Digital Cultural Studies (CCS 395): Buttons, Batteries, Storage & Couches

Stony Brook University
Department of Cultural Analysis & Theory
College of Arts and Sciences

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Spring 2015; Section: 01; Mon/Wed 11:00—12:23pm Melville Library West 4535

Office Hours: 10:00-11:00am, 12:30-1:30pm Mondays; 10:00-11:00am Wednesdays.
Office: 2-065, Humanities Building.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: CCS 395 – Digital Cultural Studies

This course critically examines how digital media and technology assist in the redesign of our political, economic, social, and cultural worlds. Special attention is paid to theories of digital media and historical developments of new technologies, as well as cultural practices with emergent technology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course explores two fundamental questions: How has digital media and technology transformed our everyday life and how do we remain critically aware of its impact going forward? We approach this question through examining everyday user habits and practices, by applying media theory to concrete things that we tend to take for granted in our experience: buttons, batteries, storage, and couches. Digital culture has introduced the paradox of increased convenience along with increased demand for maintenance, know-how, and negotiation with bureaucracies, servicing, and network protocols. We critique this paradox by formulating new questions and research topics around the subjects of efficiency, distraction, and black boxing. By exposing our assumptions related to these terms, we endeavor to hone a critical awareness about our best practice and sustainable place within digital culture.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: ARTS – Explore & Understand the Fine & Performing Arts

Upon successful completion of the course, students will meet the following learning ARTS outcomes:

1. Engage in interdisciplinary analysis of digital practices, processes, and productions.
2. Familiarize students with the history and theory of digital media
3. Explain and apply theoretical and methodological tools to analyze digital culture.

4. Apply cultural studies approaches in conversations with other disciplinary
    or
    interdisciplinary traditions.
5. Empower students as informed users and potential creators of digital media
6. Identify new research opportunities that place cultural studies and digital media theory
    in conversation with one another.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Enrolment Prerequisites: one D.E.C. B or HUM course; CCS 101
Requirement Designation: DEC H. Required grade: A through D

Required Text:

*All of the class readings will be uploaded and available on Blackboard.

GRADING (measuring learning outcomes 1-4):

Attendance & Participation	20%
Class Wiki Project	30%
Lab Reports (4 @ 5% ea.)	20%
Final Research Portfolio (2500 words)	30%

All wiki entries, reports, and final projects must use MLA citation guidelines.

Attendance and Participation: This is a seminar-style class. Standard practice is to introduce general questions for discussion, read through pertinent passages from the readings, develop concepts and formulate research problems. Participation of everyone is key to establishing a generative learning environment. Attendance is therefore mandatory and noted. No absences, late assignments or late Wiki posts will be graded unless the instructor's permission is granted after a medical note is provided.

Wiki projects: Our class wiki "Buttons and Batteries" < https://ccs395.wikispaces.com> is a collaborative research space where we post the salient points, concepts, research questions, and other related material that follow from each week's discussions. All students are required to choose from a selection of both terms and questions that will be listed on the wiki home page each Thursday evening. Students must research the answers, write responses, and post their wiki entries by 4pm the following Sunday. The wiki is intended to serve as a class database, to exercise research methods, and ultimately, to help generate more refined research questions toward for projects.

<u>Lab reports:</u> There will be four two-page lab reports spread throughout the semester. The purpose of the lab reports is to do some preliminary research that enables each student to refine their original research questions. These original research questions may have spawned from the readings, discussions, class wiki, and/or their own everyday life. Students are to take note of the questions that strike them as worth investigating, and after doing some research, come up with a more focused research problem. Each lab report asks fewer and more focused questions, helping the student to narrow in and arrive at their one final question they will investigate for their research portfolios.

<u>Final Research Portfolio:</u> Your final assignment is designed to exercise your critical thinking and research skills. Instead of writing a final essay, you will complete all the necessary research steps required to write a rigorous research paper on a topic of your choosing. Instead of presenting your work in essay format, you will catalogue, annotate, and analyze your research materials and compile your findings in a research portfolio. The report must include the following components: original research problem (well-explained and finessed for the reader), an annotated bibliography of four scholarly sources, four primary sources, statement of findings, and a proposed set of directions for further research. We will have an in-class workshop on locating, selecting, and evaluating secondary and primary sources.
** All of these assignments will be further explained, with examples given, in due course.

MEETING SCHEDULE:
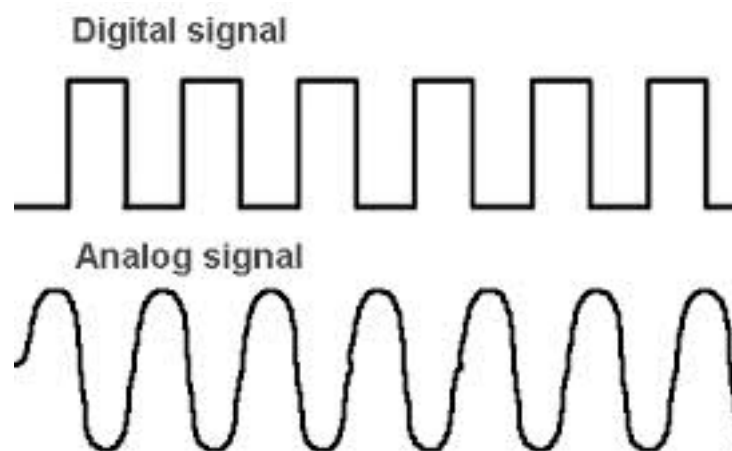
Section 1:	Defining Media & Digitality
Feb 4	Introduction – Course Syllabus & Definitions
	Digital v. Analog: Bits v. Atoms
	Read: Nicholas Negroponte "Introduction" *Being Digital*.

The Medium is the Message

Feb 9   Read: Marshall McLuhan "The Medium is the Message." Vol. 17 of *Marshall McLuhan: Unbound*, edited by W. Terrance Gordon.

Feb 11   Read: Marshall McLuhan "Media as Translators." *Understanding Media*.

Section 2:   <u>Buttons: Leverage, Interface, & Fit</u>

Coding Interface

Feb 16   Read: Lev Manovich "The Interface."*The Language of New Media.*

Feb 18   Read: "Principles of New Media (Transcoding)" & "The Rhetoric of Interactivity." *The Language of New Media*.

Material Interface: History of the Button

Feb 23   Read: Robert Bellamy & James Walker "Introduction". *Television & the Remote Control.*

<u>Feb 25</u>   Read: Caetlin Benson-Allott. "How the Remote Control Rewired the Home." *The Atlantic*.

Supplementary unit & Reading (not required):
Screen Interface: Film & Televisuality

Feb 23   Read: Thomas Elsaesser "The New Film Studies as Media Archaeology."

Feb 25   Read: Erkki Huhtamo "Elements of Screenology."

Haptic Interface: Cell phones & Touch Screens

Mar 2   Read: Heidi Rae Cooley "It's all about the fit."
       <u>Lab report #1 Due – Buttons</u>

Mar 4   Read: Lev Manovich "The Back of Our Devices Looks Better
               than the Front of Anyone Else's: On Apple and Interface Design."
               Moving Data: The Iphone and the Future of Media.

                    Toy v Tool Interface: Game Controllers
Mar 9   Read: Sheila Murphy "Alt-Ctrl: The Freedom of Remotes and Controls." *How*
               Television Invented New Media
Mar 11   Read: John Vanderhoef "Magic Disguised as Technology: Microsoft's Kinect,
               Gender, and Domestic Space."
        Lab report #2 Due – Haptics

←---------------------SPRING BREAK: NO CLASSES MAR 16-22-------------------→

Section 3:   Batteries: Power, Portability, & Mobility

                              Power
Mar 23   Read: "Batteries: The Absolute Definitive Guide." *Gizmodo*.
                                &
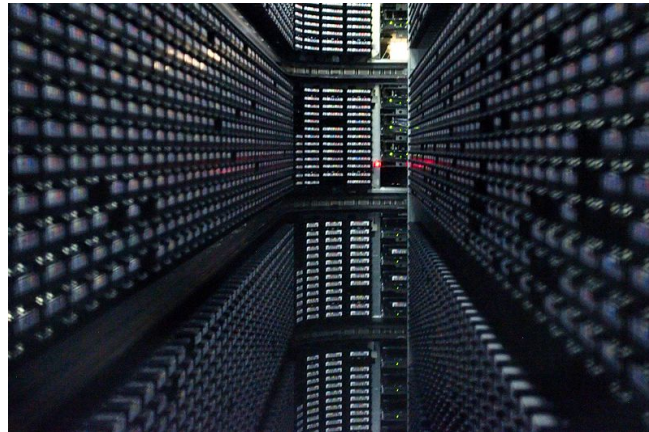   **Portability**
          Read: Chuck Tryon. "Pushing the (Red) Envelope: Portable
               Video, Platform Mobility, and Pay-Per-View Culture." *Moving Data*.

Mar 25   **No Classes**

                              Mobility
Mar 30   Read: Mark Denze and the Janissary Collective "Mobile Media Life"

Section 4:   <u>Storage: Hardware, Software, & Networks</u>

Hardware
<u>Apr 1</u>   Read: Matthew Kirschenbaum "Introduction." *Mechanisms*.
    <u>Lab report #3 Due – Batteries</u>
Apr 6   Read: Friedrich Kittler "There Is No Software."

Software
Apr 8   Read: Lev Manovich "Introduction." *Software Takes Command*.

Networks
Apr 13   Read: Katherine Hayles "Introduction." *How We Became Posthuman*.
<u>Apr 15</u>   Read: Bruno Latour "Where Are the Missing Masses?"
    <u>Lab report #4 Due – Storage</u>

Section 5:   <u>Couches: Sitting, Multi-tasking, Distraction</u>

Distraction

Apr 20   Read: Walter Benjamin "On Distraction." *Walter Benjamin:
           Selected Writings, Volume 3*.
Apr 22   Read: Ben Highmore "Absent-Minded Media." *Ordinary Lives*.

Multi-tasking

Apr 27   Read: Nicholas Carr Excerpts from *The Shallows*.
Apr 29   Read: Nicholas Carr Excerpts from *The Shallows*.

Sitting

May 4   Ben Highmore Excerpts from *The Great Indoors*.
*May 6   Final Presentations of your Research Portfolio

*May 13   **Research Portfolios Due** [email to instructor]

Americans with Disabilities Act
If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may affect your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, (631) 632-6748. The staff will work with you to determine what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students requiring emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information, go to the following web site: http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu/fire/disabilities/asp

Academic Integrity
Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/

SUNY Critical Management Initiative
Stony Brook University expects students to maintain standards of personal integrity that are in harmony with the educational goals of the institution; to observe national, state, and local laws and University regulations; and to respect the rights, privileges, and

property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, and/or inhibits students' ability to learn.

Electronic Etiquette Policy

No operation of Laptops, Tablets, or Cell-phones in lecture or screenings. Your notes during lecture should be taken with pencil and paper and your readings should be printed out and brought to class for the assigned day. For those interested in the reasoning behind this policy there is a number of studies, including Cornell's 2003 study "The Laptop and the Lecture", which conclude that electronic note-taking devices fare poorly for knowledge retention in both short and long-term.

Students should have their cell-phone on vibrate during lecture. Emergency calls should be attended outside the lecture room. Text-messaging is strictly prohibited. Faculty reserves the right to ask students to leave the lecture room if they are found using these electronic devices during lecture.

Information regarding Course Web Page

You can access class information on-line at http://blackboard.sunysb.edu If you have never used Stony Brook's Blackboard system, your initial password is your SOLAR ID number and your username is the same as your Stony Brook username. For help or more information see
https://tlt.stonybrook.edu/StudentServices/BbStudents/Pages/default.aspx
For problems logging in, go to the help desk in the Main Library SINC Site or the Union SINC Site

Class Rubric:

A	93-100%
A-	90-92.9%
B+	87-89.9%
B	83-86.9%
B-	80-82.9%
C+	77-79.9%
C	73-76.9%
C-	70-72.9%
D+	67-69.9%
D	60-66.9%
F	0-59.9%