

Sequence Two Major Paper: Critiquing Cyberspace

engl 111 / sec. Q / fall quarter 2006-07 / chang



Your second sequence of assignments continued building on the literary, cultural, analytical, and theoretical work of the first sequence—instead of just defining cyberspace, you are now critiquing it. Thinking back, reconsider Michael Benedikt’s words: “Like Shangri-la, like mathematics, like every story ever told or sung, a mental geography of sorts has existed in the living mind of every culture, a collective memory or hallucination, an agreed-upon territory of mythical figures, symbols, rules, and truths, owned and traversable by all who learned its ways, and yet free of the bounds of physical space and time. What is so galvanizing today is that technologically advanced cultures. . . stand at the threshold of making that ancient space both uniquely visible and the object of interactive democracy” (30). Take a look at key terms in Benedikt’s quote: “a mental

geography”, “a collective memory or hallucination”, “mythical figures, symbols, rules, and truths.” What about cyberspace, in all of its potential and possibility, has become “uniquely visible” and an “object of interactive democracy”? In other words, Benedikt (and our other writers and texts) argues for imagining and articulating cyberspace in order to make what is “impressionistic and incomplete” (42) actual and more complete, to make the “unimaginable imaginable and the imaginable real” (43). Part of that imagination and realization must then come through mapping and interrogating cyberspace through materiality, bodies, lived life, democratic practice, and radicalizing social locations such as race, gender, class, sexuality, education, language, and nationality.

Goal and Outcomes

For this **5- to 7-page** formal paper, you will locate and choose one “**cybercultural**” artifact for analysis and critique. You may choose a film, a website, a novel or story (not read in class), a commercial, or a text or representation of cyberculture of your choosing. Consider well your artifact, its theoretical, material, visual, or cultural interest, and its overall context and exigence. You must clear your artifact with me before you begin any research or writing, and you will need to provide access to, a clean, high quality copy, or link to the artifact.

Armed with the theoretical and cultural studies concepts from the readings and previous assignments and class discussions **generate your own original claim, your own argument** about your artifact. In other words, your paper will investigate and analyze **an issue or question raised or revealed** by your artifact. For example, how does your artifact “make visible” cyberspace and how does it function as an “object of interactive democracy?” Think about the following questions when you sit down to make your claim (pick and choose the best and most relevant questions to use as a way to generate ideas and subclaims):

- How does your artifact fit (or doesn’t fit) into our class’s critique of cyberspace?
- What meanings does your artifact convey? Does it comment on identity, culture, or power? Are these comments overt or covert?
- What stereotype or cultural assumption (about race, gender, sexuality, class, or nation) does your artifact make? How is this stereotype or assumption construction and deployed?
- What is the importance of your artifact? What does it tell its audience? Who is its intended audience?
- How is its production, circulation, and consumption important to its meaning or meanings?
- What are you trying to prove to your readers about the artifact? Why is your claim important?
- How might your artifact be in conversation with your first sequence major paper? How is your artifact in conversation with the class’s readings?
- What is **at stake** in your analysis and reading of the text and your artifact?

Remember that the above questions should not be a laundry list for you to simply run down the answers. Be selective and focused about what you wish to write about and then generate your own claim about your artifact. You are required to include at least **five outside sources** including the other texts read for this class, scholarly journals, and credible newspapers and magazines and websites.

Your paper by necessity will include a very brief description or summary of your artifact (assume your audience has encountered or seen the artifact) and will demonstrate your ability to **close read** both artifact and research. Remember that this paper is **not** about your readings directly or how the short stories compare or contrast with your artifact, but about **your claim, your analysis, your ideas** about what your artifact is arguing, doing, critiquing, saying, or showing. Like your previous papers, you will be expected to **critically analyze** your artifact and **persuasively articulate** how it reveals something significant about your culture with **direct quotes** from your research as support. Also, keep in mind the **course outcomes** as you work and write.

To summarize, you should be prepared to make a solid and relevant claim using a well-developed and clearly organized analysis of your artifact by situating it within a particular and meaningful context, with clear evidence to support your argument.

Guidelines and Due Dates

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
- 5-7 pages, typed, double-spaced, with MLA citations, stapled
- 1 paragraph specifically describing your audience
- bibliography, correct MLA format
- copy of or link to artifact

Targeted outcomes: _____

Paper Proposal/Conference Memo: Bring to your conference on _____ your Conference Memo (Short Paper 2.4 to be assigned), which identifies 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 TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21

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, NOVEMBER 28