# Mediating Identities: Technologies of the Self

CHID 480 F | Spring 2012 | University of Washington | Edmond Chang

CHID 480
Section F
MW 10:30 AM to
12:20 PM
MGH 278
Spring 2012
University of
Washington
Edmond Chang


*Maurice Mbikayi*

"Technology is neither good nor bad, nor even neutral. Technology is one part of the complex of relationships that people form with each other and the world around them; it simply cannot be understood outside of that concept."
—Samuel Collins

"This is just the beginning, the beginning of understanding that cyberspace has no limits, no boundaries."
—Nicholas Negroponte

*"The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality."*

*"Who or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others."*
—*"Identity,"* Oxford English Dictionary

CARLA KAPLAN, in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, frames the difficulty of defining "identity," saying, "One of our most common terms, 'identity' is rarely defined" (123). Rather, in everyday language, we have a "personal identity" and have, depending on situation, multiple "social identities." Kaplan continues, "Personal identity is often assumed to mediate between social identities and make sense of them. Whereas our social identities shift throughout the day, what allows us to move coherently from one to another is often imagined to be our personal identity, or 'who we are'—our constant" (123). Outlined by the above definitions of identity is a tension, even contradiction: one the one hand, identity is seemingly fixed, intelligible, innate to an individual, or on the other, something that is performed, constructed, contextual, and perhaps changeable. Our class will take up this unsettledness of identity and investigate its intersections with and co-constitution by technology. In other words, in a world of increasing technological ubiquity, how might we imagine and define a "technological identity?" What are the relationships between identity and technology? How does technology shape our identity or identities and vice versa?

WE WILL EXPLORE everyday technologies like fashion and consumer culture, cyberspace technologies like video games and social networking sites, and body modification technologies like cosmetic surgery and bioengineering. Through literature, scholarship, digital media, video games, and real world examples, our class will trace and trouble theoretical and vernacular understandings of identity and technology. We will engage critical questions about subjectivity, embodiment, race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, post- and transhumanism, and how these things link up to discourses and ideologies about individuality, personhood, and power. Texts may include in whole or in part: Michel Foucault, Dick Hebdige, John Perry Barlow, Sherry Turkle, Allucquere Rosanne Stone, Howard Rheingold, William Gibson, Maureen McHugh, Alan Turing, Julian Dibbell, Donna Haraway, Thomas Foster, Lisa Nakamura, Paul Gilroy, Judith Butler, Octavia Butler, N. Katherine Hayles, and others.

A REQUIREMENT for this class is a well-developed curiosity and a willingness to explore and interrogate interdisciplinary lines of inquiry. Our seminar will be organized like a graduate-level readings seminar engaging literature, scholarship, old and new media, and social networking technologies. Moreover, you will produce short, weekly critical responses and blog posts. Students seeking W-Credit will be accommodated.
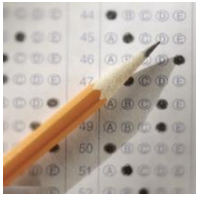
"Imagination is more important than knowledge."
—Albert Einstein


*Maurice Mbikayi*

## Required Course Texts & Materials

• Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*.
• Butler, Octavia. *Dawn*.
• Irrational Games, *Bioshock* (PC, Xbox, Playstation, 2007).
• CHID 480 F Course Reader available at Ave Copy (4141 Univ. Way NE @ 42nd) and via e-reserve.
• Web access and an active UW email account.
• Gmail, Facebook, Twitter accounts.

1

Course
Requirements

Identity Log
(30%)
Midterm Exam
(20%)
Final Exam
(20%)
Class Participation
(30%)

# Requirements & Grading

Your grade should not be the sole exigence or motivation for this class. It is the hope of the course that you walk away from the class with something more. Find some pleasure and some edification and some knowledge from this class (or any class really) and success is usually not far behind. With that in mind, your grade will be a reflection of engagement, effort, close reading, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

### Identity Log (30%)

Over the course of the quarter, you will keep and maintain a weekly "identity log" or "iLog," recording, detailing, and thinking about your own identities and identifications, particularly those mediated by and through technologies. Your "iLog" will function as a kind of identity workbook, an analytical and metacognitive journal, and reading notes, connecting your observations and experiences to the texts, theories, and ideas of the class. Periodically, you will be given specific log prompts, provocations, and experiments, and you will share your logs in class, on the class blog, or via the class's social media. These logs are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be evaluated on completion, clarity, focus, coherence, critique, and your ability to concisely formulate arguments.

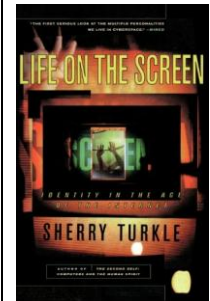### Midterm Exam (20%) & Final Exam (20%)

You will have two substantive exams that will require you to make connections, to think critically and analytically, and to precisely and concisely address the theoretical and intellectual goals of the class. In Week Five, you will be given a mandatory take-home midterm exam that will ask you to draw upon the first half of the quarter's readings, discussions, and critical ideas. Similarly, in Week Ten, you will be given a take-home final exam that will focus on the second half of the quarter's texts, theories, and critiques. The format of both the midterm and final will be short essay answers.

### Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Again, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class, 4) your **engagement** in group work, 5) your care and use of the class blog and social media (bookmark the addresses, check and comment regularly, think of these sites as an extension of class), and 6) your interactions with me and other students. Finally, failure to turn in homework, incomplete assignments, or late papers will negatively impact your participation grade.
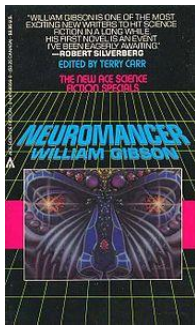
### W-Credit

In addition to the Identity Log and take-home exams, if you are seeking W Credit for the class, you be required to complete a final major paper. See me at the start of the quarter for details. In total, you must produce a minimum of 10-15 pages of formal, revised writing and earn a minimum of a 2.0 on the Major Paper to get W-Credit.

"An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all."
—Oscar Wilde

"The Singularity denotes an event that will take place in the material world, the inevitable next step in the evolutionary process that started with biological evolution and has extended through human-directed technological evolution. However, it is precisely in the world of matter and energy that we encounter transcendence, a principal connotation of what people refer to as spirituality."
—Ray Kurzweil

"The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code."
—Donna Haraway

"I don't pretend we have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about."
—Arthur C. Clarke

"Perhaps it's impossible to wear an identity without becoming what you pretend to be."
—Orson Scott Card,
*Ender's Game*

## Attendance

**Attendance is strongly recommended.** If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to play and participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and we will mark you as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your overall participation grade for the class. If you know you are going to miss class, please let me know ahead of time (via email), if you can, and make any necessary arrangements. And when you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes and see me in order to make up missed work in a timely manner.

## Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format; if you do not have access to Word, then save your documents in RTF or Rich Text Format. All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. **All papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions**. All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and should not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format.

**Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in**, lest you be one of the unhappy people whose paper is eaten by the computer. You may even want to take the precaution of e-mailing your paper to yourself as an attachment at least a couple of times during the drafting process and certainly BEFORE you exit the document for the last time and leave the computer lab, your friend's computer, or even your own computer. This way, even if you lose your disc or your paper gets mysteriously erased, you still have a copy in your e-mail files.

## Evaluation Rubric

Over the course of the quarter, your assignments will receive feedback and comments that will identify what you are doing well and what still needs improvement. Your grades assess your fulfillment of the assignment, the quality of work, detail, analysis, and argumentation, overall effort, and finally, style, polish, and risk taking. Consider the following evaluation rubric as signposts or a kind of legend to your progress and evaluation:

• **Outstanding** (3.7-4.0): Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
• **Strong** (3.1-3.6): Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), which could be further enhanced with revision, additional support, and creativity.
• **Good** (2.5-3.0): Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associate with the course or assignment goal(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).
• **Acceptable** (2.0-2.4): Minimally meets the basic course or assignment requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-

controlled and would benefit from significant revision.

• **Inadequate** (1.0-1.9): Does not meet the course or assignment requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.

## Finding Help

My office and office hours are listed at the front of the course policies. I am available during that time and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see early in the quarter even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located in the ground floor of Padelford Hall (northeast of the HUB), Room B-33. See <http://www.washington.edu/home/maps/northcentral.html?pdl>.
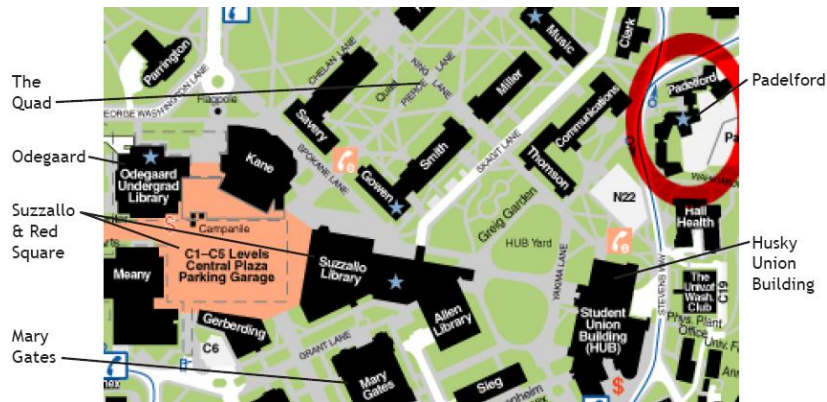


I am also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting me. I will do my best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually **within twenty-four hours**. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the Undergraduate English office in A-2H&G Padelford. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via AOL Instant Messenger or Google Talk (**nickname: EDagogy**); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation for the first time, please identify yourself to me; also, be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

Further resources, both on- and off-campus can be found on the Links page of the course website:

<http://staff.washington.edu/changed/480/links.html>.

## Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing — as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions about these matters at any time. Plagiarism includes:

• a student failing to cite sources of ideas
• a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
• a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
• a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
• a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

"The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel."
—William Gibson, *Neuromancer*



"Humanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future. We envision the possibility of broadening human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth."
—Transhumanist Declaration

"You are not your job, you're not how much money you have in the bank. You are not the car you drive. You're not the contents of your wallet. You are not your fucking khakis. You are all singing, all dancing crap of the world."
—Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*
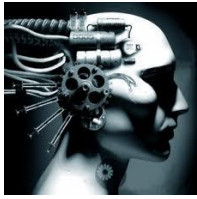
If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. It is always better to be safe than sorry. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review. For further information, please refer to UW's Student Conduct Code at <http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>. **Play it smart, don't plagiarize**!

## Accommodations

If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please see me immediately. If you have a disability and have not yet registered it with Disability Resources for Students in 448 Schmitz Hall, you should do so immediately. Please contact DRS at 206-543-8924 (Voice) or 206-543-8925 (V/TTY) or 206-616-8379 (FAX) or via their website at <http://www.washington.edu/admin/ada/dss.htm>. I will gladly do my best to provide appropriate accommodation you require.

## UW SafeCampus

Preventing violence is everyone's responsibility. If you're concerned, tell someone. For more information visit the SafeCampus website at <http://www.washington.edu/safecampus> and keep the following in mind:

• Always call 911 if you or others may be in danger.
• Call 206-685-SAFE (7233) to report non-urgent threats of violence and for referrals to UW counseling and/or safety resources. TTY or VP callers, please call through your preferred relay service.
• Don't walk alone. Campus safety guards can walk with you on campus after dark. Call Husky NightWalk 206-685-WALK (9255).
• Stay connected in an emergency with UW Alert. Register your mobile number to receive instant notification of campus emergencies via text and voice messaging. Sign up online at <http://www.washington.edu/alert>.

**syl-la-bus:** *n* 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements 2: subject to change

Chang / CHID 480 F / Spring Quarter 2012 / University of Washington

**Week 1: What is Identity?**                                    March 26-30
    Introduction to the Course, Defining Identity & Technology
    Carla Kaplan, "Identity," *Keywords*
    Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self"

**Week 2: Identity and the Everyday**                            April 2-6
    Erving Goffman, "Introduction," *The Presentation of Self*
    Dick Hebdige, "Introduction" & Ch.1: "From Culture to Hegemony" & Ch.7: "Style as Intentional Communication"
    Fred Davis, Ch.1: "Do Clothes Speak?" & Ch.2: "Identity, Ambivalence, Fashion's Fuel"
    Tim Gunn, "Introduction," *Guide to Style*

**Week 3: Cyberspace+Identity**                                 April 9-13
    John Perry Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace"
    The Mentor, "The Hacker Manifesto"
    Howard Rheingold, "Introduction" & Ch.5: "Multi-User Dungeons and Alternate Identities," *The Virtual Community*
    Sherry Turkle, "Introduction: Identity in the Age of the Internet" & Ch.7: "Aspects of the Self," *Life on the Screen*

Maureen McHugh, "A Coney Island of the Mind" & "Virtual Love" (short stories)

## Week 4: Cyberspace+Gender+Sexuality          April 16-20
Alan Turing, "The Imitation Game"
Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble*
Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace"
Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "Introduction: Sex, Death, and Machinery, or How I Fell in Love with My Prosthesis"
Nina Wakeford, "Sexualized Bodies in Cyberspace" & "Cyberqueer"

## Week 5: Cyberspace+Race          April 23-27
Lisa Nakamura, Ch.3: "Race in the Construct," *Cybertypes* & "Introduction," *Digitizing Race*
Mark B. N. Hansen, "Digitizing the Racialized Body or The Politics of Universal Address"
Henry Jenkins, "Cyberspace and Race"
William Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic" (short story)

**Prepare for Midterm Exam**

We will read Octavia Butler's *Dawn* for Weeks 6-8.

## Week 6: Posthumanism+Identity          April 30-May 4
World Transhumanist Association, "The Transhumanist Declaration"
Transhumanist FAQ: http://www.extropy.org/faq.htm
Cary Wolfe, "What is Posthumanism?"
N. Katherine Hayles, Ch.1: "Toward Embodied Virtuality," *How We Became Posthuman*
Thomas Foster, "Introduction," *The Souls of Cyberfolk*
Cory Doctorow, "0wnz0red" (short story)

## Week 7: Posthumanism+Gender+Sexuality          May 7-11
Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"
Nancy Jesser, "Blood, Genes, and Gender in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Dawn*"
Susan Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies"
Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back"
Richard M. Juang, "Transgendering the Politics of Recognition"

|  | | MAY | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|  |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | |

## Week 8: Posthumanism+Race          May 14-18
W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," *The Souls of Black Folk*
Paul Gilroy, "Introduction" & Ch.1: "The Crisis of 'Race' and Raciology," *Against Race*
Thomas Foster, Ch.5: "The Souls of Cyberfolk: Performativity, Virtual Embodiment, and Racial Histories"

## Week 9: Identity+Politics          May 21-25
Louis Althusser, "Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects"
Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Political Critique of Identity" & "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?"
James Clifford, "Taking Identity Politics Seriously"
Jose Esteban Munoz, "Introduction: Performing Disidentifications"

## Week 10: Identity+Games          May 28-June 1
Jane McGonigal, "Growing Up Gamer"
Zach Waggoner, Ch.1: "Videogames, Avatars, and Identity: A Brief History," *My Avatar, My Self*
Raph Koster, "A Declaration of the Rights of Avatars,"
    http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/playerrights.shtml
McKenzie Wark, "Allegory (on The Sims)," *Gamer Theory*
Alexander Galloway, Ch.3: "Social Realism," *Gamer*
Bonnie Nardi, Ch.8: "Gender," *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*

**Prepare for Final Exam**

Mon 5/28 Memorial Day Holiday

|  | | JUNE | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |