

Digital Communications in Theory and Practice

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Fall 2013

Office Hours: By appointment

Course website: <http://alchemicalmusings.org/dctap13>

Description

Like the telegraph and the railroad in their time, the Internet has been heralded as the promoter of equality, freedom, and democracy. And like the technologies that preceded it, its impact will ultimately derive from the ways we choose to use it.

What strategies are individuals, communities, and organizations developing to manage flows of information, maintain relationships, and organize collective action on the internet? How can we communicate more intentionally and purposefully? How can we be more deliberate in our choices around media consumption and production?

This course will explore new media and communication in both theory and practice. We will attempt to contextualize and historicize the digital revolution through the lenses of social and cultural theory, architecture, popular culture, and a simultaneous immersion in cultures of use. We will study and encounter how software embedded in communities of practice traces the social fabric of the networked age. Our inquiry will be guided and informed by a hands-on immersion into the fields we are studying.

Objectives

This course is designed to help you improve your critical judgment around media and communications platforms and practices. Through a combination of direct engagement and reflection, you will learn to make more informed ethical and aesthetic choices in your media and communications diet, and learn to better critique the hype around emerging technologies. You will feel confident critically engaging with mainstream Internet pundits and become more comfortable engaging in the jargon-filled discourse around new media.

By the end of the course you will have a greater understanding of what software is and how/why it is created, and you will have also gained experience with a variety of collaboration tools, such as issue trackers, wikis, blogs, tagging, and RSS. We will be working closely with the technologies we will be studying, in order to develop perspectives grounded in experience, and throughout the semester we will be helping each other connect theory to practice, and vice versa.

Requirements

This course will be run in as a hybrid between a seminar and a studio, and we will

prioritize student participation and engagement. Texts and films assigned weekly will be broadly interdisciplinary – drawing from media and communications studies, sociology, anthropology, psychology, literature, feature and documentary films. A final research paper, or instructor-approved project, will be a class requirement.

The course will be divided weekly units. We will systematically explore critical communications scholarship, mainstream "Information Society" pundits, and specific tools and services at the junction of these themes. Throughout the semester will be using tools (issue trackers, wikis, blogs, and RSS) to aid our exploration of the material. Please seek assistance from your classmates or the instructor if you need help using any of the tools we will be exploring this semester.

Beyond keeping up on weekly readings/films and course participation, these are the additional requirements:

1. **Weekly discussion facilitators**

Each student will be expected to pick a class session of particular interest to them and post by midnight (2 days before class) of the week in question a list of 2-3 questions on the wiki that might guide our class session. Any additional links, texts, etc. that you find that are relevant to that week's discussion should also be posted.

Assignments for discussions will be made the first week of class.

2. **Weekly reflections**

Students will be expected to post weekly on their blog. We will be reading each other's posts to help each other understand that week's readings, and some weeks we will divide up the readings and rely on each other's summaries to develop a fuller picture of the weekly topic. If you don't already have a blog, you will need to create a new one for this course. This posting will take the place of weekly reaction papers and will allow us to knowledge-build as a group. All of the blogs feeds will be aggregated on the course wiki.

You can post on the current week's readings or, if compelled, on a previous week's readings. You can respond to the questions raised by that week's student "wiki organizer".

3. **Weekly digital studio**

Each class session will be divided up into a seminar discussion, followed by a hands-on, group studio. Students will work in small groups to complete activities and projects relating to the week's themes.

4. **Ongoing**

Throughout the semester we compile an archive of articles and related media that pertains to the class. We will be collecting this material using social media. The course hash tag is #dctap13

5. **Mid-Term Field Work**

Students will also attend a relevant local (un)conference, meetup, or maker-space and report back on their observations of the cultural practices they observe. Use the readings we use in class to do a brief discussion of the community you observe. No external sources necessary (unless you're compelled to do so). Please incorporate these observations into your reflections for week 8.

6. **Final Project/Project Presentation**

Students will be expected to complete a substantial final project, practice-based or critical, by arrangement with the instructor. The project will explore how the topics we have covered in this class are transforming the industry/sector of your choice (government, politics, journalism, education, activism, advertising, manufacturing, etc), or your own area of study. The project can be collaborative, and might incorporate multimedia. Multimedia projects will require an accompanying written analysis.

This project will involve research but should not attempt to offer final results so much as a proposal for future critical understanding.

We will use the last 2 studio sessions to present on final papers. Students will give a mini-lecture on their final paper topic and bring in excerpts (as possible and appropriate) of the subject they are studying.

Materials

Texts:

The Social Media Reader, ed. Michael Mandiberg. New York: NYU Press (2012)

Gladstone, B., & Neufeld, J. (2011). *The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Films: Students will view assigned films prior to class (so this means putting the films on your Netflix queue, if you have one, or using your local library/videostore; all our films will also be on reserve.)

Catfish (2010)

Century of Self (available at the internet archive)

Man with A Movie Camera (1929)

We Are Legion (2012)

We Live in Public (2009)

Week 1: Introduction

Theory:

Carey, J. W. (1992). *Communication as Culture*: Chap. 1 – A Cultural Approach to Communications.

Peters, J. D. (2001). *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. University Of Chicago Press: Introduction (The Problem of Communication) + Chapter 1 (Dialogue and Dissemination).

Parts 1 & 2 of *Century of Self*.

Practice:

Initial setup of accounts and services: Creating a blog, (course) twitter account, zotero, and flickr.

Introduction to issue tracker, and task workflows.

Set up an RSS reader and “subscribe” to 5 of your favorite sites.

Week 2: Rearview Mirrors

Theory:

Plato, *The Phaedrus*

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Chapters 2-3

Plus choose one:

L. Febvre, H. Martin *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800* (Chap 2. The Technical Problems and their Solution)

James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Chapter 8, “Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph,”)

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, (Chapters 3-5)

Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time, Chapter II*

Tim Wu, *The Master Switch* (Part I – The Rise)

Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, chapter 1

Practice:

Video reflections – this week’s reflections should be recorded, uploaded to

youtube, and embedded in your blog post. We will spend some time in the lab helping you complete these tasks.

Week 3: The Medium

Theory:

Borges, J. L. (1994). *The Garden of Forking Paths*. Ficciones.

Manovich, L. (2002). *The Language of New Media*. (Introduction and Part I)

McLuhan, M., & Lapham, L. H. (1994). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (Introduction,

Part I and 3 clips of your choosing from <http://marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/>, which you should incorporate into your weekly reflection post).

Practice:

Mashup lab. We will learn how to embed media across sites on the web, as well as how to utilize hashtags for search and discovery.

Week 4: Networks

Theory:

Barabasi, A.-L. (2003). *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means*. (Chapters 1-7).

Mejias, U. (2010). [The Limits of Networks as Models for Organizing Sociality](#). *New Media & Society*, (12) 4, 603-617.

Anderson, Chris.

(http://www.ted.com/talks/chris_anderson_of_wired_on_tech_s_long_tail.html)

Catfish (2010)

Practice:

Network analysis tools - We will explore and evaluate various tools used to analyze twitter networks, and compare these to the networks described in the literature.

Week 5: Narratives and Databases

Theory:

Manovich, L. (2002). *The Language of New Media*. The MIT Press. (Part V)

Benjamin, W. (1969). *Unpacking my library* Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. Schocken.

Benjamin, W. (1969). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.

Roy Kozlovsky. The Junk Playground: creative destruction as antidote to delinquency Junk Playground ([pdf](#))

Man with A Movie Camera (1929)

Practice:

Instant Infographics: Google Spreadsheets, Forms, Maps, Widgets/Charts, Refine, NGram, and Freebase.

Week 6: Software and Algorithms

Theory:

Brian Kernighan, D is for Digital: What a well-informed person should know about computers and communications. (Part II: Software)

Friedrich Kittler (1997). *Literature, Media, Information Systems*, "There is No Software"

Eben Moglen (2006). *Software and Community in the Early 21st Century*.
<http://www.archive.org/details/eben-moglen-oct-2006>

Please choose one:

O'Reilly, Tim. (2005). *What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software* (<http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>)

Scott Rosenberg. (2007). *Dreaming in Code: Two Dozen Programmers, Three Years, 4,732 Bugs, and One Quest for Transcendent Software* is a (2007). Chap 5-6.

Kevin Slavin. *How Algorithms Shape our World*,
http://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_slavin_how_algorithms_shape_our_world.html

Practice:

Begin the codeacademy.com API module

Week 7: Free Software, Hackers, and Tricksters

Theory:

Chris Kelty, *Two Bits: The Cultural Value of Free Software* (Chap 1-4)

Gabriella Coleman, Phreaks, Hackers, and Trolls and the Politics of Transgression and Spectacle. In *The Social Media Reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg. New York: NYU Press (2012)

Please choose one:

Julian Assange, "State and Terrorist Conspiracies" and "Conspiracy as Governance" (<http://cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf>)

Paul Graham. (2010). Hackers and Painters, Chap. 2.

We Are Legion (2012)

Practice:

Install and use bittorrent, for legal purposes. Download a linux live-distribution, create a bootable USB key, and boot into linux.

Week 8: Sharing, Cooperation, and Collective Action: Commons-Based Peer Production and the Wisdom of the Crowds

Theory:

5) Joseph Reagle, *Good Faith Collaboration The Culture of Wikipedia* (Chapt 3-5)

Yochai Benkler—Watch

http://www.ted.com/talks/yochai_benkler_on_the_new_open_source_economics.html (see also: *The wealth of networks : how social production transforms markets and freedom* (2006).

Please choose one:

Jaron Lanier, *DIGITAL MAOISM: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism*

Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (2009), The Labors of Internet-Assisted Activism: Overcommunication, Miscommunication, and Communicative Overload. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*. Volume 6, Issue 3 & 4, pp. 267-280. DOI: 10.1080/19331680903048840. [Link](#).

Clay Shirky—Watch

http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirky_on_institutions_versus_collaboration.html (see also: Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations (2008).

Practice:

Wikipedia Edit-a-thon

Week 9: Student Defined

This week is reserved for studying materials that we as a class encounter and decide to incorporate into the syllabus.

Week 11: Search and Discovery

Theory:

Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, Chaps 1, 5-7

David Stark, (2012) A Sense of Dissonance, Chap 1.

The PageRank Algorithm: [How Google Finds Your Needle in the Web's Haystack](#) by the American Mathematical Society

The AdWords algorithm (skim): Aranyak Mehta, Amin Saberi, Umesh Vazirani, and Vijay Vazirani. 2007. AdWords and generalized online matching. *J. ACM* 54, 5, Article 22 (October 2007).

DOI=10.1145/1284320.1284321

<http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1284320.1284321>

Practice:

Set up an adwords account - come up with a list of adwords for...

Change something in your Facebook account and take a screenshot of the the ads changing.

Take a screenshot of an odd juxtaposition, explain why you think it appeared.

Week 10: Surveillance and Privacy

Theory:

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (2nd Vintage ed.). Vintage. (Part III, 3 - Panopticism

Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", from *_OCTOBER_ 59*, Winter 1992, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 3-7.

Jonah Bossewitch and Aram Sinnreich, The end of forgetting: Strategic

agency beyond the panopticon *New Media & Society* March 2013 15: 224-242, first published on July 23, 2012 doi:10.1177/1461444812451565

We Live in Public (2009)

Practice:

Collusion: The firefox third-party tracker (<http://www.mozilla.org/en-US/collusion/>)

FOIA yourself (<http://www.getmyfbifile.com/>).

Try going one full week w/out using any google services (also, learn how to use site blockers)

Week 12: Intellectual Property

Theory:

John Perry Barlow, *Selling Wine Without Bottles: The Economy of Mind on the Global Net*

Lawrence Lessig (2004). REMIX: How Creativity Is Being Strangled by the Law (see also: <http://www.free-culture.cc/freecontent/>)

Nigel Thrift, "Re-inventing invention: new tendencies in capitalist commodification", *Economy and Society* Volume 35 Number 2 May 2006: 279-306

A Fair(y) Use Tale (2007) <http://cyberlaw.stanford.edu/blog/2007/03/fairy-use-tale>

Practice:

Find a CC licensed photo, and add it to our course wiki.

Select a creative commons license, and attach it to a flickr photo that you upload.

Create a simple remix, e.g. <http://www.popculturepirate.com> (if you don't have time to edit this remix during the lab, sketch out your planned project, in detail). You can use Mozilla's popcornmaker (<https://popcorn.webmaker.org/>) to make a quick remix/mashup

Week 13: Attention and Distraction

Theory:

Jameson, Fredrick. *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (see also:

http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/portfolio/culture_and_society/postmodernism_or_the.html)

Todd Gitlin, (2007). *Media Unlimited*, chapter 1

Nick Carr, *Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is doing to our brains*

James G. Webster, "Structuring a Marketplace of Attention", in Joseph Turow and Lokman Tsui, eds. 2008. *The Hyperlinked Society: Questioning Connections in the Digital Age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Practice:

This week's studio will be devoted to student presentations.

These tools are to be evaluated on your own, outside of the studio. Evaluate these Anti-Distraction tools - <http://99u.com/articles/6969/10-online-tools-for-better-attention-focus>. Pick one of these tools and use it this week. For your weekly reflection, write a review where you detail its limitations and suggest improvements.

Week 14: Revolution?

Theory:

danah boyd (2007). "Viewing American class divisions through Facebook and MySpace ." *Apophenia Blog Essay*. June 24 .

<http://www.danah.org/papers/essays/ClassDivisions.html>

Tawil Sour, H. (2007). Move Over Bangalore. Here Comes... Palestine? Western Funding and 'Internet Development' in the Shrinking Palestinian State. In Paula Chakravartty and Yuezhi Zhao (eds.), *Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy* (263-284). Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield.

Evgeny Morozov (2011). The Net Delusion The Dark Side of Internet Freedom. (Chap 7-11)

Practice:

This week's studio will be devoted to student presentations.