Sequence One Major Paper: Defining Cyberspace

For the past weeks, you have been reading, writing, thinking, and exploring different conceptualizations and articulations of cyberspace. You have been reading, writing, and thinking about what cyberspace is, might be, and could be through the lenses of history, science, popular culture, and science fiction. William Gibson, credited with coining "cyberspace," described it: "Towers and fields of it ranged in the colorless non-space of the simulation matrix, the electronic consensus-hallucination that facilitates the handling and exchange of massive quantities of data" ("Burning Chrome"). But you know and the writers you have read know cyberspace — the idea, the ideal, the myth of cyberspace — is much more. Michael Benedikt, in his essay "Cyberspace: First Steps," wrangles with the many faces and potentialities of Gibson's vision. He writes, "Cyberspace is an elusive and future thing, and one can hardly be definitive at this early stage" (42). In other words, cyberspace is amazing, complex, full of potential, but what is it? Is cyberspace the land of the free and the home of anyone and everyone willing to jack in? Is cyberspace the land of the lost and the home of the dark, dangerous, and deviant? Is it all of the above? All of the writers you have read so far have offered their hopes, fears, praise, and cautions for cyberspace. They recognize that the technology and its concomitant stories are important, part of what is to come, and ultimately a reflection of ourselves as a culture, a world, a species. All of the writers then are trying to map, to imagine, and to *define* cyberspace.

Goal and Outcomes

For this **5- to 7-page formal paper**, you will write an **extended definition** of cyberspace drawing on the short stories and essays read in class. Select **at least two** of the readings to use in your analysis and close reading. Choose readings that are in conversation, that are **intertextual**. From the texts, generate **your own original claim, your own argument** about how the writers **imagine, deploy, use, and define cyberspace**. Think about the following questions when you sit down to make your claim (though this is not to be a laundry list for you to simply run down the answers):

—Do the writers imagine and define cyberspace similarly? How? Why is that important?
—Do the writers conceive of cyberspace radically differently? How? Why is that important?
—What are the writers' arguments about cyberspace? What role or function does cyberspace play in life, in culture, in the text? How and what does cyberspace tell us about the world?
—Do the writers' critique cyberspace? What are the consequences or dangers of cyberspace?
—How is cyberspace described? Materialized? Used? Why is that important?
—Ultimately, what can you argue your writers argue about cyberspace? Why is that important?

Your paper by necessity will include a **very brief** synopsis of your chosen readings and will **demonstrate** your ability to **close read** each text. However, this assignment asks more from you than a compare and contrast paper. Remember that this paper is about **your claim, your analysis, your ideas** about what your readings are arguing, doing, critiquing, saying, or showing. Also remember that you are not just summarizing or repeating what your writers have written. You will be expected to **critically analyze** your texts and **persuasively articulate** how they reveal something significant about "cyberspace." Keep in mind your **exigence** and your **stakes** for your paper.

Also keep in mind the **course outcomes** as you work and write. Your claim should be supported with valid evidence from the readings, **directly quoting and citing** the texts when necessary. You are required to include other **outside sources** (at least two, not to exceed five) including other texts read for this sequence, scholarly journals, and credible websites, newspapers, and magazines. To summarize, you should be prepared to make a solid and relevant claim using a well-developed and clearly organized analysis of your readings by situating it within a particular and meaningful context, with clear evidence to support your argument.

Guidelines and Due Dates

Audience: At base, you are writing for an audience that includes a general academic community, which includes your instructor, your classmates, and the authors of the essays we have read. You should imagine a larger, more inclusive audience. Keep in mind that your audience is varied in many ways, including academic experience and familiarity with the texts, so you'll need to consider of what information each type of reader will need to make sense of your essay. Another good way to think about your audience is to imagine the publication in which your essay could appear such as the *Reading Contexts* anthology or *e.g.* website or a scholarly journal.

Format: This assignment is a formal, academic paper and should follow the manuscript guidelines outlined in the course policies:

formal title page, appropriate title for your paper
1 paragraph audience analysis
5-7 pages, typed, double-spaced, with MLA citations, stapled
bibliography, correct MLA format

Targeted outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 4

Paper Proposal/Conference Memo: Bring to your conference on _____
your Conference Memo (Short Paper 1.5 to be assigned), which identifies key concepts, your overall claim, chosen artifact, and a rough outline of your main ideas.

First Draft: Please bring an e-copy of your paper for peer workshopping to class on THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26

Final Draft: Make revisions based on comments and responses from me and your peers and hand in the revised final draft at the start of class on TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31