

Media Toolkit

Lang College, Spring 2007

LCST / 2005A

Tues/Thurs, 10-11.40

Dominic Pettman

Course Description

This course situates “media” in the broader context of an innovative and integrative liberal arts education. As such, its primary goal is to enable students to evaluate and make decisions concerning their relationship to proliferating technologies and new media. This course will combine lectures and lab-work to help students familiarize themselves with various software platforms and multimedia tools, in order to more effectively gather, analyze, contextualize, present and *re-present* information within a broad political and cultural framework. After completing the five different modules (intro, image, word, sound, number), students will better understand – and be more confident in utilizing – the various modes and methods which enable the critically informed to “read between the pixels,” as well as meaningfully contribute to the ever-expanding digital public sphere.

Course Objectives

- to introduce students to various software packages and digital platforms, in order to enhance the capacity to express certain ideas relating to media literacy
- to contextualize these tools within a coherent history of ideas based on technology and culture
- to reflect on the the role of media and technology in contemporary society;
- to communicate intelligibly and thoughtfully in several different media formats

Course Readings

All readings are available online via the Fogelman Library’s E-reserves program.

<http://ereserves.newschool.edu/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=70&page=docs>

the password is "tools"

These e-reserves are also available via MyNewSchool.

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Course Format

Students attend two sessions a week: the first a seminar based on the weekly readings, and the second a lab tutorial, which includes both discussion and media practice responding to and extending the topics covered.

Over the semester there are five modules. Each module shall focus on a particular software package, beginning with a blog/web page that shall serve as a storage facility for weekly response assignments. By the end of the semester, students will summarize the trajectory of the course as a whole, by condensing, translating and importing their previous postings into a final ten-minute Power Point presentation, followed by a brief question period.

Assignments (General)

Module One (Intro): Create a Blog at Blogspot.com, upload response papers each week. Questions will provide suggested themes and topics to focus on.

Module Two (Image): Use digital cameras and/or GIMP to find/create/modify images for your blog. Emphasis on juxtaposition and the deployment of meaning(s).

Module Three (Word): Use the principles and practices of wikimedia to link blogs and/or cross-reference your blogs. Emphasis also on research, veracity/credibility, and methodology. [Note: Final paper/project *proposal* due during this section.]

Module Four (Sound): Use Splice online to experiment with the basics of digital recording, editing, interviewing, and adding sound-files to blog and/or PowerPoint. The more advanced students can experiment with podcasting.

Module Five (Number): Distill and import all previous posts from blog into final ten-minute PowerPoint presentation. Emphasis on visual communication/rhetoric, keeping elements such as target audience and non-linear logic in mind.

Course Assessment

1. Participation/Attitude	33 %
2. Weekly Assignments	33 %
3. Final Power Point Presentation	33%.
4. Poise	1%

Syllabus

Module 1: Introduction – Finding Our Bearings in the “Mediascape”

Program: Blogspot.com

Week 1 (Jan 23, 25): Society of the Spectacle

What exactly is the “mediascape”? What are its landmarks and survey points? How would we begin to “map” such a terrain, or at least get our bearings? This lecture employs the notion of “the spectacle” to begin approaching these questions, as well as introducing such motifs as urbanization, industrialization (and its aftermath), globalization, digitalization and the scopophilic logic of today’s visual culture. Particular emphasis will be placed on Guy Debord’s famous dictum: “The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.”

Readings/Viewings:

1. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Akpress, 2006)
2. Todd Gitlin collage, *Adbusters Magazine*, August 2002, vol.42

Lab Assignment:

Set up your own blog at www.blogspot.com. Link to and review some of your favorite blogs and reflect on what they do effectively, and where they could use improvement. Then blog your first entry introducing yourself, and where you figure you “stand” in relation to “the media” via Todd Gitlin’s eight strategies. This will be supplemented with some good “housekeeping” practices in terms of file storage and organization.

Week 2 (Jan 30, Feb 1): The Medium is the Message

A discussion of form over content. This lecture introduces the musty, but still influential, ideas of McLuhan and his contemporary followers (Wired magazine, BoingBoing, etc.), in order to discourage the instinctive focus on the kinds of content which make up today’s media. Rather, we ask what social and material conditions *create* the mediascape in the first place. In other words, the fact that our public spaces are populated by massive TV screens is – for the student of media – more significant than the material that is being displayed on them.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message,” *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (chapter 1)
http://cultofjim.com/scripture/understanding_media/
2. Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore, *The Media is the Message* (Gingko, 2006)

Lab Assignment:

Post 150 – 200 words on your response to McLuhan’s dictum “the medium is the message.” Which quote do you find most persuasive and why? Which quote do you find least persuasive and why? Offer at least one example that could be used to support or refute McLuhan’s argument that he doesn’t cite in this chapter.

Week 3 (Feb 6, 8): The Blue Pill or the Red Pill

A discussion of the increasing power-effect of the signifier over the signified. This lecture uses *The Matrix* and Plato's Cave as starting points for considering the millennia-long debate on the pros and cons of "virtual realities": from imaginary flights-of-fancy (art, literature, etc.) to the insistent alternative universes of today's video-games and cinema-scapes.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Plato, *Republic* (Book VII)
2. Oliver Grau, "Historic Spaces of Illusion," *Virtual Art* (Cambridge: MIT, 2003)
3. Don DeLillo's "Most Photographed Barn In America," *White Noise* (New York: Picador, 1989)
4. Charles Chaplin, *Modern Times* (1936)
5. Wachowski Bros, *The Matrix* (1999)

Lab Assignment:

Identify and discuss a significant virtual space which existed either historically or mimetically between Plato's cave and Neo's Matrix. In what way does this virtual space provoke the same questions, anxieties and responses of Plato and Neo? In what ways might it have something to say about our own media age? And finally, what might we use instead of a red pill to "get out of the Matrix"?

Module 2: The Image-Text

Program: GIMP (aka “free Photoshop”)

Week 4 (Feb 13, 15): The Memeing of Life

A discussion of some of the more prominent and persistent images in the storefronts and on the streetscapes of New York and beyond; contextualized via the concept of “the meme.” How do certain abstract images (such as logos or anti-logos) spread, and how do they communicate specific meanings? What is the difference between an authorized and unauthorized sign-system? And how accurate is the biological metaphor of the virus for studying media transmission?

Readings/Viewings:

1. Susan Blackmore, “Memes” (e-lecture)
2. Mark Dery, “The Scream Meme,” *The Pyrotechnic Insanitorium* (New York: Grove, 1999)

Lab Assignment:

Profile your favorite or least favorite meme, and reflect on the significance of its “memetic success” in relation to Blackmore’s and or Dery’s arguments and/or definitions. What is the *political* element of this meme?

****Feb 20, 22: No Classes – President’s Day****

Week 5 (Feb 27, March 1): Culture Jamming

A discussion of the unprecedented power of the Internet, as well as image-manipulation software, to create and disseminate images according to viral models and markets. This will include a discussion of the ways in which new media encourages both the proliferation of persuasion (e.g., corporate and government propaganda), as well as the tools to resist and subvert such methods.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Mark Dery, “Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs”
<http://www.levity.com/markdery/culturjam.html>
2. Steven Downes, “Hacking Memes”
http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue4_10/downes/index.html
3. RTmark www.rtmark.com (website)
4. Craig Baldwin, *Sonic Outlaws* (1995)

Lab Assignment:

Collect, scan, create, and/or manipulate images for your blog. Reflect and comment on the ways in which certain images can be recontextualized, and how meanings can be altered by certain semiotic decisions and/or constraints. Provide an example. Experiment with Picasa 2 or Flickr to come up with a class database of images. Feel free to consider your digital or cell-phone camera as an extension of the class, and as a tool for your blog.

Week 6 (Oct 9, 11): Remediation

A discussion of the “backward compatibility” of media in general, and the ways in which so-called new media “remediate” older forms and formats. Harking back to Wagner’s vision of a holistic and immersive form of multi-media, we move to Bolter and Grusin’s notion of “immediacy” and “hypermediacy” in order to better appreciate two formally and historically distinct modes of representation.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Richard Wagner, “Outlines of the Artwork of the Future,” Randall Packer & Ken Jordan (eds.), *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality* (New York: Norton, 2001)
2. Jay Bolter & Richard Grusin, “Immediacy, Hypermediacy and Remediation,” *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT, 2000)

Lab Assignment:

A practice run for your final presentation: choose one of the following theorists (Marx, McLuhan, Debord, Baudrillard, Chomsky). Create a brief Powerpoint presentation which discusses one of their main ideas in relation to one of the following key terms from our glossary:

Alienation
Alterity
Consensual Hallucination
Culture Jamming
Ideology
Liminality
Memetics
Narrating the Nation
Ontology/Epistemology
Postmodernism
Signifier/Signified
Spectacle, The
Taylorism & Fordism

Template for Revision Assignment:

Page 1: Name and Portrait of Key Figure

Page 2: Brief Bio

Page 3: Key Quotes

Page 4 - ?: Summary of this figure’s main ideas in relation to at least THREE of the key terms from the right hand column. Include relevant images and illustrations. Take a “media-centric” view of the material. Results will be Google-tested for excessive cut-n-pasting.

Module 3: The Written-Text

Program: Word + Wikimedia + Refworks

Week 7 (March 13, 15): Start Your Search Engines – Library Session

This week's lecture will be held in the Fogelman Library, and include a discussion of *the* "killer app" of today and tomorrow: search engines. Framing the meteoric rise of Google, along with its multi-tentacled ambitions, this guest presentation tests the rhetoric of instant and complete information delivered to one's finger-tips. Beginning with Arthur C. Clarke's observation that "looking for information on the Internet is like trying to get a glass of water from the Niagara Falls," this presentation identifies the major debates surrounding sponsored results, rampant plagiarism, dubious source materials, compromised privacy, and other hazards associated with the Google-effect. More practically speaking, it will introduce us to indispensable databases, such as Proquest and Project Muse, as well as citational software, such as Refworks.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Geoffrey Nunberg, "Teaching Students to Swim in the Online Sea"
<http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~nunberg/infolit.html>
2. Richard Rogers, "The Viagra Files," *Information Politics on the Web* (Cambridge: MIT, 2004)
3. Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945
<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/194507/bush>
4. Projective Google video

Lab Assignment:

Read your classmates' blogs, and then make at least one constructive comment; referencing concepts or readings covered so far during the course. ALSO, begin research on your topic by visiting 1) the Wikipedia 2) an offline encyclopedia 3) the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Finally, use Refworks to build a bibliography for your final project, and format your citations (at least five) in both MLA style, then Chicago style. Include both books and articles.

**** Spring Recess: No Classes March 20, 22****

Week 8 (March 27, 29): Wiki-Media

A discussion of the "open source" concept as applied in one of its most spectacular (not to mention controversial) success stories: the Wikipedia. This free encyclopedia rejects the notion of authorized expertise, and rather emphasizes the "collective and distributed intelligence" of the world's proactive netizens. The lecture will look at both sides of the debate concerning certified knowledge; and explore the immense stakes involved when cultural gate-keepers realize that the gates have suddenly and unexpectedly been moved.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Borges, "The Library of Babel"
http://jubal.westnet.com/hyperdiscordia/library_of_babel.html

2. Daniel H. Pink, "The Book Stops Here"
http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.03/wiki_pr.html
3. Brian Lamb, "Wide Open Spaces: Wikis, Ready or Not"
<http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm04/erm0452.asp?bhcp=1>
4. Hacknot, "Wikiphilia: The New Illness"
<http://www.hacknot.info/hacknot/action/showEntry?eid=71>
5. Walter Lang, *Desk Set* (1957)

Lab Assignment:

Continue using the Internet and the library to research your final project. Your proposal is due this week, and should include at least five "legitimate" sources. Reflect and comment on the criteria you have used to justify your source materials, in light of this week's readings; including any difficulties you experienced during your quest. Once this is completed, then begin the mini-assignments designed by the Fogelman staff, as well as the questions asked the Department of Information in *Desk Set*.

Week 9 (April 3, 5): The QWERTY Regime

A discussion of the notion of authorship in the digital age, as well as our continuing reliance on words in a social scene often characterized as primarily image-based. Collaboration, "crowd-sourcing," creative commons, and other manifestations of "hive mind" creativity will be broached in this class, which traces a general line from the hand to the printing press to the World Wide Web.

Reading/Viewing:

1. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," *The Foucault Reader*, Edited by Paul Rabinow (UK: Penguin, 1991)
2. Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (NY: Hill & Wang, 1977)
3. Scott Bukatman, "Gibson's Typewriter," *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* [Mark Dery – Ed.] (Durham: Duke UP, 1994)

Lab Assignment:

In groups of two, workshop your individual topics for the final project, incorporating constructive criticism and research suggestions. Come up with a template for the project proposal, and – when completed accordingly – upload your full proposal to your blog. Remember, this must include a key question and/or *problematique*.

Module 4: The Sound-Text [simulated online]

Program: Splice Music Online

Week 10 (April 10, 12): Hearing – The Subliminal Sense

A discussion of the often “over-looked” sense of hearing, and the ways in which sound is sculpted and manipulated to create its own texture, message, effects, etc. This lecture uses sound in cinema and video-games as a spring-board for a wider discussion concerning the power of the ear to hear – and selectively *not* hear – the most significant aspects of its acoustic environment.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Luigi Russolo, “The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto”
2. R. Murray Schafer “The Music of the Environment”
3. Pierre Schaeffer, “Acousmatics”
4. Henry Cowell, “The Joys of Noise”

[all from Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (eds), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2005)]

5. Arthur Schopenhauer, “On Noise”

<http://www.mgilleland.com/asonnoise.htm>

Lab Assignment:

Practice some “acousmatic listening” in two different environments. Pay attention to “invisible” sounds that we have become accustomed to. As an example, download and listen to the .mp3 “Johnny Kawasaki - MSsong (The Boy Is Saved).mp3” at <http://www.imputor.com/mp3.php>. Your assignment is to create a similar single-track .mp3 at Splice Music.

You can use the samples at Splice Music or at any of the following online resources:

<http://ccmixter.org/>

<http://freesound.iua.upf.edu/>

<http://www.archive.org/index.php>

Make sure that you sign up at Splice Music and include the information on your blog.

Week 11 (April 17, 19): Ripping Yarns – Invasion of the iPod People

A discussion of the radical effects of digital technologies and techniques on the music industry in particular, as well as the wider cultural logic of aesthetic practices. Introducing the concept of “prosumerism,” this lecture questions the ways in which the swapping of MP3 files, and the sampling/mashing of loops from pre-existing tracks, re-orient the individual’s relationship to The Archive of recorded history.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Philip A. Gunderson, “Danger Mouse’s Grey Album, Mash-Ups, and the Age of Composition”

<http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.904/15.1gunderson.txt>

2. Dominic Pettman, "A Break in Transmission: Art, Appropriation and Accumulation," *Avoiding the Subject: Media, Culture and the Object* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004).
3. DJ Food, Raiding the Twentieth Century (MP3 file)
http://www.ubu.com/sound/dj_food.html
4. Andrew Sullivan, "iPod World: The End of Society?" *Times Online*, Feb 20, 2005
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/article516577.ece>

Lab Assignment:

Now that you have become familiar with the Splice synthesizer, your assignment is to create a more complex "mash-up" comprising a minimum of 4 tracks. You are encouraged to explore the resources listed and use a range of audio clips from political speeches, to propaganda, to advertising, to drum loops, and finally sampled sounds. Advanced users are encouraged download the audio freeware MEAPsoft at <http://labrosa.ee.columbia.edu/meapsoft/> to re-segment popular audio tracks and add new samples to the existing database at Splice Music.

Week 12 (April 24, 26): ET Phones Home – Imagined/Rendered Communities

A discussion of the ways in which mobile phones, and Voice-Over-IP programs, connect to the overall story of the telegraph, the telephone, and the virtual intimacy of telepresence in an ever-shrinking world. Particular attention will be paid to the marketing ideal of mobile phones functioning as "remote controls for your entire life," especially as such a goal threatens to undermine established models of public space, local community and (less) alienated forms of communication.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Tom Standage, "The Thrill Electric" and "Wiring the World," *The Victorian Internet* (New York: Berkley, 1999)
2. Sadie Plant, "The Effects of Mobile Phones on Social and Individual Life"
www.motorola.com/mot/doc/0/234_MotDoc.pdf
3. Kate Fox, "Evolution, Alienation and Gossip"
<http://www.sirc.org/publik/gossip.shtml>

Lab Assignment:

Continue to edit and refine the sound file you have been working on at Splice Music from the previous week. Collaborative work is encouraged, and if two or more of you are working simultaneously on the same track, it is recommended to try and design a method of collaboration that is entirely online. In addition to this, listen to at least one podcast, and blog a review in terms of both content and technical competence. How did this podcast differ from a radio broadcast?

Module 5: The Numerical or In-Formative Text

Program: PowerPoint

Week 13 (May 1, 3): Information Architecture

A discussion of the importance of interface design in terms of effective and efficient communication. Visual case-studies will be used in order to highlight fundamental principles of organizing and presenting information using new and multimedia formats. As a result, this lecture will touch on some of the assumptions behind data analysis, and cognitive semiotics.

Readings/Viewings:

1. Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* (extract) + *Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*
2. Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners*
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>
3. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (extract)
4. Aaron Swartz, "Powerpoint: The Remix"
<http://www.aaronsw.com/weblog/000931>
5. W. Bradford Paley's TextArc program
<http://textarc.org/Hamlet.html>

Lab Assignment:

Begin parsing your blog for the essential elements relevant for your final project presentation. Start reflecting on the various options you have to structure and organize your data; then begin importing them into Powerpoint. What differences, if any, are there between the blog and Powerpoint formats?

Week 14 (May 8, 10): Troubleshooting

A group discussion of problems and/or solutions encountered while creating the final multi-media presentation. Students are asked to consider the protocols of effective and efficient knowledge sharing, as well as how to archive, communicate and re-present "tips and tricks." Special emphasis will be placed on non-linear ways of using PPT.

Lab Assignment:

Fine tune final projects for presentation next week.

Week 15 (May 15): Presentation and Feedback Week

This week is dedicated to student Power Point presentations, as well as peer and instructor feedback.