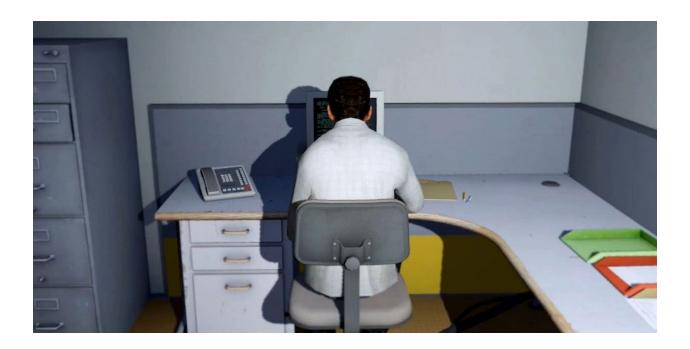# HL 4009
Popular Culture
AY 2024/25 S2

Instructor: Samuel Caleb Wee (samuelwee@ntu.edu.sg), SHHK #03-79
Seminars meet on Thursdays (1330 - 1620) at ***TR+45 at the Hive***.
Office hours are on Mondays 1130 - 1300 at my office, or by appointment over Zoom.

This syllabus is tentative and subject to change.

OVERVIEW

This course explores the relationship between cultural production and technology in the age of digital media. Over the course of 12 weeks, students will encounter a range of genres including contemporary popular music, poetry, films, video games, and experimental fan fiction. We will examine how the technological conditions of these cultural productions shape their existence as artistic projects, operating either within experimental underground spaces, in mainstream mass media discourse, or within traditional literary boundaries. As this is an advanced module, students should be prepared for intensive engagement with theoretical readings. In studying how our understanding of the Internet has evolved through different frameworks, students will investigate what it means to read cultural productions as an archive of digital-age subjectivity, within a media environment characterized by the fleeting and ephemeral.

COURSE READINGS

To be purchased:
Marshall McLuhan*, The Medium is the Massage*

Theory *to be uploaded to NTULearn*
Espen Aarseth, Introduction to *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*
Miryam Aouragh, "Palestine Online"
Wendy Chun, "Orienting Orientalism, or How to Map Cyberspace"
Bolter & Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*
David S. Roh et al, "Technologizing Orientalism"
Legacy Russell, selected articles
Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Two (and Thousand) Faces of the Virtual"
Marshall McLuhan*, The Medium is the Massage*
N. Katherine Hayles, "How We Became Posthuman"

Music *to be listened to on Youtube or streaming services*
U2, *ZOO TV - Outside Broadcast* (1993)
Yllis, *Island-01 EP* (2016), *Exodus* (2016)
Yeule, *Glitch Princess* (2022)
PC Music (Selected songs on playlist)

Films and videos *to be watched on streaming services, from the library, or on DVD*
Ghost in the Shell (dir. Mamoru Oshii) (1995)
The Matrix (dir. Wachowski Sisters) (1999)
Wolfenstein OS X, "Vaporwave: A Brief History [Documentary]"

Video games *to be downloaded or purchased via Steam and mobile app stores or played on browsers*
Team Salvato, *Doki Doki Literature Club* (Purchase through Steam)
Galactic Café, *The Stanley Parable* (Purchase through Steam)
Rasheed Abueideh, *Liyla and the Shadows of War* (Mobile game available through iOS or Android app stores)
Molleindustria, *The New York Times Simulator* (Browser game)

Fiction *to be uploaded to NTULearn*
Neal Stephenson, "Spew"
Tavi Gevinson, "Fan Fiction: A Satire"

Poetry *to be uploaded to NTULearn*
Hera Lindsay Bird (selected poems)

COURSE POLICIES AND STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **In general,** do your best to complete the assigned pre-class readings and activities, attend all seminar classes punctually, and take all scheduled assignments and tests by due dates. Though the reading schedule may look intimidating at first glance, with the exception of the video games, most of our cultural productions are brief music

albums, poems, and films that are easily finished within one or two train commutes! You are highly encouraged to complete the theoretical readings as well – every week, I will begin the class with a brief lecture covering the theoretical argument for the week. Remember, it is your responsibility to stay on top of course notes, assignments and course related announcements for seminar sessions you might have missed. I expect all students to make a reasonable effort to participate in seminar discussions and activities.

2. **Participation:** The format of this class is known as a *flipped classroom*, where learning is heavily peer-driven. The subject matter of this class is challenging, so I encourage you to make the most of the smaller groups by candidly voicing any difficulties you might face with understanding the readings, testing out potential arguments, and learning to support and be supported by your peers. I expect all students to contribute to a productive and nourishing learning environment – disruptive behaviour will be firmly called out. If you find yourself struggling at any point, please take the initiative to approach me to schedule a consultation within their office hours.

3. **Absence** from class without a valid reason will not only affect your overall course grade, but also your holistic understanding of the subject matter. NTU's policy for valid absences include falling sick and participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies. If there are other intervening factors keeping you from the seminar, inform me prior to the start of class.

4. **Deadlines** assigned in this class are to be adhered to, **especially** for group presentations. I will be implementing an extension policy which I will explain on the first day of class.

5. **Plagiarism** is dumb as hell. Don't do it.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS

The **group assignment** is worth **10%,** and is due *on a weekly rolling basis*.
The end of term essay is worth **40%,** and is due *Week 12, April 17*.
The final exam is worth **50%,** and is held on *May 6.*

Presentations (10%): I have designed the structure of our class around five smaller collaboration groups. We will split up into these smaller collaboration groups on the first day, and begin working in these groups starting from week 2. These groups will remain constant for five weeks, after which we'll shuffle up the make-up of our members. Each student in the assigned weekly group will get 3 minutes at the start of the class to speak about the text. You may wish to use this time to advance an individual argument about the text, collectively engage in a group presentation (individually graded), or even candidly voice any difficulties you might have with understanding our texts. Your job here is not to impress me, but to help everyone learn, and in doing so, to act as the first learner. At the end of the presentation, your group should collectively come up with **four (4) discussion questions** for the rest of the class.

Essays (40%): You will be asked to formulate an original reading of our course texts that considers the themes of the class. Students will have the option of responding either in the conventional critical genre or in a more hybrid-creative form – in the case of the latter, a consultation with me will be necessary. Either way, assignments will be evaluated on their ability to integrate scholarship and theoretical sources into an overall well-structured, persuasive, and original argument.

Exam (50%): You will pick from several questions given to you two prompts to respond to, and write two short essay responses that demonstrates your knowledge of the course material and your mastery of its critical concepts. The exam is intended to evaluate the degree to which you have internalized the teachings of this class and synthesise it with your ongoing knowledge of literature. *(April 29)*

POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU's shared values.

As a student, it is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in all the work you do at NTU. *Not knowing what is involved in maintaining academic integrity does not excuse academic dishonesty*. You need to actively equip yourself with strategies to avoid all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, self-plagiarism, academic fraud, collusion and cheating. If you are uncertain of the definitions of any of these terms, you should go to the academic integrity website for more information. Consult me or your tutors if you need any clarification about the requirements of academic integrity in the course.

On the use of AI tools, it is important to acknowledge that AI use has already become widespread in our contemporary technological landscape due to political, institutional, and economic pressures. Nonetheless, when we use large language models (LLMs), we do so at significant costs to both our own learning and to the world around us. The training of new LLMs consumes fresh water and substantial energy at a rate that is currently hyper-accelerating the climate crisis (Strubell et al.; Xiao et al.) Recent research (Hua et al.; Kosmyna et al.) has found that over-reliance on LLMs measurably weakens your decision-making, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning while eroding long-term brain development and cognitive capacities.

In light of these documented facts, here are some guidelines on the use of AI tools for coursework:

1. Do **not** pass off writing from AI as your own. At the university level, the ability to resourcefully consult and connect your writing to other vetted sources is just as important as your ability to generate original ideas. Passing off AI text as your own is not only easily detectible to a trained reader, it also undermines the entire basis of a humanities education.

2. If you are to use any AI tool, ensure that such usage is properly cited. Extending the practice of correctly citing references in your work under NTU's policies on citation and plagiarism, the University requires students to (i) identify any generative AI tools used and (ii) declare how the tools are used in submitted work. For HL4009, you are allowed **one (1) ChatGPT conversation** for the entire semester. If you have used ChatGPT for your essay assignment, you must **provide a single share link to this conversation** so I can verify that all AI use occurred in one place.

3. In addition, **your essay should be written entirely on Google Docs** before being downloaded and submitted through NTULearn as a .docx file. You are to retain your original Google Docs file for the duration of the semester, and to grant your instructors access to the file whenever it becomes necessary to inspect the file's version history. No copying and pasting may be done into this document.

4. Before submitting a piece of work in which generative AI has been used, make sure to check and recheck your facts, quotes, and sources. Generative AI is notoriously prone to hallucinating or misinterpreting quotes, sources, and citations. Hallucinated or misinterpreted quotes and sources in your essay undermine the reliability of your work, and will be penalised accordingly in your grade.

5. Finally, nothing beats your own ideas. AI tools may be good at producing summaries and grammatical sentences, but they cannot replace your original ideas and creativity. A rigorous education will equip you with the ability to express your ideas, process ideas for problem solving and make sound judgements. These capabilities and your unique human experiences are still your most valuable assets.

READING SCHEDULE

Week	Topic	Readings/ Activities
Week 1, Jan 12	Introduction to Media Theory	*Administrative* Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Introduction and Chapter 1)
Week 2, Jan 19	Media Theory (Cont'd): (P)remediation and electronic capital	Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Chapter 2) U2: ZOO TV Outside Broadcast 1992 (67 minute concert film; watch on Youtube)
Week 3, Jan 26	P)remediation and electronic capital	Neal Stephenson, "Spew" *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, dir. Mamoru Oshii)
Week 4, Feb 2	Cyberpunk and cyborgs	Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, dir. Mamoru Oshii)
Week 5, Feb 9	Cyberpunk and cyborgs	Katherine Hayles, "How We Became Posthuman" (Prologue and Chapter 1) *The Matrix (*1999, dir. Wachowski Sisters)
Week 6, Feb 16	Cyborgs in cyberspace HBL Week	Marie Laure Ryan, "The Two (and Thousand) Faces of the Virtual)" from *Narrative as Virtual Reality* *The Matrix (*1999, dir. Wachowski Sisters), cont'd
Week 7, Feb 23	The end of the digital future: after cyberspace	Espen Aarseth, Introduction to *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* *The Stanley Parable* (in-class group play)
	Recess Week	
Week 8, Mar 9	Technology and the Orient	Wendy Chun, "Orienting Orientalism, or How to Map Cyberspace" Team Salvato, *Doki Doki Literature Club!* (partial in-class group play)
Week 9, Mar 16	Technology and the Orient (cont'd)	Wolfenstein OS X, "Vaporwave: A Brief History [Documentary]"

		[Selected PC Music playlist] Yllis, *Island-01* and *Exodus*
Week 10, Mar 23	Technology and the Orient (cont'd)	Miryam Aouragh, "Palestine Online" (2018) Rasheed Abueideh, *Liyla and the Shadows of War* Molleindustria, *The New York Times Simulator*
Week 11, March 30	Feminism(s) in crisis: Parasociality and irony	Tavi Gevinson, "Fan Fiction: A Satire" Hera Lindsay Bird, selected poems
Week 12, April 6	N/A	N/A (Prof on conference)
Week 13 April 13	Feminism(s) in crisis: Glitching girlhood, glitching place	Legacy Russell, selected articles Yeule, *Glitch Princess*