



Class:
Office Hours:
Office:

Instructor: Dr. Jake Bohrod
Email:

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This class is a critical, interdisciplinary survey of virtual reality as concept and media technology. The last decade has witnessed the resurgence of a “virtual reality” that conforms to all expectations – sophisticated, technologized goggles and sleek prosthetics that help teleport your senses to new heights of entertainment. Yet the ubiquitous advertising of gadgets like the Meta Quest belies the far more diffuse origins and applications of virtual reality. This course conceives of virtual reality as a far-reaching idiom of mediation, one that intersects multiple diverse fields, such as psychology, education, history, and the arts. In the era of real-time production, Unreal Engine, AI-generated art, and multiverse storytelling, virtual reality has become an especially useful concept in reframing the key debates of cinema and media studies for the 21st century. We will ask: what is reality? Are movies reality? Is the mind an image? Is that air you’re breathing? Through case studies, theoretical analysis, and hands-on experience, this class will explore what virtual reality does, what it claims to do, and what you are going to do about it.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate the key theoretical concepts of virtual reality
- Historicize virtual reality’s relationship with media and entertainment
- Construct arguments about the multidisciplinary meaning of virtual reality
- Author a basic virtual reality “scene” using the REACH platform
- Contextualize the role and function of virtual reality in society today

REQUIRED READINGS

All readings will be on BrightSpace.

Instructions to Access Brightspace: Go to <https://brightspace.lmu.edu> → Enter your username and password → Click on your course title → If you have trouble logging in Brightspace, contact ITS Help Desk.

ACCESS TO VR

Virtual Reality remains a niche and oftentimes expensive media technology. We will spend at least one class period at the VR lab in order to gain some hands-on experience; students are encouraged to arrange additional visits to the VR lab in their own time. Students are similarly encouraged to download and experiment with VR applications on their smartphones and personal computers – many of these apps are free to use.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This class is a critical survey of virtual reality as a philosophical concept and media technology. No previous experience with VR is necessary, but a tolerance of critical thinking is required.

Class time will consist of discussions, lectures, group work, screenings, and guest speakers. There are a variety of ways to earn credit, bring your own tastes to class, and develop your own critical voice – in-class exercises, class discussion, pitching a VR project, and developing an interactive VR “scene” using the REACH platform.

Your weekly attendance and active **participation** is central to the success of the class, as is your thoughtful engagement with the course readings. Much of class will consist of a thorough discussion of the readings and their relationship with that week’s topic; therefore, it is paramount you complete the readings before class on Friday, and come to class with your questions and comments.

In an effort to maximize class time and minimize homework, students will complete several **in-class exercises** both individually and in small groups. These exercises are designed to be a more creative outlet for exploring virtual reality in theory and in practice. They are indicated weekly in the course schedule by the term “in class” and will be described in detail on their assigned date.

Each student will **conceptualize and pitch a VR project/story**. The pitch will consist of a 5-minute (maximum) description of a VR project to be presented in class on October 20. Students must complete and submit a corresponding lookbook for their pitch. More details on this assignment will be provided in class.

As a final project, students will be **authoring and designing their own VR “scene” using the REACH platform**. REACH is a free, web-based platform that enables creators to develop

immersive media spaces without the need of coding. As a prerequisite, students will need access to a relatively up-to-date computer; additionally you will be encouraged to supply your scene with more advanced assets, which will require a basic familiarity with and use of production resources. Each REACH project must be accompanied by an **artist's statement** describing the conceptual intent of the project and the methods used in creation, to be turned in alongside the completed project. A more detailed prompt and discussion of this assignment will come later in the semester.

Grading breakdown: Participation	=	15%
VR Pitch + Lookbook	=	20%
In-class exercises (7)	=	35%
REACH project	=	30%
+ artist's statement		

TOTAL GRADE BREAKDOWN:

A	Exceeds Expectations	100%-90%
B	Meets Expectations	89%-80%
C	Satisfactory	79%-70%
D	Poor	69%-60%
F	Failure	59%-

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Email is the preferred method of communication. I will communicate with the class and individual students using campus email, so it is essential that you regularly check your email account or the preferred email address to which you forward. Please allow up to 48 hours for me to respond before you follow up.

OFFICE HOURS

Use the Google doc linked on BrightSpace to schedule a meeting during my office hours. My office hours are a time set aside for you. Students are highly encouraged to make use of this time and come chat with me about course concepts, assignments, questions you may have or media you are interested in. If the times are inconvenient, I am happy to arrange appointments for another time. Just email me with a few available times.

COURSE SCHEDULE

<p>Week 1</p> <p>09/01/23</p>	<p>Topic: Introduction to Course</p> <p>Screening: <i>La Jetée</i> (Marker, 1962)</p>
<p>Week 2</p> <p>09/08/23</p>	<p>Topic: What is virtual reality?</p> <p>Reading: • Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato, from <i>The Republic</i> • Janet Murray, “Virtual/reality: how to tell the difference” • “Virtual Reality and Technologies for Combat Simulation” pgs. 11-17 <p>In class: VR infographic exercise</p>
<p>Week 3</p> <p>09/15/23</p>	<p>Topic: Virtual Reality Theory + Practice</p> <p>Reading: • Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pierre Lévy, “The Nature of Virtualization” • Michael LaRocco, “Developing the ‘best practices’ of virtual reality design” <p>In class: questions about VR design</p> <p>Guest speaker: Dr. Michael LaRocco, Bellarmine University</p>
<p>Week 4</p> <p>09/22/23</p>	<p>Topic: Augmentation and Cyberculture</p> <p>Reading: • Allahyari and Rourke, “The 3D Additivist Manifesto”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” • Scott Bukatman, “Lifestyles of the Electronically Enhanced” • William Gibson, “Johnny Mnemonic” <p>Screening: <i>Johnny Mnemonic</i> (Longo, 1995)</p>
<p>Week 5</p> <p>09/29/23</p>	<p>Topic: Virtual Literature</p> <p>Reading: • Marie-Laure Ryan, “Immersion vs. Interactivity: Virtual Reality and Literary Theory”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Saler, “Living in the Imagination” <p>In class: deep observation + spatial narrative exercise</p>

<p>Week 6</p> <p>10/06/23</p>	<p>Topic: VR Lab</p> <hr/> <p>Homework: finish VR Pitch + Lookbook</p>
<p>Week 7</p> <p>10/13/23</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AUTUMN DAY – NO CLASS</p>
<p>Week 8</p> <p>10/20/23</p>	<p>Topic: Virtual Theatre</p> <p>Reading: • Antonin Artaud, “The Alchemical Theater” • Brenda Laurel, from <i>Computers As Theatre</i></p> <p>HOMEWORK: VR Pitch + Lookbook</p>
<p>Week 9</p> <p>10/27/23</p>	<p>Topic: Virtual Painting</p> <p>Reading: • Leon Battista Alberti, “On Painting” • Oliver Grau, “Historic Spaces of Illusion”</p> <p>In class: 3D perspective exercise</p> <p>Guest speaker: Dr. Nonny de la Peña, Arizona State University</p>
<p>Week 10</p> <p>11/03/23</p>	<p>Topic: Virtual Cinema</p> <p>Reading: • Jean-Louis Baudry, “The Apparatus” • Andreas Sudmann, “Bullet Time and the Mediation of Post-Cinematic Temporality” from <i>Post-Cinema</i> • Brian Crecente, “Lights, camera, graphics: How Epic helps Hollywood”</p> <p>Screening: <i>The Matrix</i> (The Wachowskis, 1999)</p>
<p>Week 11</p> <p>11/10/23</p>	<p>Topic: Virtual Games</p> <p>Reading: • Brian Crecente, “Their future is Epic: the evolution of a gaming giant” pgs. 1-5 • Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play” • Tricart, “Game Engines and Interactive VR” from <i>Virtual reality filmmaking</i></p> <p>Screening: <i>Sword Art Online</i> (2002-2009)</p> <p>In class: Roblox exercise</p>

<p>Week 12 11/17/23</p>	<p>Topic: Case Study - Virtual War Reading: • Sasha Crawford-Holland, “Virtual Healing” • Dyer-Witthof and de Peuter, “Banal War: <i>Full Spectrum Warrior</i>” Screening: <i>Serious Games</i> (Farocki, 2009-2010) In class: presence questionnaire</p>
<p>Week 13 11/24/23</p>	<p>THANKSGIVING BREAK</p>
<p>Week 14 12/01/23</p>	<p>Topic: Case Study - Virtual Heritage Reading: • Donald Sanders, “Virtual Heritage: Researching and Visualizing the Past in 3D” • Erik Champion, “History and Cultural Heritage in Virtual Environments” In class: phone photogrammetry</p>
<p>Week 15 12/08/23</p>	<p>WORK DAY</p> <p>Homework: Finish final project</p>
<p>Final 12/15/23</p>	<p>FINAL – REACH project + artist statement</p> <p>DUE: by 5pm</p>