to either quote material directly, using quotation marks, or put ideas completely in your own words. In either case, acknowledgment is necessary. Remember: expressing someone else's ideas in your own way does not make them yours.*
- Facts. In a paper, you will often use facts that you have gotten from a lecture, a written work, or some other source. If the facts are well known, it is usually not necessary to provide a source. (In a paper on American history, for example, it would not ordinarily be necessary to give a source for the statement that the Civil War began in 1861 after the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.) But if the facts are not widely known or if the facts were developed or presented by a specific source, then you should identify that source.*
- Ideas. If you use an idea or ideas that you learned from a lecture, written work, or some other source, then you should identify the source. You should identify the source for an idea whether or not you agree with the idea. It does not become your original idea just because you agree with it.*

Penalties for violation of Temple University's academic honesty policies can range from a failing grade for the assignment or the entire course to referral to the university disciplinary committee.

SLACKERS

If you miss many classes, much class time, or fail to do the readings and assignments, then you will have difficulty passing this course. You are expected to actively participate in this course! After all, this is grad school. Any topic discussed in class will be assumed to have been heard by everyone. If you miss a class, please feel free to ask questions of the professor; however, do not expect him to recite the class lecture for you.

HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS

The best way to do well in this class is simple: come to class, stay up on the readings, study hard, and have an open mind. Also, let your professor know if you have any questions!

TEXTING, EMAILING, WEB SURFING IN CLASS: Your media universe will still exist at 8:00!

Instant access online is surely a permanent feature of digital media on college campuses. Obviously, there are many benefits to these technologies. However, text messaging, emailing, and web surfing in class are too often a *detriment to concentrating and learning in a college classroom*. First, you cannot concentrate on class material when you are texting and surfing; this will hinder your understanding of complex class material and reduce your performance on the exams and projects. Second, the imagery on your laptop or cell phone screen is a distraction to others around you, especially when we are screening film clips. So, do yourself and your classmates a favor: avoid texting, emailing, and surfing during class. Your mediated world and friends will still exist when the class is over!

EMAIL PROTOCOL

Since your prof teaches 250 students each semester, he receives a huge volume of emails. To insure efficient responses and clear communication, he has two requests:

- Please provide him at least 24 hours to reply to your email; it is much better for all concerned that when you get an email response, he has had time to think about it and gather additional information, if necessary.
- Please compose your emails in clear, concise sentences, keeping the length of the email as brief as needed.

It should go without saying that you should use proper grammar and form in composing your email and addressing your professors. Emails should be written as a brief letter, not a text message. Short, clear emails make for clear communication and help everything to run smoother!

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

We want all students to be able to participate fully in class activities, and we will do everything possible to achieve this. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including special accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation by the end of the second week of classes or as soon as practical. If you have not done so already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to learn more about the resources available to you. We will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

FOOD NEEDS

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable her to provide any resources that she may possess.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Professor Vacker privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215.204.1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Temple University has requested that the following information be included on all course syllabi: *Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02.*

CLASS PROTOCOL

In general, your professor is an easy-going guy who prefers his classes to be open forums for ideas and opinions relevant to class topics. However, a few rules are needed:

- please arrive to class on time; lectures, discussion, and films will begin promptly.
- you are encouraged to silence or turn off all mobile phones.
- please show respect and courtesy to fellow students at all times.
- eloquence is the most persuasive form of dialogue; insults and “in your face” persuade no one of anything.
- feel free to ask questions during discussions or at appropriate moments during class lecture.
- I want all of you to do well in this class, so feel free to approach me with questions before or after class, or during office hours.

DATE 5041 TOPICS AND READINGS

Note: These topics are being revised and updated; subjects may change; videos and video clips will be added.

PART 1: KEY CRITICAL CONCEPTS

Week 1 No Class: Martin Luther King Holiday

Week 2 The Spectacle and the 21st Century

Jan 22 From television to Super Bowls, Twitter to Trump, Lady Gaga to *Black Mirror*
Kellner: "Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle," *Media Spectacle*.
Video: Interview with Lady Gaga.

Week 3 Hyperreality

Jan 29 From Disneyland to daily life: a world more real than real, more true than true.
Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," "Simulacra and Science-Fiction," *Simulacra and Simulation*.

Week 4 Hypermodernism

Feb 5 Fashion, time, and the future; consumption and individualism.
Lipovetsky: "Paradoxical Individualism," "Time against Time," *Hypermodern Times*.

PART 2: TECHNOLOGIES

Week 5 Networks and Screens

Feb 12 What is the role of networks: social web, hive mind, global brain?
Packet: Marwick, "A Cultural History of Web 2.0," *Status Update*

Week 6 Mobile Media: Phones and Drones

Feb 19 The many domains of media technologies and our place in society, on Earth, and in the universe.
Packet: Julia Hildebrand, "Over-Extended Media: Hashtag Hatred and Domestic Drones," *Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory*, PDF handout.

Week 7 Search Engines and Space Telescopes

Feb 26 Mapping our existence, from big data to a big universe; Facebook to Google to the Hubble telescope
Packet: new reading from Andrew Iliadis.
Packet: Vacker, Gillespie, "Yearning to be the Center of Everything When We are the Center of Nothing: From Facebook to Hubble" (*Telematics and Informatics*, 2013). (reading packet)

Spring Break: March 5-11

PART 3: CONTENT

Week 8 Brands and Hyper-Selling

March 12 Commodity as spectacle; From Big Macs to 24/7 advertising.
Kellner: "Commodity as Spectacle: McDonald's as Global Culture," *Media Spectacle*.
Baudrillard: "Hypermarket and Hypercommodity" & "Absolute Advertising," *Simulacra and Simulation*.

Week 9 Celebrities and Reality-TV Stars

Mar 19 Why the fascination celebrities, reality-TV stars, and Twitter trash talkers?
Packet: Cashmore, "Answering/The Big Question" (*Celebrity Culture: Key Ideas*, 2006).
Albrecht, "Waldo Wins IRL: Donald Trump, *Black Mirror*, and the Politics of the Hyperreal" (*Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory*, PDF handout).

Week 10 Selfies and Status Updates

Mar 26 Social media: What is the deeper meaning of Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and so on?
Packet: Rune Vejby and D. E. Witkower, "Spectacle 2.0?" (*Facebook and Philosophy* 2010).
Packet: Marwick: "Self-Branding," *Status Update*.

PART 4: BEHAVIORS

Week 11 Fans and Tribes

April 2 Social organization and identity in the spectacle.
New Readings.

Week 12 Viral Videos and Binge Viewing

April 9 Nonstop spectacle: From YouTube and Netflix to live streaming and #hashtag culture.
New Readings.

Week 13 Clones and Zombies

April 16 The postmodern and premodern humans; metaphors for human behavior in the spectacle?
Baudrillard: "Clone Story," *Simulacra and Simulation*.
Packet: Lizardi, "The Zombie Media Monster's Evolution to Empty Undead Signifier" (*Thinking Dead* 2013).

PART 5: 21st CENTURY FUTURES

Week 14 Extinctions and the Anthropocene

April 23 Are the spectacle and consumer society causing a "sixth extinction" event?
Packet: Annalee Newitz, "Are We All Going to Die?" *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).
Packet: Jan Zalasiewicz, "What Mark Will we Leave on the Planet?" *Scientific American* (2016).

Week 15 Media, Science, and the 21st Century

April 30 What does the media future hold for us, collectively and individually?
Packet: Best and Kellner, "Challenges for the Third Millennium," (*The Postmodern Adventure* 2001).

Final Paper and Presentation: May 7, 5:30, no exceptions.