

INTS 348: Digital Futures

Robinson Hall B218

M/W 3:00-4:15 pm

Instructor: Lindsey Macdonald

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Office: Enterprise 427

Office Hours: Thursdays, 12:00-1:00 pm (and by appointment)

“Utopias are non-fictional, even though they are also non-existent. Utopias in fact come to us as barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being.” – Fredric Jameson

This course comprises a series of critical investigations into the interrelationship between “the digital” and “the future” at the nexus of aesthetics, politics, and economy. Over the course of the semester, we will work toward developing a sophisticated critical and philosophical vocabulary for examining digital media and digital technologies within their cultural, political, and economic contexts, while also examining the ways in which advancements in digitization and computation correspond to complex array of claims to, and about, the field of possibilities for our collective future.

Learning Objectives:

- Develop a critical vocabulary for describing and analyzing the complex interrelationship between technology and society.
- Develop critical approaches to digital media and digital technologies that emphasize their political, economic, and cultural contexts.
- Learn to apply theories and theoretical concepts to contemporary case studies.
- Develop new critical perspectives on digital media and digital technologies.

GRADING SCALE

Points	Letter		Points	Letter
94 – 100	A		77 – 79	C+
90 – 93	A-		74 – 76	C
87 – 89	B+		70 – 73	C-
84 – 86	B		60 – 69	D
80 – 83	B-		< 60	F

ASSIGNMENTS

Digital Essays (40 pts. total)

(Group) Poetic Documentary (35 pts.)
Midterm Self-Assessment (15 pts.)
Participation (10 pts.)

Detailed information on assignments is available through the course Wordpress:
<https://ints348lindsey.wordpress.com/>

COURSE POLICIES

Diversity Statement

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds, and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard, and respected.

Class Discussion

Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas and perspectives. In our class, we will deal with **sensitive** and sometimes **controversial** materials, images, and ideas. You are expected to approach our class with seriousness, critical thinking, and respect for the material, your peers, and myself.

Late Work Policy

You are responsible for completing assignments on time. Due dates are clearly indicated throughout the schedule. I will not accept ANY late assignments unless previous arrangements have been made. This means that if you anticipate not being able to complete your assignment on time, you must contact me **before** an assignment is due if you want to turn it in late. Barring extreme circumstances (i.e. circumstances outside of your control), extensions will only be granted if you contact me **at least one week** in advance. If you do not communicate with me and get direct permission in a timely manner, you will not be eligible to turn in your assignment late, even if your excuse is documented.

Attendance

Although you will not be graded on attendance, regular attendance is a fundamental prerequisite for participation. You are permitted **three (3) absences** over the course of the semester with no penalty. Each additional absence will result in a 1/3 letter grade deduction to your final grade. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class; tardiness will result in you being marked as absent. You are responsible for all announcements, assignments, materials and date changes covered or made in class while you are absent. Under no circumstances will I make my slides or

notes available to students. It is your responsibility to be alert and aware in order to benefit from this class.

Readings

You are expected to complete all assigned readings before coming to class. You are also expected to bring course readings with you to class (either hard or electronic copies). **Accessing readings from your phone is not acceptable.** Finally, you are required to take **detailed** notes on the readings, and bring those notes with you to class. These notes will be checked periodically at the beginning of class, and factored into your participation grade. If I suspect that students are coming to class unprepared, pop quizzes will be introduced and figured heavily into your participation grade.

Electronic Devices

Your cell phone must be **turned off** and **put away** for the duration of class. If you are anticipating a special circumstance, please check-in with me at the beginning of class that day.

You may use your laptops or tablets to access course readings and take notes during class. You may NOT use this opportunity to complete tasks that are not related to our classroom, play games, surf the Internet or chat with your friends on social media or elsewhere. To ensure that electronic devices do not become a distraction, all devices must be disconnected from Mason Wifi for the duration of class (make sure to download and save the readings you'll need ahead of time).

E-mail

Please include your **last name, course, and section number** in the subject and body of any e-mail correspondence. During the week, you can expect a **24-hour** turnaround. E-mails received over the weekend will be answered Monday. Do not send time-sensitive e-mails last minute. Be aware that I will **not** discuss grades via e-mail; if you wish to discuss a grade on an individual assignment or your overall progress in the course, please come see me in office hours or schedule an appointment.

In compliance with a University-wide initiative, our correspondence will be only through GMU assigned email accounts. Please check your email account regularly for updates and important announcements.

Drafts

Although I am happy to provide feedback on essay topics, I cannot, due to time constraints, offer feedback on drafts. If you need additional help with a draft, I strongly encourage you to schedule an appointment with [GMU's Writing Center](#).

Plagiarism and the GMU Honor Code

When submitting work under your own name, keep in mind that plagiarism is a violation of the [GMU Honor Code](#). The Honor Code states, "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." Plagiarism means using words, ideas, opinions, or factual information from another person or source without giving due credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles

consulted is not sufficient. In addition to direct quotations, you must also provide an in-text citation and an entry in your list of works cited for paraphrases and summaries of information not formerly known to the writer. Even when you paraphrase information, you still must cite the original source of the information (in-text and in your bibliography). A serious academic offense, plagiarism is grounds for failing at least the assignment, if not the course.

The preferred citation style for this course is MLA, however you may also use APA or Chicago. Please see the [Purdue OWL](#) if you are unfamiliar with citation formatting.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

[GMU Writing Center](#) (703-993-1824; Robinson A 114, main office; Enterprise 076)

Provides, at no charge, tutors who can help you develop ideas and revise papers. Although the Writing Center accepts walk-ins, I strongly recommend making an appointment well in advance of your assignment's due date. If you are unable to meet with a Writing Center tutor during normal hours, keep in mind that the Writing Center also provides [online](#) and [video](#) tutoring by appointment

[STAR Lab](#) (703-993-8990; Johnson Center, Room 229)

Provides GMU students, faculty, and staff the space and resources necessary to complete creative projects. Resources include high-quality audio and video recording equipment (available by reserve). Also provides access to advanced editing software.

[Counseling Services](#) (703-993-2380; SUB I, Room 3129)

Provides individual and group sessions for personal development and assistance with a range of emotional and relational issues. In addition, the Learning Services Program (703-993-2999) offers academic skill-building workshops as well as a tutor referral service.

[Office of Disability Services](#) (703-993-2474; SUB I, Room 2500)

Assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will provide a form to give to your instructor at the beginning of every course. Please note that faculty cannot legally provide accommodation to students with learning differences or physical conditions that may affect academic performance without appropriate documentation. Please obtain documentation and talk to me as soon as possible to make arrangements.

SCHEDULE

Links to readings and other materials are available on the course WordPress.

Please see **Blackboard** to obtain the password for "Readings & Due Dates."

	Readings & Due Dates
Week 1: Introduction to INTS 348	<p>Monday, August 29th No assigned readings for this day.</p> <p>Wednesday, August 30th Tara McPherson, "Digital"</p>
Week 2: The Politics of Utopia	<p>Monday, September 5th No class (Labor Day).</p> <p>Wednesday, September 7th Theodor Adorno & Ernst Bloch, "Something's Missing" Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia" <i>Recommended:</i> Thomas More, excerpt from <i>Utopia</i></p>
Week 3: Technology & Materiality	<p>Monday, September 12th Leo Marx, "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept" <i>Recommended:</i> Herbert Marcuse, "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology"</p> <p>Wednesday, September 14th Alexander Galloway, "Physical Media" Watch: "The History of the Internet"</p>
Week 4: Aesthetics and Politics	<p>Monday, September 19th E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" Bruce Grenville, "The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture" In class: Clips from <i>Metropolis</i> and <i>Modern Times</i></p> <p>Wednesday, September 21st R. L. Rutsky, "Within the Space of High Tech" Park Avenue Armory, "Ryoji Ikeda: The Transfinite" Watch: "Ryoji Ikeda: Transfinite" & "Ryoji Ikeda 'the transfinite' installation at the Park Avenue Armory"</p>

<p>Week 5: The Digital Sublime</p>	<p>Monday, September 26th Vincent Mosco, "Myth and Cyberspace" Watch: Vice News, "Werner Herzog Explains the Internet to Us" In class: <i>Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World</i> (documentary)</p> <p>Wednesday, September 28th No assigned readings for this day. In class: <i>Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World</i> (documentary)</p> <p>*Due to WordPress on Thursday, September 29th by 12:00 pm (noon): Digital Essay #1</p>
<p>Week 6: Poetic Documentaries</p>	<p>Monday, October 3rd Nichols, "What Types of Documentary Are There?"</p> <p>Wednesday, October 5th Reading/additional materials TBD. Watch: The History of Cutting - The Soviet Theory of Montage In class: Storyboard workshop.</p>
<p>Week 7: Midterm Self-Assessment</p> <p>(Monday classes meet Tuesday)</p>	<p>Tuesday, October 11th No readings assigned for this day. In class: Peer review of midterm self-assessments. *Due at the beginning of class (hard copy): Midterm self-assessment (draft)</p> <p>Wednesday, October 12th No readings assigned for this day. *Due at the beginning of class (hard copy): Midterm self-assessment (final)</p>

<p>Week 8: Digital Enclosures</p>	<p>Monday, October 17th Mackenzie Wark, excerpts from <i>The Hacker Manifesto</i> <i>Recommended:</i> Karl Marx, "The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land"</p> <p>Wednesday, October 19th Molly Sauter, "DDoS and Civil Disobedience in Historical Context" <i>Recommended:</i> Electronic Arts Ensemble, "Electronic Civil Disobedience"</p> <p>*Due to WordPress on Thursday, October 20th by 12:00 pm (noon): Poetic Documentary - Step 1</p>
<p>Week 9: Smart Cities</p>	<p>Monday, October 24th Adam Greenfield, excerpts from <i>Everyware</i> Anthony Townsend, "The Automatic City: The Quest to Create Buildings That Think for Us" Watch: "The Internet of Things" & "Cities are Getting Smarter"</p> <p>Wednesday, October 26th Marc Andrejevic, "Surveillance in the Digital Enclosure"</p> <p>Due to WordPress on Thursday, October 27th by 12:00 pm (noon): Digital Essay #2</p>
<p>Week 10: Automation & Post-Work Futures</p>	<p>Monday, October 31st Martin Ford, "The Automation Wave" Peter Frase, "Four Futures"</p> <p>Wednesday, November 2nd Reading TBD.</p>

Week 11: Artificial Intelligence	<p>Monday, November 7th Arlie Russel Hochschild, "Exploring the Managed Heart" <i>Recommended:</i> Jennifer S. Light, "When Computers Were Women" In class: <i>Her</i> (film)</p> <p>Wednesday, November 9th Reading TBD. In class: <i>Her</i> (film)</p>
Week 12: Red Plenty	<p>Monday, November 14th Francis Spufford, excerpts from <i>Red Plenty</i> <i>Recommended:</i> Geroovitch, S. "InerNyet: Why the Soviet Union Did Not Build a Nationwide Computer Network"</p> <p>Wednesday, November 16th Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Red Plenty Platforms"</p>
Week 13: First Cuts	<p>Monday, November 21st No assigned readings for this day. In class: Poetic Documentary - Step 2 (attendance required to receive credit)</p> <p>Due to WordPress on Tuesday, November 22nd by 12:00 pm (noon): Digital essay #3</p> <p>Wednesday, November 23rd No class (Thanksgiving break).</p>
Week 15: Group Work	<p>Monday, November 28th No assigned readings for this day. In class: Group work day.</p> <p>Wednesday, November 30th No assigned readings for this day. In class: Extra office hours</p> <p>Due to WordPress on Thursday, December 1st by 12:00 pm (noon): Poetic Documentary - Step 3</p>

<p>Week 16: Documentary Film Festival</p>	<p>Monday, December 5th Read: Digital press kits 1, 2, & 3 In class: Documentary screening (groups 1, 2, & 3) Due at the beginning of class: Poetic Documentary - Step 4</p> <p>Wednesday, December 7th Read: Digital press kits 4 & 5 In class: Documentary screening (groups 4 & 5)</p>
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****There is no final exam for this course.****