

# **Comm 340**

## **Cultures of New Media**

### **Spring Semester 2009**

Professor Anne Balsamo  
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Office: School of Cinematic Arts new building TBA  
Office Hours: Tuesday Noon – 1:30 pm

Course Location  
Annenberg School of Communication G64  
Tuesday, 2:00 – 4:50 pm

#### **Course Description:**

This course provides an introduction to the theoretical foundations for the study of new media technologies as cultural phenomena. The course is framed by a cultural studies approach to the study of technology. We will discuss basic concepts that inform the development of insightful cultural analyses. The course begins with an overview of a philosophy of technology, with special emphasis on the role of new media technologies in the reproduction of culture. Students will investigate a range of contemporary new media technologies using the frameworks of analysis discussed in the course. One of the key topics addressed is the issue of participation in technological cultures, especially those that involve the creative making of new technologies. The broad aim of this course is to provide students with a foundation for their future encounters with new media, both as producers and consumers of these new cultural forms.

#### **Academic Integrity**

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the Campus Guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor. See section 11 of Scampus.

#### **Students with Disabilities and Academic Accommodations**

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to Professor Balsamo as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776. For additional information, see the Web page of the Disabilities Services Program in SCAMPUS.

## Required Textbooks:

Slack, Jennifer Daryl and J. Macgregor Wise. *Culture and Technology* (New York: Peter Lang publishers, 2005).

DuGay, Paul, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah and Nick Montfort, ed. *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

Fraunfelder, Mark, ed. *Best of Make* (Make Books, 2007)

## Required Film:

*Bladerunner* (Ridley Scott, 1985)

## General Course Requirements and Expectations:

While I am an avid multi-tasker myself, I expect your attention to focus on class discussion. Each session, one student will be designated the Google Jockey for the day. If you bring a laptop to class, you may be asked to serve as the web archeologist for that day.

I expect assignments to be turned in on the due date. I will respond to email questions, but I cannot guarantee how long it will take. So if you have questions about assignments, ask them early....this means you must pay attention to your assignments well before the due date. Do not wait until the last minute, because I will not be able to respond to your questions at the last minute.

## Grade Requirements:

Technology Investigations (#1, 2, and 3)	30%
Group Project:	30%
Presentation: 10%	
Research Paper: 20%	
2 Exams: 2@20%	40%

## Group Project Topics

You will be assigned to a group to work on a research paper and class presentation on one of the following topics. This will require you to do library research on a topic, and work collaboratively on organizing both a research paper and an oral presentation. Expect that you will have to read additional material not originally assigned as course material, such as other science fiction novels, or films.

- Game Your Life: Game Modding Cultures
- Democracy On-Line and Cyberactivism
- The Social Life of Avatars
- The History of Tinkering: Gender, Race, Class, Geography
- Robot Wars among the Roombas
- Ways of the Hand: Makers Culture in a Digital Age

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Course Outline</b>
1/13/09	<p><b>Course Introduction</b></p> <p><b>Section 1: Introduction to Cultural Studies of Technology</b></p>
1/20/09	<p><b>Key Concepts of a Framework of Analysis</b></p> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication as Culture</li> <li>Levels of Discourse</li> <li>Theories of Interpretation: Meanings and Practices</li> <li>Issues of Representation: Signifying practices</li> </ul> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Slack and Wise, <i>Culture and Technology</i>: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 8</p>
1/27/09	<p><b>A Cultural Studies Approach to Technological Culture</b></p> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic frameworks and disciplinary research questions</li> <li>The relationship between theory and research</li> <li>Theories of Technology</li> <li>Technological Formations</li> </ul> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Slack and Wise, <i>Culture and Technology</i>: Chapters 3, 4, 9, 10, 11</p>
2/03/09	<p><b>Doing Cultural Studies of Technology</b></p> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methods of Analysis</li> </ul> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>DuGay, et. al. <i>Doing Cultural Studies</i>: Introduction, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4</p>
2/10/09	<p><b>The Dance between Consumption and Regulation</b></p> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contextualizing Technology</li> <li>Reading Technology Critically</li> <li>Identity</li> <li>Globalization</li> </ul> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>DuGay, et. al. <i>Doing Cultural Studies</i>: Sections 5 and 6</p> <p>Slack and Wise, <i>Culture and Technology</i>: Chapters 12, 13, 15, 16</p> <p><u>Technological Investigation:</u></p> <p><i>Decoding, Recoding: Myth making in contemporary advertising</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create your own analysis of a particular new technology</li> </ul>

## **Section 2: New Media as Technologies of Culture**

**2/17/09**

### **Theories of Media: Old, New and Otherwise**

Topics:

History of Communication Technologies

McLuhan's Framework of Analysis for Reading Technologies

Readings:

Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*: Chpts 13, 18, 19, 20

McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (selections)

**2/24/09**

### **Reading and Writing Culture**

Topics:

From Hypertext to Hypermedia

Multimedia

Multimodal

Electronic Literature

Literary Machines

Readings:

Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*: Chpts 1, 2, 5, 12, 21,27, 30, 47

Technological Investigation:

*The Aesthetics of Electronic Literature: Learning How to Read Again*

- Reading/Analyzing an Electronic Text

**3/03/09**

### **Media Literacies and Technologies of Literacy**

Topics:

Architects of the Future

Evocative Knowledge Objects

The Technological Imagination

Readings:

Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*: Chpts 14,15,16,12,41,48. 49

Technological Investigation:

*Experiments in the Future of Reading*

- Blog Posts

**3/10/09**

### **MID-TERM EXAM**

**3/17/09**

### **Spring Break**

3/24/09      **An Interlude**  
Film Screening:  
*Bladerunner*

3/31/09      **Cyberpunk: A Techno-Cultural Formation**  
Topics:  
    Postmodernism: Pastiche, Remix, Mash-up  
    Post-Futurism: Cyberpunk, Postmodern Fictions, Virtualities  
    Digital Humanism: Cyborgs, Robots, and the Post-Human  
    The Cultural Logic of Postmodernity

### **Section 3: Creative Participation in the Making of Digital Culture**

4/07/09      **Life in a Network Culture**  
Topics:  
    From the Counterculture to Hacker Culture  
    Democracy On-Line  
    Life on the Screen  
    Culture Jamming

Readings:  
Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*: Chpts 34, 43, 46, 51, 53, 54

4/14/09      **DIY**  
Topics:  
    Tinkering and Maker's Culture  
    Paradigms of Innovation: Learning from the Bees and Ants  
    Culture and Materiality in a Digital Age  
    Making the Future, Hacking the present

Readings:  
Frauenfelder, *The Best of Make* (selected chapters TBD)  
Research on Group Project Topic

4/21/09      **Group Presentations**  
  
Technological Investigation:  
Participatory Techno-Cultures  
• Group Project Presentations

4/28/09      **Wrap-Up: Designing Culture: Architecting the Future**

**Thursday May 7: 2-4 pm**

**FINAL EXAM**

