Topics in New Media and New Media Theory
Proposed introductory or mid-level undergraduate lecture course (survey style)
Designed around a 15-week semester; not yet taught

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course presents a survey of some of the major issues in new media studies and new media theory, with a strong focus on the place of technological change on cinema and neighboring moving-image media such as videogames and internet-based video. How has the evidential status of photography shifted in the digital era? How have audiences' and theorists' conceptions of cinema evolved as it is moved from a photographic medium to one distributed via digital means, and increasingly dominated by computer animation? How have digital technologies impacted both film production and distribution? What has their impact on fan cultures been? Now that the utopian rhetoric that positioned social media such as Twitter as an emancipatory political tool has cooled, how can we analyze the effects it has had on the reception of popular culture, and in particular the migration of political critique of culture from the academy to the internet? What is the future of the analysis and critique of popular culture in an era filled with disruptive technologies, precarious employment for critics of all stripes, and the emergence of the crowdfunding model as an alternative to traditional publishing? These are among the major issues that will animate this class, which will blend the academic voices of figures such as Marshall McLuhan, Laura Mulvey, Henry Jenkins, Janet Murray, and Ian Bogost with contemporary essayists working on the edges of academia and on the front lines of new models of criticism.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All course reading materials will be posted online, but students are required to purchase one game: *Gone Home* (The Fullbright Company, USA, 2013). Available for Windows, Mac & Linux for $19.99 via GOG.com (DRM free), The Humble Store (DRM free), or Steam.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

1) Attendance and participation. Unexcused absences at 2 or more class sessions will significantly lower your final grade. (20% of final grade)
2) Participation in the course discussion board, in the form of at least ten posted reflections on readings, films, and/or games. For more details on this and all other assignments, see assignment descriptions below (30% of final grade).
3) One analytical blog post, a written analysis with visual accompaniment (this can be frame grabs, analytical video essay portion, etc.), due Week 7 (20% of final grade)
4) One collaborative analytical group project (the default form for this will be a video essay, though its exact form will be negotiable, as I encourage creativity here) (30% of final grade)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Premonitions
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (1909)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, selections (pp 24–35) (1962)

Week 2 – Digital photography: from new forms of skepticism to new forms of evidence
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Anne-Marie Willis, "Digitization and the Living Death of Photography" (1990)

Home Viewing Assignment for Class Meeting 2:
Standard Operating Procedure (Errol Morris, USA, 2008, 116 min)

Week 3 – Post-photographic cinema: computer-generated animation and special effects
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Dai Vaughn, "From Today, Cinema Is Dead" (1994), Lev Manovich, "What Is Digital Cinema?" (1999)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Stephen Prince, "Painting with Digital Light," in *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (2011)

Week 4 – Production disruption: technology and the shifting aesthetics of low-budget cinema
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Holly Willis, "Introduction: Exploding Cinema," in *New Digital Cinema: Reinventing the Moving Image* (2005)

Home Viewing Assignment for Class Meeting 2:
Tangerine (Sean Baker, USA, 2015, 88 min)

Week 5 – Distribution revolution: From fetish objects to the cloud
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text" (1971)
Laura Mulvey, "Passing Time," in *Death 24x a Second* (2006)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Kristin Thompson, "The Celestial Multiplex" (2007)
Chuck Tryon, "Introduction: On-Demand Culture," in *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies* (2013)
Jan-Christopher Horak, "The Gap Between 1 and 0: Digital Video and the Omissions of Film History" (2007)

Week 6 – Contemporary video distribution meets contemporary moving-image aesthetics
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Michael Curtin, Jennfier Holt, and Kevin Samson, "Introduction: Making of a Revolution," and
      "Interview: Ted Sarandos, Chief Content Officer, Netflix" in *Distribution Revolution:*
      Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television (2014)

The class will be split into two groups for readings & viewing assignments this week:

Reading and Home Viewing Assignment for Class Meeting 2, Group 1:
Noah (Walter Woodman and Patrick Cederberg, Canada, 2013, 17 min)
Paranormal Activity (Oren Peli, USA, 2009, 97 min)
Cætlin Benson-Allott, "*Paranormal* Spectatorship: Faux Footage Horror and the P2P Spectator," in
      Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing (2013)

Reading and Home Viewing Assignment for Class Meeting 2, Group 2:
Noah (Walter Woodman and Patrick Cederberg, Canada, 2013, 17 min)
Cabin in the Woods (Drew Goddard, USA, 2012, 95 min)
Kartik Nair, "Blood, Sweat and Tears: Monstrosity and Materiality on the Cinematic Stream" (2014)

Week 7 – Digital fan cultures
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Abigail de Kosnik, selections from *Rogue Memory: Archives and Repertoires of Digital Culture* (2015)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Sarah Gwenllian Jones, "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters" (2002)
ANALYTICAL BLOG POST DUE

Week 8 – The Internet as unsafe space
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Kathy Sierra, "Trouble at the Koolaid Point" (2014)
Whitney Phillips, "Dicks Everywhere: The Cultural Logics of Trolling," in *This Is Why We Can't Have*
      Nice Things (2015)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
always_black, "Bow N*****" (2004)
Lisa Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player: Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in *World of*
      Warcraft" (2009)

Week 9 – Political critique in the age of social media
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Molly Haskel, "The Big Lie," in *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* (1974)
      (excerpts from chapter)
Joshua Rothman, "In Facebook's Courtroom" (2014)
Alyssa Rosenberg, "How We Talk About Politics Is Infecting How We Talk About Culture" (2014)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Jen Yamato, "*The Avengers*' Black Widow Problem: How Marvel Slut-Shamed Their Most Badass Superheroine" (2015)
Aaron Clarey, "Why You Should Not Go See *Mad Max: Feminist Road*" (2015)

Week 10 – Gaming: Narrative possibilities and spatial storytelling
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Janet H. Murray, "Agency," in *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1997) (excerpts from chapter), Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (2004)

Home Playing Assignment for Class Meeting 2:
Gone Home (The Fullbright Company, USA, 2013 – available for Windows, Mac & Linux)
GROUPS FOR COLLABORATIVE FINAL GROUP PROJECT FORMED

Week 11 – Gaming as rhetorical form
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Ian Bogost, "Procedural Rhetoric," in *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (2007) (excerpts from chapter)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Steven E. Jones, "Collecting *Katamari Damacy*," in *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies* (2008)

Week 12 – Gamification and "playbor"
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (2012) (excerpts)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Andrew Ross, "In Search of the Lost Paycheck" (2013)
COLLABORATIVE FINAL GROUP PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE

Week 13 – New platforms, new spaces
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Anna Anthropy, "The Problem with Videogames," "The New Videogame," "Appendix A: What to Use," in *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* (2012)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
merritt kopas, ed., selected contributions to *Videogames for Humans: Twine Authors in Conversation* (2015)

Week 14 – Croudfunding content
Reading for Class Meeting 1:
Chuck Tryon, "Indie 2.0: Digital Delivery, Crowdsourcing, and Social Media," in *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies* (2013)

Home Viewing Assignment for Class Meeting 2:
Sita Sings the Blues (Nina Paley, USA, 2008, 82 min)
Kung Fury Official Trailer (David Sandberg, Sweden, 2013, 3 min)

Week 15 – Crowdfunding critique
Reading and Home Viewing Assignment for Class Meeting 1:
Women as Background Decoration (Part 2) (Anita Sarkeesian/Feminist Frequency, USA 2014, 29 min)
Ian Steadman, "Tropes vs. Anita Sarkeesian: On Passing off Anti-Feminist Nonsense as Critique"
      (2014) (please also watch all YouTube videos embedded in blog post)

Reading for Class Meeting 2:
Katherine Cross, "'We Will Force Gaming to Be Free': On GamerGate and the License to Inflict
      Suffering" (2014)
FINAL GROUP PROJECT DUE

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Discussion board reflections
Students must complete six brief (250-400 words) written responses to questions posted on the course's discussion board. These prompts will vary in scope and precision, sometimes asking quite specific questions about the week's readings, and other times allowing for more free-form discussion of the week's films, games, or general themes.

Questions will be posted thirteen times. As only ten reflections are due, students may choose to skip this assignment for any three chosen weeks without affecting their grade, but no more (so choose wisely!). Bonus credit will be awarded for turning in more than ten.

Analytical blog post
I allow for a fair amount of leeway in how students approach this project, but the basic requirements are as follows: Rather than being printed out or emailed to me as a document, this project must take the form of a post to the course blog. It must make use of some sort of figures. This could take the form of still frames, video clips, animated GIFs, or data visualization—I am purposefully leaving this broad, as the only real requirement is that the images be used in a genuinely analytical way, rather than just being window dressing to the written prose. It should be roughly 1000 words in length, although this is negotiable if you're making heavy use of video-based analysis (for instance, including voice-over narration with video clips, or inserting text on top of video).

Collaborative Analytical Group Project
Often, in humanities education, there is an assumption that "creative" projects (using the materials available to the various arts) and "critical/theoretical" work (using the rhetorical power of written prose) should remain separate, even if both types of assignments are included in the same class. As a way of pushing against this arbitrary division, the final project of this course asks students to harness the rhetorical power of images (moving and otherwise) as an alternative to written prose. This should NOT be seen as a "creative" project, but rather a critical essay achieved through means other than pure prose writing. Students will be split into groups for this final project. The exact form is negotiable. The basic template I have in mind is that of the video essay, although other possibilities, from infographics to interactive websites to persuasive videogames will be entertained, if the group demonstrates that such options are feasible.