

Media, Culture & Communication
Topics in Digital Media
E58.2130
Thursday 4:55 - 7:05 pm
25 West 4th St., room C-17
Dr. Aram Sinnreich
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Description

This course examines the role of new communication technologies – especially digital media and the Internet – in transforming our cultural, economic, political, ethical and epistemological systems. Specific areas we will cover include cultural antecedents to the digital revolution, the Internet economy, hacking, gaming, intellectual property, and “configurable” culture, such as remixes, mash-ups and modding.

Class will be conducted as a seminar. Students will be responsible for leading discussions on the readings, and are encouraged to critically engage the readings and class conversations.

Methods of Evaluation

Attendance and Participation 30%
Because this class is a graduate seminar, attendance and participation are of paramount importance: they are the best way to demonstrate what you have been learning as well as fine tune your ideas in dialogue with your classmates. This means regular and prompt attendance, coming to class having done the work, speaking when you have something to say, and listening respectfully when you don't. An excess of three absences over the course of the semester will negatively impact your grade.

Reading Presentations 15%
Each text we read will be presented to the class by a student. This means that each student will be responsible for several reading presentations over the course of the semester. Please come equipped with notes/synopses on paper, to hand out to your classmates.

Reading Blog 15%
Prior to each class meeting, you should post 1-2 paragraphs to the reading blog (<http://nyutopics08.blogspot.com/>), asking questions or making observations about the readings and/or class discussions thereof. These will be due by the night before class. They will be used frequently to guide our discussions. These assignments are not graded individually, and you cannot make them up.

Final Paper and Presentation 40%

The final paper, due on December 15, will be 15-20 pages (or 5,000-6,000 words). You will be responsible for generating your own paper topic, related to our readings and class discussions. However, I will be available to consult on the paper topic, and to evaluate early drafts. Your final presentation, which will last roughly 10 minutes during the last two weeks of class, will be based upon an early draft of your final paper. Part of your presentation grade is the active participation (questions, respectful listening, attendance) in the presentations of others.

Written Work

All submitted work must be typed, double spaced, and paginated in 12-point Times New Roman font, and submitted digitally, to my email address, in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or OpenOffice format. The student's name, date, and essay title should appear on the first page, and pages should be numbered. Consult the American Psychological Association (APA) formal style manual or Chicago Manual of Style for proper citation and quotation formatting.

Online and encyclopedic sources such as Wikipedia are excellent starting points for your research. They offer a valuable overview of specific subjects, and link to vital primary and secondary sources for your work. However, ***you are not permitted to quote or cite the Wikipedia pages themselves*** as references in your work.

Free writing help is available through the Writing Center, 269 Mercer Street, 2nd Floor. The telephone number is: (212) 998-8866.

Plagiarism

Regardless of the cultural value of “creative reappropriation,” academic plagiarism is a serious offense. If you do it, in any form, you will fail the entire course. Just to be clear, this includes every unacknowledged use of materials written by others (even sentences or obvious paraphrases without quotes). Please see the University’s guidelines for further information on this matter.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be marked down one letter grade for every day they are overdue. If you think you are going to be late with an assignment, you must notify me before the assignment is due (and this does not mean an email an hour before class). Please respect yourself and me. Lame excuses and lying will not be tolerated.

Students With Disabilities

Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980, 240 Greene Street, <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Evaluation

A=Excellent

Outstanding work in all respects. This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Includes skillful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and no grammar/typing errors.

B=Good

This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials, examples, illustrations, are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Paper has been carefully proofread.

C=Adequate/Fair

This work demonstrates understanding that hits in the ballpark, but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expresses some significant errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing/articulation may appear vague, hard to follow, or loaded with typos and other technical errors.

D=Unsatisfactory

This work demonstrates a serious lack or error in understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient.

F=Failed

Work not submitted or attempted.

Plus (+) or minus (-) grades indicate your range within the aforementioned grades. In other words, B+ means very good.

A = 94-100

B+ = 87-89

C+= 77-79

D+ = 67-69

A- = 90-93

B = 84-86

C = 74-76

B- = 80-83

C- = 70-73

Texts:

Most of the texts on our syllabus are available freely on the Internet. Some of the other short texts will be emailed to you in PDF format, a week prior to the class discussion. Additionally, The following books will be read in their entirety. While they are not available at the NYU bookstore, they can easily be purchased online. Please purchase them as quickly as possible, to avoid last-minute delays.

- Thomas, D. (2002). *Hacker Culture*.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture*.

Schedule:

The following is a “working schedule.” Class materials are subject to change based on the interests, understanding, and general pace of the class. It is your responsibility to keep on top of any schedule changes, whether you are in class or not. If you have a concern about any of the materials, please speak to me.

September 4: Introduction

I. Visions of the Digital Future

September 11: Utopia

- [Bush, V. \(1945\). As we may think. *The Atlantic*.](#)
- [Nelson, T. \(1974\). *Computer lib/dream machines*. \[excerpt\]](#)
- [Rifkin, J. \(1995\). A view of the future. *Utne Reader*.](#)
- Negroponte, N. (1996). *Being Digital, Part 3* [pp. 163-233]

September 18: Dystopia

- [Borges, J. L. \(1941\). *The library of Babel*.](#)
- [Baudrillard, J. \(1988\). *Simulation and Simulacra* \[excerpt\]](#)
- Slouka, M. (1996). *War of the worlds*. [chap 1]
- [Brin, D. \(1998\). *The transparent society*.](#)

II. Hackers and Gamers

September 25:

- Thomas, D. *Hacker Culture*

October 2:

Guest speaker: Biella Coleman

- [Coleman & Golub \(2008\). *Hacker practice: Moral genres and the cultural articulation of liberalism*](#)
- [Stallman, R. GNU manifesto](#)
- Kelty, C. (2008). Inventing copyleft.
- 2600 editorial tk

October 9:

- [Turkle, S. \(1984\). *Video Games and Computer Holding Power*](#)
- [Doctorow, C. \(2004\) *Anda's Game*](#)
- Dibble, J. (2008). [Mutilated Furies, Flying Phalluses: Put the Blame on Grieferers, the Sociopaths of the Virtual World. *Wired*.](#)
- Pendragon, H. (2008) [Grieferers: Why Dibble's Wired Article Was 1-Sided.](#)

III. dot-com and Web 2.0

October 16: Dot-com and the “new” economy

Guest speaker: Gene DeRose (tentative)

- [Dyson, E. \(1995\). Intellectual value. *Wired*.](#)
- Sinnreich, A. (2001). Remixing the Distribution Chain for Digital Music. Jupiter Research.
- [Meeker, M. \(1995\). *The Internet Report*. Morgan Stanley. \[Read part 1. The rest is skimmable\].](#)
- [CNET, Top 10 dot-com flops](#)

October 23: Social Networks and Web 2.0

Movie: Startup.com

- [O'Reilly, T. \(2005\). What is Web 2.0?](#)
- [Anderson, C. \(2004\). The Long Tail. *Wired*.](#)
- [Schiff, S. \(2006\). Know it all. *The New Yorker*.](#)
- [boyd, d. \(2007\). Viewing American class divisions through Facebook and MySpace.](#)

IV. Governance and Policy

October 30: Content

- [Lessig, L. \(2004\). *Free Culture*.](#)

November 6: Access and privacy

Guest speaker: Andrew Rasiej (tentative)

- [Wu, T. \(2005\). Network neutrality, broadband discrimination.](#)
- [Cohen, E. \(2008\). The end of privacy. *Truthdig*.](#)
- [Ginsburg, F. \(2005\). Rethinking the digital age.](#)

V. Mixing and Mashing

November 13:

- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture*

November 20:

- [Sinnreich, A. \(2007\). *Configurable Culture*](#)

November 27: THANKSGIVING

December 4: Presentations

December 11: Presentations

December 15: Final Paper Due