

## **“Literature and Technology”**

**LLT 3623: Literature and Science (Grand Challenge)**

**Spring 2018**

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**Office Hours: S228, MW 1-2, and by appointment.**

### **Course Description**

We are caught in a complex feedback loop with our technologies. A new invention or development—writing, for instance, or the assembly line, or the smartphone—makes possible new ways of being in the world while also inhibiting other forms of life.

Technologies seem to take on a life of their own, born of our imagination only to transform that imagination in unexpected ways. We register these changes at every level of human life, from our political systems to our bodies, and our literature is no exception.

Indeed, literature is also a kind of technology, and this course will be a study of literature AS technology as well as a study of literature’s representations OF technology. Our readings and class discussions will explore a number of connected yet distinct topics, loosely grouped under three sequences.

In the first, we will reflect on the technology of writing, which Plato’s Socrates famously critiqued, exploring writing as a form of memory, the interaction between literature and other media (such as television), literature’s modes of reproduction and replication, and the ways in which writing has evolved in recent centuries.

In the second, we will narrow our focus on the question of the virtual and virtual reality, one of today’s “Grand Challenges” as identified by the National Academy of Engineering. As we will see, virtual reality has been projected and imagined by literary writers for decades. How might the literary texts of the past shed light on developments in virtual reality for the future? In particular, what might literary texts reveal about the way VR experiences illuminate and complicate our notions of embodiment?

If VR provides the opportunity to place human minds in virtual worlds, AI and robotics raise the specter of artificial minds in physical bodies. Our final sequence, “I Just Fell in Love With a Cyborg,” explores the cyborg as a figure of hope, fear, desire, and uncertainty, looking at the cyborg in literature, philosophy, and film.

Combined, these readings should provide you with a rich network of concepts to help you think more critically about our current and emerging technologies. The course will be conducted as a seminar, with students taking an active role in collaborative learning. You will also be required to write a number of short discussion board posts, facilitate one of our seminar discussions, and write 3 essays (3-4 pages each).

## Course Outcomes

By taking this course, students will develop...

- ✓ A critical knowledge of the relationship between literature and technology
- ✓ A familiarity with major philosophical statements on technology, including communication technologies
- ✓ Advanced skills in close reading of literary texts, drawing on several major genres
- ✓ A sense of how their own disciplinary knowledge and background intersects with literary, artistic, and humanistic disciplines
- ✓ Improved written and oral communication skills

## REQUIRED STUDENT WORK

1. Close and attentive reading of the assigned texts; active, engaged, and daily contribution to the class discussion.
2. 3 discussion board posts, on assigned days.
3. With a partner, facilitation of one of our seminar discussions.
4. Three essays (3-4 pages each)

## GRADE CALCULATION

Participation: 20%

Discussion board posts: 10%

Seminar leadership: 10%

3 essays: 60%

I will be handing out prompts for the discussion board, seminar leadership, and the essays.

The following grading scale will be used for computation:

A, 100% - 95%,	B, 85% - 83%	C-, 72% - 70%
A-, 94% - 90%	B-, 82% - 80%	D+, 69% - 66%
B+, 89% - 86%	C+, 79% - 76%	D, 65% - 63%
	C 75% - 73%	D-, 62% - 60%

## REQUIRED TEXTS

**In the bookstore, and available on Amazon. YOU MUST PURCHASE THESE EDITIONS. Additionally, I want you to purchase ALL of the books by week 3.**

Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*, ISBN: 978-1555974077

Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ISBN: 978-0345404473

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, ISBN: 978-0441569595

## On Canvas

Various readings, listed in the reading schedule below. **Print and bring HARD COPIES on the day these texts are assigned.**

## **EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES, ADVICE**

### **On Reading**

Henry David Thoreau said that the best books require the best of us, and that “reading in the high sense” is “not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep [...], but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to.” The more actively and intelligently you engage with these texts, the more you will get out of this course. Prepare to spend the bulk of your studying time for this class carefully reading and rereading the assigned texts. We will spend some time discussing what this means but, at minimum, it requires you to read **with a pen in hand** (underlining, making comments in the margins, taking notes). I will be looking for evidence of engaged reading as the course proceeds. **ADDITIONALLY: you must bring all REQUIRED material to class in HARD COPY. Printer malfunctioning will not be an acceptable excuse for not having the hard copy in hand.**

### **Participation/Attendance**

Per LTU guidelines, I will be keeping attendance every day and students who miss more than 6 class sessions risk failing the course. I believe that you are ultimately responsible for your own learning. Whether or not you attend class is entirely up to you; apart from the regulations imposed by the university, I will not reward you simply for being here or penalize you for not being here.

However, a seminar is not a lecture, but an exercise in shared learning. We teach one another in this course, and thus, if you ARE in class, I expect your fully engaged presence. As your instructor, I am responsible for guaranteeing the best classroom environment, which informs my participation guidelines. Additionally, if your classroom behaviors indicate that you are not here to learn, I will ask you to leave. Specifically, I will ask you to leave if...

- ...you do not have hard copies of the assigned readings.
- ...you use your cell phone (if you need to take a call or text, simply step outside).
- ...you use your laptop without prior permission.
- ...you engage in other behaviors that distract from or diminish the quality of our conversation.

Obviously, if you are not here, you will not be able to earn participation points. Your participation score will fall into one of four categories. Here are the characteristics of each category:

**Excellent participation** (full points): Demonstrates leadership in our class discussion by initiating conversation on a daily basis. Listens to fellow classmates and responds to them directly. Attends each class prepared to offer relevant, insightful, and thoughtful comments or questions. Demonstrates a thoughtful reading of the material, and is prepared to respond to questions about the text. Takes regular notes and actively annotates the readings.

**Good participation** (3/4 points): Speaks up in class on a daily basis. Demonstrates that he/she has read and engaged the material to some degree, but offers little insight. Contributes to small group discussion, but fails to show leadership. Takes minimal notes.

**Passing participation** (half points): Speaks up in class occasionally, but does not make a significant contribution to the class discussion. Participates in small group activities, but minimally. Does not demonstrate basic knowledge of the material. Takes no notes.

**Failing participation** (no points): Attends class, but does not speak. Does not demonstrate that he/she has read the material. Does not contribute actively to small group activities, and sits passively during large group discussion.

I will be giving you feedback throughout the term so you know where you stand on your participation grade.

### **Due Dates**

Late essays may be penalized one third of a letter grade for each 12-hour period. Thus, an “A” essay due at 11:59 pm turned in at 5 am the next day will score at B+; at 5 pm, it will score a B, etc.

### **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 plagiarized piece of writing may receive an F with no possibility of revision, *even if the plagiarism is unintentional*. Additionally, students who commit flagrant or persistent plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Honor Board for review and risk failing the course. Note that plagiarism is an insult to me as your instructor and to your peers. There is no reason for you to stoop to this in this course. If at any point you have further questions about this, or aren't sure whether or not something is plagiarism, come and see me.

**You will be required to type the undergraduate Honor Code Pledge on all papers and other work completed outside of class. Failure to do so will result in a lowered grade for that particular assignment. The Honor Code Pledge is as follows:** “I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in completing this work, nor have I presented someone else's work as my own.”

Finally, the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Communications requires students to submit all final copies of expository essays to VeriCite, an anti-plagiarism software. Instructions on submitting work to VeriCite will be provided at a later date.

## **Accommodations**

Please let me know if you need accommodation of any sort. I will work with Disability Services to provide what you require. I am very willing to take suggestions specific to this class to meet your needs. This syllabus is available in large print, as are other class materials.

## **Important Dates**

1/15: Last day to add/register on Banner Web

1/19: Last day to drop traditional semester courses with refund

## **Reading Schedule (subject to revision)**

### **Sequence I: Writing, Mediation, Communication**

1/8 Introductions: "The Seminar"

1/10 Technology and mediation: McLuhan excerpts (Canvas; hereafter C), Carr, "Does The Internet Make You Dumber?" (C) **Essay 1, seminar leadership assigned**

1/15 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—NO CLASS

1/17 Critiques of writing: Plato's *Phaedrus* (C) **Discussion board assignment distributed**

1/22 *Phaedrus*, cont.

1/24 Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (C)

1/29 Benjamin, cont.

1/31 Benjamin, cont.

2/5 Medium contra expression: Goldsmith and Dworkin, *Against Expression* (C) **Seminar leadership 1**

2/7 OuLiPo (C); Queneau's "100 Thousand Billion Poems," (C) **SL 2**

2/12 OuLiPo (C); Queneau's "100 Thousand Billion Poems,"

2/14 Remediation: David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram" (C) **SL 3**

2/19 David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram" (C)

2/21 The poetics of television: Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* **SL 4**

2/26 Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

2/28 Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* **Essay 1 due**

3/5: **Mid-semester break: NO CLASS**

3/7 **Mid-semester break: NO CLASS**

### **Sequence II: Meat Machines and Virtual Worlds**

3/12 What does VR do?: N.A.E, "Enhance Virtual Reality" (C), Clune, "Virtual Reality Reminds Users What its Like to Be Themselves" (C)

3/14 VR art and empathy: Coupland and Birnbaum, "Wildest Dreams" (C), Loh, "I Feel You (C)

3/19 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* **SL 5**

3/21 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

3/26 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* **SL 6**

3/28 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

4/2 VR experience (TBD)

4/4 VR experience (TBD)

### **Sequence III: I Just Fell in Love With a Cyborg**

4/9 Cyborg Dreams: Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto," (C) **SL 7 Essay 2 due**

4/11 Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" (C)

4/16 *Ex Machina* film viewing/discussion **SL 8**

4/18 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* **SL 9**

4/23 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

4/25 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* **SL 10**

4/30 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

**Wrap up/essay 3 due during finals week, TBD**