Communication 120/220
Digital Media in Society
Spring Quarter, 2006
Lectures: T/Th 11-12:15, Cubberly 128
Sections TBA

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Course Goals:

The last twenty years have brought us an astonishing array of digital technologies and with them, a bewildering variety of new media forms. Web pages, multi-player online games, CD-ROMs, PDA’s, cell phones – together, many argue, these and other forms of new media technologies are reshaping our understandings of how we live and work and of what it means to be human.

In this class we will explore these claims as we survey contemporary theories of the impact of digital media on the individual, the community and the state. Do digital media fundamentally alter the nature of the human self, as many claim? How do they alter the landscape? Our notions of what it means to be “at home”? The ways we do business? The ways we govern ourselves?

To answer these questions, we’ll explore the dynamics of digital media and at the same time, the ways in which those dynamics shape – and have been shaped by – ongoing processes of social change. By the end of the course, you should have a sense of just what is and isn’t “new” about new media. You should be able to critique and synthesize the ways others have characterized the social impact of digital media. And most important of all, you should have begun to build your own theories of how digital media and social life interact.

Readings:

Required readings are available at the bookstore and on line.

At the Bookstore, you should buy:


**Course Reader**

*Recommended readings* are just that: recommended. I’ve listed them here as a way for you to dig deeper into topics that interest you.

**Assignments:**

Please note that the assignments for Communication 120 (Undergraduate students) and Communication 220 (Graduate students) are somewhat different.

**Communication 120 (Undergraduates):**

**Response Papers:**

You will be asked to write two “response” papers of 2-2 ½ double-spaced pages (700-750 words). In these papers, you will draw on the course readings and discussions to craft a brief, focused argument in response to an assigned statement. For instance, you might be asked to respond to the statement: “Cyberspace is an open stage for identity play.” You could then agree with the statement, disagree with it, or take a position in the middle. Your position would need to be well-supported and would need to take account of opposing points of view. What will determine your grade will not be the position you take so much as the sophistication and rigor with which you support it.

First Response Paper First Draft Due: At the start of class, **April 27**.

First Response Paper Final Draft Due: **May 11**.

Second Response Paper First Draft (optional) Due: to your TA by **May 18**.

Second Response Paper Final Draft Due: At the start of class, **May 25**.
Presentations:

As a way to focus discussion and give you practice applying some of the theories we explore in class to various media, section meetings will feature a 15-minute presentation by a student team. The teams will choose a digital media artifact, introduce it, and use it to support and/or challenge theories from that week’s readings. Teams will also produce a 2-3 page written summary of their presentation.

You will sign up for teams and dates in the second week of class. Presentations will begin in week three. Every member of the team will receive the same grade.

Final Paper:

You will be asked to choose among several possible topics and write an essay of approximately 8-10 double-spaced pages (2400-3000 words). The questions will ask you to synthesize course readings and link them to issues and/or artifacts we have discussed in class.

Due Date: TBA (exam week)

Expectations:

Participation:

While formally a lecture course, our class meetings will in fact be quite interactive. You’ll need to come to both lecture and section with the reading done and with the ability to participate in a class discussion.

To participate effectively, you should aim to speak in a way that moves a discussion forward and increases the learning for the whole group. Contributions can include questions, insights, and responses to other comments. They can also include provocative mistakes. Being “wrong” but intellectually adventurous can often help jump-start everyone’s thinking. One powerful comment or question is worth more than many less powerful remarks.

Writing:

Your writing needs to come in on time and should represent your best work at every level. Papers that come in late or with errors of fact, grammar or spelling will be penalized. As ever, the Honor Code applies to all your work.

Grades:

Presentation = 10%

Participation = 10%
First Draft of First Response Paper = 10%
Final Draft of First Response Paper = 15%
Second Response Paper (only final draft graded) = 20%
Final Paper = 35%

**Communication 220 (Graduate Students):**

**Assignments:**

**Response Papers:**

You will be asked to write two “response” papers of 5-8 double-spaced pages (1500-2400 words). In these papers, you will draw on the course readings (including the recommended readings), class discussions, and where appropriate, your knowledge of digital media, to craft a focused argument in response to an assigned statement. For instance, you might be asked to respond to the statement: “Cyberspace is an open stage for identity play.” You could then agree with the statement, disagree with it, or take a position in the middle. Your position would need to be well-supported and would need to take account of opposing points of view. What will determine your grade will not be the position you take so much as the sophistication and rigor with which you support it.

First Response Paper due: At the start of class, May 11.
Second Response Paper due: At the start of class, May 25.

**Final Paper:**

You will be asked to choose among several possible topics and write an essay of approximately 8-10 double-spaced pages (2400-3000 words). The questions will ask you to synthesize course readings and link them to issues and/or artifacts we have discussed in class.

Due Date: TBA

**Discussion Sections:**

Optional. You will not be required to give a presentation, even if you decide to attend section.

**Grades:**

Participation = 10%
Response Paper 1 = 25%
Response Paper 2 = 25%
Final Paper = 40%

Course Schedule:

Note: This schedule is subject to change.

Part 1: What Are Digital Media and How Do They Matter?

Tuesday, April 4: Introductions
No Readings

Thursday, April 6: What ARE digital media?

Required readings:


Recommended Readings:


Key Questions: How are digital media different from other media? How are different digital media artifacts similar to one another?

Tuesday, April 11: Connecting Cyberspace and Social Space: Industrialism and Cold War Computing

Required Readings:

• Norbert Wiener, “Cybernetics in history,” The Human Use of Human Beings, Ch.1 (reader)

Recommended Readings:


Key Question: How were conceptions of computing related to conceptions of social and psychological order during the Cold War?

Thursday, April 13: Connecting Cyberspace and Social Space: Postindustrialism and Networked Computing

Required Readings:

• William Gibson, Neuromancer

Recommended Readings:


Key Question: How have visions of computing and social order changed since the Cold War? And why?

Part 2 Digital Media and the Self: New Bodies, New Minds?

Tuesday, April 18: Digital Bodies

Note: Team Presentations Begin

Required Readings:

• John Perry Barlow, “Being in Nothingness”
  http://www.eff.org/Publications/John_Perry_Barlow/HTML/being_in_nothingness.html
• Sherry Turkle, “Who Am We?” Online at:
  http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.01/turkle.html

Recommended Readings:


Key Question: How do digital media disrupt “modern” categories of “the body” and “the self”

Thursday, April 20: Cyborgism and Gender: Liberating Women?

Required Readings:

  http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html

Recommended Readings:

• Judith Squires “Fabulous feminist futures and the lure of cyberculture” in Bell, Cybercultures Reader
• Chela Sandoval “New sciences: cyborg feminism and the methodology of the oppressed” in Bell, Cybercultures Reader

Key Question: Do digital media challenge the modern category of femininity?
Tuesday, April 25: Cyborgism and Gender: Enlisting Men?

Required Readings:


Other Requirements:

- Download and play around with “Army Operations” from http://www.americasarmy.com

Recommended Readings:


Key Question: Do digital media challenge the modern category of masculinity?

Thursday, April 27: Virtuality and the Performing Self

Due: Draft of First Response Paper

Required Readings:

- Julian Dibbel, “A Rape in Cyberspace; or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society” on line at: http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle.html.
Recommended Readings:

- Sherry Turkle, “What are we thinking about when we think about computers?” Online at: http://web.mit.edu/sturkle/www/routledge_reader.html

Key Questions: How do digital media shape the performance of “self”? Who or what has “agency”?

Tuesday, May 2: Virtuality and Race

Required Readings:

- Lisa Nakamura, Cybertypes, chapters 1, 2, 5, and conclusion.

Recommended Readings:


Key questions: How does “race” shape on-line experience? How do various on-line experiences shape our ideas of race?

Thursday, May 4: Virtuality as Ideology

Required Readings:

- Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, “Code Warriors,” on line at http://www.t0.or.at/0ntext/warriors.htm
- Ellen Ullman, Close to The Machine

Recommended Readings:


Key Question: How should we think about the relationship between the ways we experience digital technologies and the nature of the industries that produce them?

Tuesday, May 9: No Class. Work on rewrites with TAs.
Part 3: Place, Community and State: Where Are We and What Are We Doing Here?

Thursday, May 11: Landscapes of Information: the World Wide Web and the Post-Modern Metropolis

Due: Final Draft of First Response Paper

Required Readings:

- Manuel Castells, “The Space of Flows,” Ch. 6 of The Rise of Network Society
- David Morely, “Media, Mobility and Migrancy,” Ch. 7 of Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity

Key Questions: How can we understand the relationship between material place and digital media? How do identity, media and place interact?

Tuesday, May 16: Locating Virtual Communities

Required Readings:

- Susan Leigh Star, “From Hestia to Home Page” in Bell, Cybertculures Reader, 632-643 (reader)

Recommended Readings:


**Key Questions**: What are “virtual communities” and how do they connect to “material” communities?

**Thursday, May 18**: Game Worlds

**Last Day to Review Optional Draft of Second Paper**

**Required Reading**:

- Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*, Chapters 1, 2, 6-11

Guest Lecture by Nick Yee, Ph.D. candidate and gaming researcher

**Key Questions**: What are MMORPGs and how do they matter?

**Tuesday, May 23**: Governing the Virtual State

**Required Readings**:


**Recommended Readings**:

- Ananda Mitra, “Virtual Commonality: Looking for India on the Internet” in Bell

*Key Question:* How can “cyberspace” be governed? And how does the nature of cyberspace shape the organization of political power in the material world?

**Thursday, May 25:** Digital Economics: Networks of Production

**Final Draft of Second Paper Due**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**

- Eric Raymond, “Homesteading the Noosphere,” *firstmonday* 3 (10): http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_10/raymond/
- Free Software Foundation web site: http://www.fsf.org/

*Key question:* What is a network form of production and what roles do digital media play in one?

**Tuesday, May 30:** Digital Economics: Digital Media and the Politics of Distribution

**Required Readings:**

- John Perry Barlow, “The economy of ideas: a framework for rethinking patents and copyrights in the digital age (everything you know about
intellectual copyright is wrong).” *Wired* 2.03 March, 1994: 84-90, 126-129. Online at: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/2.03/economy.ideas_pr.html


**Recommended Readings:**

- Richard Stallman’s GNU Public License, online at: http://www.fsf.org/licenses/gpl.html

**Key Question:** How does the nature of digital media shape how they can be distributed and regulated?

**Thursday, June 1:** Digital Economics: Consuming as Producing

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**

- The Cookie Web Sites: http://www.cookiecentral.com

**Key Questions:** How do the production of identities and communities with digital media create economic value? And for whom?
Tuesday, June 6: The Future: Constant Mutual Surveillance?

Required Reading:

Key question: How will the increasing mobility, ubiquity and integration of digital media shape the trends we’ve tracked so far in the course? If digital media and networked forms of social life are coevolving, where are they likely to lead us?