New York University
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
Topics in Digital Media: Digital Media & Materiality

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MCC-GE 2133
Classroom location TBD
Wed 11:00 AM – 1:10 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Part reaction to the hyped “immateriality” of the internet and part reaction to the textual approaches of cultural media studies, there has been a recent emergence of research on the materiality of media and communication. This work, at times grouped under the “new materialisms,” has extended from research in material culture to media archaeologies inspired by German media theory, and from studies of media infrastructure to cultural geographies of ubiquitous computing. This seminar will introduce students with the range of recent materialist research, while at the same time maintaining a skepticism about claims of the “newness” of this approach and the coherence or unity of the “material turn” in social theory. While including materialist media theory, the course will also focus on the elemental aspects of digital media – from codes and circuits to power generation and storage – in order to assess the usefulness of materialist and infrastructural analytics for understanding contemporary media systems.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
After completing this course, students will be able to effectively:
• Identify what materiality means in critical terms for the study of digital media
• Compare materialist theory across various aspects of digital media formats, infrastructure, software and storage
• Evaluate the effects of digitizing material culture and assess the materiality of digital transmission
• Synthesize the media ecology of the digital realm in terms of the politics of space, labor, economy, waste, etc.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Internet Infrastructure Industry Resources
Telecom Ramblings: http://www.telecomramblings.com/
Telegeography: http://www.telegeography.com/
Network World: http://www.networkworld.com/
Data Center Map: http://www.datacentermap.com/
Submarine Cable Networks: http://submarinenetworks.com/
ASSIGNMENTS
Participation will be based on attendance, diligent reading, and active participation in all class discussions. Students will be asked to write one midterm paper (10 – 15 pages) deconstructing arguments of materiality/immateriality on a topic of their choice in media and communication. They will also be responsible for completing a final paper (20 pages) that fleshes out the media ecology of a particular digital media environment or technology using the “new materialism” arguments and citing specific evidence of social change. Detailed instructions be provided to students in class for both required assignments.

Evaluation
Participation: 20%
Midterm Paper (Week 7): 30%
Final Paper (Week 14): 50%

Evaluation Rubric
A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B= Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C= Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F= Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A  = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B  = 84-86
B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C  = 74-76
C- = 70-73
D+ = 65-69
D  = 60-64
F  = 0-59

COURSE POLICIES
Absences and Lateness
Attendance is mandatory. More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for rescheduling exams. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

Format
Please type and double-space your written work. Typing improves the clarity and readability of your work and double-spacing allows room for me to comment. Please also number and staple multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing. If sending a document electronically, please name the file in the following format Yourlastname Coursenumber Assignment1.doc

Grade Appeals
Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

General Decorum
Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity
The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.
Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you
- cheat on an exam,
- submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
- receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
- plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following:
- copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
- download documents from the Internet;
- purchase documents;
- report from other’s oral work;
- paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
- copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people's ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty
- Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
• Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged.
• Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
• Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
• Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

Disciplinary Sanctions
When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline.

The Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with the New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.

Student Resources
• Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

• Writing Center: 411 Lafayette, 4th Floor. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

Schedule of Classes, Readings and Assignments

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Materialisms (New, Historical, Digital)


**Week 3: Infrastructural Encounters**  

Shannon Mattern, “Infrastructural Tourism.”  
[http://www.wordsinspace.net/wordpress/2012/07/20/infrastructural-tourism/](http://www.wordsinspace.net/wordpress/2012/07/20/infrastructural-tourism/)

**Week 4: Digitizing Material Culture**  
Readings: Daniel Miller, “Materiality: An Introduction”  
[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic_staff/d_miller/mil-8](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic_staff/d_miller/mil-8)

Haidy Geismar, “Digital + Museum = ?”


**Week 5: The Materiality of Transmission**  


**Week 6: The Materiality of Software**


**Week 7: The Materiality of Storage**


**Week 8: Electrical and Optical Power**


**Week 9: Media Ecologies and Digital Objects**


Week 10: Labor and Maintenance


Selections from *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz

Week 11: Materials


Week 12: Digital Disposal


Screening: *Exporting Harm: The High Tech Trashing of Asia*

Week 13: Materialist Experience and Everyday Space


**Week 14: Paper Presentations**