media ecologies and cultural politics

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Class Meetings	Tuesdays 1:00-3:45 pm, Living/Learning B-101
Class Blog	https://blog.uvm.edu/aivakhiv-e2mc

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar course presents an advanced introduction to media and cultural studies in the context of social, political, and environmental movements that make use of, and in the process transform, the new media environments in which social and political life increasingly takes place.

We will study debates in "media ecology" and the cultural politics of new/emergent media, from Marshall McLuhan's notion of media as sensory extensions of humanity to theories of "media convergence" and of new media as open, dynamic, and complex networks. We will also study recent debates in cultural and political theory concerned with politics, democracy, and radical social change in a global and highly mediated world.

Drawing on this combination of theoretical resources, we will examine and assess media use in a range of contemporary social movements and phenomena. These may include the anti-corporate globalization (or "alter globalization") movement, the Occupy movement, Wikileaks, the Arab Spring, backlash to the "Innocence of Muslims" film trailer, the climate justice movement, "tactical media" interventions such as "culture jamming" and "hacktivism," and various forms of "ecomedia" and "biomedia" activism.

The course will not only be *about* media, and particularly "new media," but will also *make use of* these media. Class activities will include analysis of media objects as well as applied media production projects (generally carried out in groups; collaboration will be a prominent focus of the class). Some class activities will be shared on a public blog forum and will be intended to contribute to the development of an Ecomedia Studies Center at the University of Vermont. Students will therefore be encouraged to see their contributions as not merely class activities, but as also contributing to public discourse.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. **Attendance & class participation (15%)**

The course will take a seminar format, and readings and class discussions will be critical to the success of the class. Students are expected to attend all classes, to do all required readings in preparation for their discussion in class, and to participate in class discussions and activities in an informed and respectful manner that contributes to the collective "thinking through" of the issues raised. We will also regularly set aside time for sharing "found objects" relevant to the course (these can be physical or electronic/online objects); sharing these can be a component of students' participation grades.

If a student cannot make it to a class, they should notify the instructor ahead of time. *Those who miss more than two classes without prior notification will automatically fail the course.*

2. **Reading/response journals and online participation (35%)**

Reading responses and/or other online activities will be required in most weeks of the class. These are to be submitted online, either through Blackboard or on the course blog (this will be announced in class). Specific response questions and expectations will be announced in class and/or on the course blog; if none are announced by the Thursday prior to a class, students should submit a 350-500 word "commentary" responding to something that caught your greatest attention about the readings.

These response journals will normally be due the Monday night before class. One student will normally be selected during the previous class to "**kick off**" the discussion by posting a summary and introductory commentary by the Thursday before class; a second student (and occasionally a third) will be responsible for providing additional **background** by working from a set of sources/suggestions provided and posting a relevant summary by the Friday before class. Each student in the class will be responsible for **one** of these "kick-offs" **or** "backgrounders" (worth 5% of the class grade).

Weekly responses will not be graded individually, but will be graded as part of the student's overall writing and online participation profile. Students are invited to comment on others' comments and to participate in online discussions, which will also contribute to the participation profile. The *formal* weekly response and *one* kick-off/backgrounder will be the minimum requirement.

It is strongly recommended that students **keep a personal record** of all responses and comments; these will go into the final self-evaluation (see item #5 below). You are also encouraged to print out all of the Blackboard (electronic) required readings, or to keep electronic copies of these, so that you can have these accessible for class discussion and for study purposes during the duration of the course.

3. **Critical media analysis (25%)**

Students will be expected to carry out, individually or in small groups, an in-depth critical analysis of a media object/text or set of media objects/texts using analytical methods from the course. This will take place in stages, as follows.

   a) A 1 to 2 page **proposal** (worth 5%) will be due in class on February 12. This should outline the object of your analysis, your specific method(s) of analysis, a rationale for choosing this method in relation to your object (with reference to other literature, if relevant), a description of the format for the analysis if is not a traditional written paper, and a description of the distribution of labor if you are working in a group with other students.

   b) The **analysis** itself (worth 15%), due on or before March 19. This should include all the components of a scholarly paper, as outlined below, but its format can be either a regular paper or a web site or series of web pages. The scholarly components should include the following:

   i. An introduction or abstract stating the topic, thesis, methodology, and results/conclusions.

ii. A <u>description</u> of the media objects under consideration, providing any essential background to understanding the object (no more than 2-3 paragraphs). If you are choosing an online format for your analysis, you may substitute this with directly accessible <u>links</u> (e.g., hyperlinks) to those objects,

iii. An <u>in-depth analysis</u> of the object as a form of social and/or environmental communication or as a media-ecological intervention, using some clearly defined analytical method(s). This should be the longest section of the assignment.

iv. Full <u>bibliographic</u> information on all relevant sources, in APA, MLA, Chicago style or another academically recognized style (except where web links may suffice).

<u>Suggested length</u>: This will depend on the format and the number of students involved. For individual written papers, it should be roughly 1200-1600 words; for multiple-authored work it will be longer.

c) In-class **presentation** (worth 5%), on March 19 or 26.

Further details about this assignment and the presentation will be provided in class.

4. **Applied media project (20%)**

Students will be expected to carry out an applied media project, which will demonstrate some form of critical praxis (i.e., analysis and intervention) into the mediascape, informed by concepts and practices explored in the course. These may range from more traditional media-based products, such as text-and-image web sites, to "tactical media interventions" or "ecoventions" of one kind or another. They may involve online as well as non-digital components (performances, exhibitions, etc.), but the latter should be documented in a way that is digitally accessible. (Ideally, all of these will become accessible, in some form, through the online public course blog, but if there is some reason for restricting a project to a "class-only" or "UVM-only" audience, we can do that instead.)

These projects should typically be carried out in groups of 3-5 students, though alternatives (including individual projects) are possible. The topic and theme of this assignment may be related to your previous critical analysis assignment (i.e. being an extension of it in a more applied direction), or it may be something entirely different.

Like the above assignment, this will take place in 3 stages:

a) A <u>1 to 2 page</u> **proposal** (worth 5%) will be due in class on <u>March 26</u>. This should outline the <u>themes</u>, <u>format(s)</u>, <u>methods and activities</u>, and <u>distribution of labor</u> for the implementation of the project, as well as justification for your choices with each of these.

b) The **project** itself (worth 15%), due on or before <u>April 23</u>. Because the format will be widely variable, expectations will vary as well.

c) In-class **presentation**, on April 23 or 30 (valued as part of project grade).

Further details about this assignment and the presentation will be provided in class.

5. **Final class reflection and self-evaluation** (5%)

This 400-600 word paper should summarize the work you have accomplished in the class, the strengths and weaknesses of your performance on the various class assignments and tasks, and the evolution of your thinking on "media ecologies and cultural politics." Further instructions will be provided in class.

COURSE READINGS

Required or strongly recommended reading (available at UVM Bookstore)

1. Jeremy Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics* (Berg, 2008). **Required**.
2. Christine Harald, *OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007).
3. Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the Media* (Oxford U. Press, 2012).

A variety of other course readings will be made available electronically over the semester.

Related reading:

1. Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera, ed., *Radical Democracy and the Internet: Interrogating Theory and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
2. Glen Creeber and Royston Martin, *Digital Cultures: Understanding New Media* (Open Univ. Press, 2009).
3. Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2009).

COURSE POLICIES

Written submissions: Any gradable written submissions handed in as part of a class assignment should be typed and 1.5- or 2bl-spaced, in a standard font and size (such as Times New Roman 12-point).

Late assignments: Unexcused 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 and would like to request an extension, please do so well before the assignment is due (2-3 days ahead is recommended).

Plagiarism: Academic plagiarism is a serious offense and a threat to the scholarly enterprise. This includes every *unacknowledged* use of materials written or produced by others (even sentences or obvious paraphrases without quotes). Please see the University's guidelines if you need further clarification. Any plagiarism will be penalized, even to the extent of completely failing the course. If you are not sure whether something constitutes plagiarism (e.g., because of a web format, artistic "creative reappropriation," and so on), please consult the instructor about it before hand.

Class and online etiquette: Students are expected to refrain from rudeness toward other students or the class as a whole. If you disagree with something, be careful to disagree with the *idea* being expressed, not with the *person*. This also means that when you are in class, you should participate in the class and not be engaged in other activities (whether on the cell phone, computer, other devices, side conversations, etc.), except during those times when such activities are called for. In online activities (i.e., on the course blog), students are encouraged to "think before you press 'send'" and to take reasonable precautions around personal and institutional identification. These online activities take place at the interface of UVM, a public university, and "the world at large" (in fact, the largest public space in the world). Please avoid rudeness, personal attack, and inappropriate language. If you prefer, you may choose to identify your public blog contributions with only a first name or some other identifier.

PRELIMINARY (TENTATIVE) SCHEDULE OF READINGS & TOPICS

This schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and online.

Date	Schedule of class topics	Readings due	Important due dates
Jan 15	Course Introduction		
22	Media studies & medium theory	Creeber & Martin, "What is new media?" and "Digital cultures" Macnamara, "Understanding the mediascape: Philosophies and theories of emergent media" McLuhan, "The medium is the message" excerpt Ott and Monk, "Ecological analysis"	

29	Media convergence	Bell, "On the net: Navigating the World Wide Web" Jenkins, "Introduction: 'Worship at the altar of convergence'" Boler, "Digital media and democracy: Introduction"	
Feb 5*	The public sphere, social media, & politics *Class to be held online due to instructor being abroad.*	Dahlberg & Siapera, "Introduction" Kahn & Kellner, "Globalization, technopolitics, & radical democracy" Habermas, "The public sphere" Poell, "Conceptualizing forums and blogs as public sphere" Bond et al., "A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization"	
12	Open source, open content, & the "free culture" movement	Boyle, *Public Domain* (selections) Lessig, selections TBA	Media analysis proposals due
19	Cultural studies (& politics) after 1968	Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture,* Introduction, ch. 1 & 2	
26	Case studies: The Zapatistas, alter-globalism, & the World Social Forum	Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture,* ch. 3 & 4	
Mar 5	Spring Break: No Class		
12	Theorizing global network society	Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture,* ch. 5 Hardt, "The global society of control" J. Dean, "Communicative capitalism" Deleuze & Guattari, "Rhizome" (excerpt)	
19	Case studies: Culture jamming, hacktivism, & other tactical media	Harald, *OurSpace,* Introduction and Ch. 2 Renzi, "The space of tactical media" McKee, "Tactical media, sustainability, and the rise of the 'new green revolution'"	Media analysis due; presentations
26	Global case studies: Color revolutions, the Arab Spring, & other events	Gilbert, ch. 6 and 7	Project proposals due; presentations
Apr 2	Theorizing global network society (continued)	Galloway & Thacker, "Prolegomenon: 'We're tired of trees'" Connolly, "Steps toward an ecology of late capitalism," "Is eco-egalitarian capitalism possible?"	
9	E-waste & the material ecologies of global media	Maxwell & Miller, *Greening the Media,* Introduction, ch. 2 ("Words"), and ch. 6. ("Citizens").	
16	New media ecologies, ecomedia & biomedia	Parikka, "Media ecologies & imaginary media" Thacker, "What is biomedia?" Other readings TBA	
23	Case study: The Occupy movement	Readings TBA	Projects due; presentations
30	Course conclusions		Presentations