

Spring, 2012

CUSS 5120: Topics in Cultural Representation and Interpretation

Professor Anne Balsamo
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Class Location: SO 102
Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursday: 7-10 pm

This course investigates the role that culture plays in the design of innovative technologies and new media experiences. The relationship between design and culture will be explored with reference to innovations that take shape in two national contexts: The United States and China.

The course will begin with an overview presentation of a cultural theory of technology as a context for a more in-depth discussion of an approach that I refer to as “A Reproductive Theory of Technology” that draws insights from critical cultural studies and feminist philosophies of science. This approach develops an anti-essentialist theory of technology adequate to the digital age that can serve as a conceptual and critical framework for the development of a critical and cultivated technological imagination.

Class discussions will explore the relationship between innovation and culture in two national contexts to explore the distinctions among innovation, invention and creativity, models of socio-cultural change, and the dynamics of techno-human agency.

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Be able to articulate a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between technology and culture;
- 2) Articulate a critical framework for studying emergent cultural formations using methods of conjunctural analysis;
- 3) Produce a work of media-rich scholarship;
- 4) Assemble a personal toolkit of digital research tools;
- 5) Participate in a digital research production environment for collaborative research.

Required Texts:

Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work, Anne Balsamo (Duke UP, 2011)

Academic Integrity: Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations.

Required Course Activities:

Participation & Attendance (10%): Students are expected to attend all classes and outside meetings and to arrive at class prepared and ready to participate. Absences will affect your grade. Assignments are due on time; late assignments will not be accepted.

Pecha Kucha (20%): Each student will make ONE brief individual presentation in class on an assigned topic in the form of a Pecha Kucha. This presentation will give you an opportunity to introduce your interests and critical commitments to other class participants. The requirements for the Pecha Kucha will be discussed in class.

Mid-Term Powerpoint Presentation (30%): By the middle of the term, each student will prepare a powerpoint presentation that demonstrates how to do an applied work of cultural analysis.

Collaborative Multimedia Research Document (40%): By the FINAL week of the course, students will complete a collaborative multimedia document on research topic to be determined through class discussions.

2012 COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: INTRODUCTION

January 31: Course Introduction and Student Introductions

A Creative Inventory of the Expertise in the Room

What do you Know? Where do you Stand? What do you Care about?

A PRE-FLIGHT Assessment

READING ASSIGNMENT for Feb 2: Slack and Wise, Chapter 1

February 2: An Introduction to Culture and Technology (lecture)

READING ASSIGNMENT for Feb 7: Balsamo, *Designing Culture*, Introduction

Week 2: Designing Culture

February 7: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding the Relationship between Culture and Innovation (lecture/discussion)

OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Reading the Interactive City

February 9: NO CLASS—Out-of-Class Documentation Activity

Week 3: Studying Emergent Interactive Cultures

February 14: Interactive Hong Kong

Presentations by Students of Interactive Experiences

READING ASSIGNMENT for Feb 17: Balsamo, *Designing Culture*, Chapter 2

February 16: Designing Communication (Reading, Writing, Watching)
(lecture/Discussion)

READING ASSIGNMENT for Feb 21: Balsamo, *Designing Culture*, Chapter 3

Week 4: The Technological Imagination at Work

February 21: Public Interactives and the Design of Technological Literacies
(lecture/discussion)

MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT:

Part 1: Pecha Kucha

Part 2: MID-TERM Assignment

February 23: POSSIBLE FIELD TRIP

Week 5:

February 28: Designing Culture: The Case of Hong Kong
Midterm Part 1: Student Pecha Kuchas

March 1: Designing Culture: The Case of Hong Kong
Midterm Part 2: Presentations on Applied Analysis Projects

Week 6: *How to Do Cultural Studies: On Design*

March 6: Introduction to Conjunctural Analysis (Lecture/Discussion)

March 8: Design of a Collaborative Research Project
ASSIGNMENT: Setting up the Infrastructure

Week 7: *Making Sense of Collaborative Research*

March 13: Media Affordances and Scholarship

March 15: Collating Research Findings

Week 8: *Course Conclusion*

March 20: Cross-cultural comparison of Emergent Cultural Formations

March 22: Class wrap-up and final critiques

