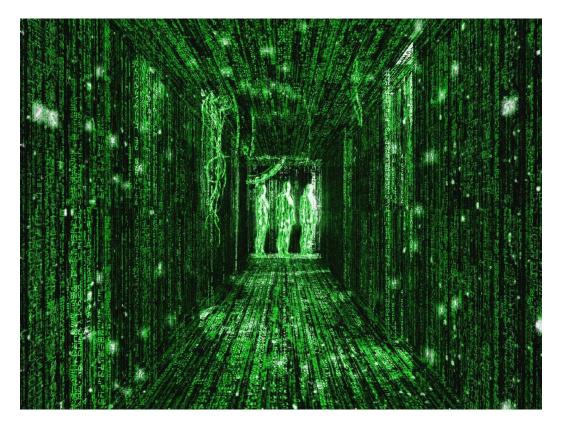# HL 4009
Popular Culture
AY 2024/25 S2

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 Wednesdays 1330 - 1520 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*
Wendy Chun, "Orienting Orientalism, or How to Map Cyberspace", 2003
Bolter & Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media,* 1999
David S. Roh et al, "Technologizing Orientalism", 2015
Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 1985
Legacy Russell, selected articles
Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Two (and Thousand) Faces of the Virtual", 2001
N. Katherine Hayles, "How We Became Posthuman", 1999

Music *to be listened to on Youtube or streaming services*
U2, *ZOO TV – Outside Broadcast* (1992)
PC Music (Selected songs on playlist)
Yllis, *Island-01 EP* (2016) and Exodus (2016)
Yeule, *softscars* (2023)

Films and videos *to be watched on streaming services, from the library, or on Youtube*
Ghost in the Shell (1995, dir. Mamoru Oshii)
The Matrix (dir. Wachowski Sisters) (1999)
Wolfenstein OS X, "Vaporwave: A Brief History [Documentary]"
After Yang (dir. Kogonada) (2021)

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)

Fan fiction *to be uploaded to NTULearn*
Tavi Gevinson, "Fan Fiction: A Satire"

Poetry *to be uploaded to NTULearn* or watched on Youtube
Hera Lindsay Bird (selected poems)
Chia Amisola, selected performances (class screening)

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!

(2) **Secondary readings:** This is a level 4 module, so theory constitutes a huge part of the course. While keeping up with the readings might seem intimidating or stressful, the course is structured such that every week, I will begin with a brief lecture covering both the assigned readings. A useful approach towards reading a large amount of theory and criticism is to practice **reading for ideas instead of details** (which I will cover in the first week of class). On top of that, we will also think through the material via the weekly presentations that your classmates give. Because you will be expected to give at least **two (2)** presentations in this class (once before, and once after the break), one good way to approach this is to see it as asking you to take ownership of **two weeks** for the semester in which you will chip in to help your fellow classmates understand and unpack the material.

(3) **Participation:** The format of this class is known as a *flipped classroom*, where learning is heavily peer-driven. As such, I expect all students to make a reasonable effort to participate in seminar discussions and activities. The subject matter of this class is challenging, so I encourage you to make the most of the smaller collaboration 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. In other words, doing well in this course is not simply a matter of demonstrating your own individual intelligence, but also consistently contributing to a productive and nourishing learning environment. Disruptive behavior will be firmly called out. If you find yourself struggling with the course at any point, please take the initiative to approach me to schedule a consultation within my office hours.

(4) **Course content**: Some materials in this course contain sensitive content, including stylized or explicit depictions of violence (*Ghost in the Shell*, *Liyla and the Shadows of War, The Matrix*), mental illness, self-harm, and suicide (*Doki Doki Literature Club*), loss and grief (*After Yang*), and sexual content or nudity (*Ghost in the Shell*). If you anticipate, based on the description of the content, that it might be distressing to you, please notify me. If you encounter content during readings or discussions that is overwhelming, I encourage you to pause and let me know. There may also be occasions when your own work touches on potentially upsetting content. In this case, please give a content warning before you share your work.

(5) **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. I treat punctuality seriously as well – coming on time is not simply a matter of discipline, but respecting your fellow students and their learning experience. If there are intervening factors keeping you from the seminar, please let me know prior to the start of class.

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

(7) **Plagiarism** is dumb as hell. Don't do it.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS

The **group presentation** 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%):

This class uses a flipped classroom model where students drive the learning process through small collaboration groups. On day one, we'll form groups that remain constant for five weeks before reshuffling. Starting in week 2, each group will give a **15-20 minute** presentation (with timekeeping as a graded component). Your job is not to impress me, but to help everyone learn as "first learners" that engage with primary and secondary readings—this might take the form of summarising the material, critiquing it, or even candidly voicing difficulties or struggles you might have with understanding the text.

At the end of each presentation, groups will create four discussion questions for the class. In the second half of the seminar, the presenting group will split up and help guide discussions within the other four groups, with each group tackling a different discussion question. Note: while the presentations are group efforts, grades will be assigned individually based on my evaluation.

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, 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, if the assignment explicitly allows for generative AI to be used, you should provide in your submission **clear and complete screenshots** of your conversation with the generative AI tool. These screenshots should include all student-generated text that were fed into the AI as a prompt, well as all responses generated by the AI tool. Failure to pre-emptively identify and declare your use of AI will be treated as academic dishonesty, and you will be disciplined accordingly.

   NOTE: even with acknowledgement, copying of output generated by AI tools (in part or whole) may still be regarded as plagiarism (refer to below). If in the doubt, err on the side of caution and talk to me.

3. For assignments that exclude the use of generative AI, **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.

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! Most generative AI tools do not give you actual information; instead, they provide natural sounding language. In other words, they excel at writing nonsense that sounds plausible. If you consult AI at any point, be sure to not only properly cite it, but also to check that the texts it quotes actually exist.

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 16	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 23	Media Theory (Cont'd): (P)remediation	Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Chapter 2) U2: ZOO TV Outside Broadcast 1992 (67 minute concert film; watch on Youtube)
Week 3	Chinese New Year	No classes
Week 4, Feb 6	Cyberpunk and cyborgs	Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, dir. Mamoru Oshii) *(Content warning: sex and violence)*
Week 5, Feb 13	The end of the future: on cyberspace	Katherine Hayles, "How We Became Posthuman" *The Matrix (*1999, dir. Wachowski Sisters) *(Content warning: depictions of violence)*
Week 6, Feb 20	The end of the future: on cyber nostalgia	Wolfenstein OS X, "Vaporwave: A Brief History [Documentary]" [Selected PC Music playlist] Yllis, *Island-01* and *Exodus*
Week 7, Feb 27	The end of the digital future: after cyberspace	Marie Laure Ryan, "The Two (and Thousand) Faces of the Virtual)" *The Stanley Parable* (in-class group play)
	Recess Week	
Week 8, Mar 13	Technology and the Orient	Wendy Chun, "Orienting Orientalism, or How to Map Cyberspace" Team Salvato, *Doki Doki Literature Club!* (partial in-class group play) *(Content warning: graphic depictions of mental illness, self-harm, and suicide)*

Week 9, Mar 20	Technology and the Orient (cont'd)	Roh, et al. "Technologizing Orientalism". *After Yang* (dir. Kogonada) (*Content warning: loss and grief*)
Week 10, Mar 27	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* (*Content warning: Strong depictions of war and violence*)
Week 11, April 3	Feminism(s) in crisis: Parasociality and irony	Tavi Gevinson, "Fan Fiction: A Satire" Hera Lindsay Bird, selected poems
Week 12, April 10	Feminism(s) in crisis: Glitching girlhood, glitching place	Legacy Russell, selected articles Yeule, *Glitch Princess* Chia Amisola, selected performances (class screening)
Week 13	-	Class to be substituted by guest lecture