

Digital Cultures | Digital Divides

American Studies 590

Tues. 3-6; Wilson 6

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Comparative Ethnic Studies

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Office hours: Wed 12:30-2:30 or by appointment

Course Description and Goals:

Digital Cultures | Digital Divides interrogates the often claimed but unexamined implications of a “digital age” and “digital divide.” This class examines the emerging institutional landscape of digital culture as it intersects with national histories, new global markets, and ideologies of race, class and gender. We will explore a wide range of materials—from United Nations discussion papers that limit what and who counts within international legal structures and the digital domain (the Internet), to national legislation that seeks to redefine digital “creators” and their knowledge through a liberal intellectual history aimed at delineating “information,” “culture” and the public good. We will probe the limits and the possibilities afforded by emergent technologies for both the preservation and creation of cultural products and emergent forms of social and political disobedience. Reading critical legal accounts of digital legislation alongside ethnographies that specifically deal with uses of digital technologies, we will frame our discussions in both global and local terms—being careful to outline their intersections and points of disjuncture. We will focus on the intended and unintended uses of new technologies to create and control “culture.” Our discussions will push at the limits of technological and social determinism to reframe the “culture wars” at the intersection of emergent technologies, cultural reproduction, and the contingent circuits of capital in which they circulate.

Requirements

1. Students are expected to do all course readings prior to class and come prepared to discuss the readings in depth. Class will be run in a seminar-style with the expectation that students will actively engage in and drive the discussions.
2. Each student will give two formal presentations (material story presentation + project proposal presentation) during the semester and be part of two group presentations. Group presenters will also turn in a written 2-3 page paper analyzing the readings on which they are presenting. Groups will be responsible for deciding how to divide the readings. Each member should plan on leading a group discussion for 15-20 minutes. In addition presenters should come prepared with a list of 3-5 discussion points to engage the group and stimulate discussion.
3. Four other times throughout the semester students will turn in a 2-3 page paper on a specific required reading. These will be CLOSE READINGS.
4. Students will also produce a final project that can take the form of a multimedia presentation (DVD, website, etc.) or written essay (these can be individual or collaborative efforts). This final project will engage the larger theoretical themes of the class with an eye towards specific solutions. Students may work with local or university groups facing an issue related to digital cultures/digital divides to inform their project.

Assignment Guidelines:

Material story presentations:

Each student will give a TEN minute presentation examining the materiality of a digital object, narrative, or project. In Chapter One, David Bell argues against the types of disembodies, utopian narratives that often accompanied the examination of digital culture and digital objects in the early 1990s. Instead, he suggests that we refocus on the "material stories" often elided by celebratory notions of digital connectivity, labor-free environments and the like. You will have ten minutes to present your material story. Be precise, give concrete examples and make sure that you discuss the IMPLICATIONS of your material story for the larger study of digital culture. Use the readings we have done to date to inform your argument. You should time yourself prior to class, as I will hold to the time limit. This is good practice for conference presentations.

Presentation and short papers:

Twice during the semester you will present as part of a group for that week's readings. These presentations should be approximately 15-20 minutes. Your presentation should be directed towards the themes generated by the readings. Please do not summarize the readings, as we will have all read them. Instead you should be prepared to discuss the theoretical and methodological insights you have gleaned from the readings, you should discuss the possibilities opened up by the readings as well as its problems. Your presentation should act as a catalyst for a larger group discussion.

The 2-3 page paper that accompanies your presentation should be a critical analysis of the readings. If you have divided the readings amongst the group then your paper should address the particular reading (s) on which you have focused. These short papers should be critical and reflective of the general ideas presented by the author. Discuss the author's argument, its limits, its openings, how it relates to and furthers the task of examining digital culture.

Close readings:

These 2-3 pages close readings should FOCUS on a specific idea or passage from ONE reading for the week. Pull out a passage or idea from a reading that you find intriguing or provocative. A close reading examines the passage at the level of sentences, phrases and words and from there examines the implications of the section in relation to larger theoretical claims. You can use this as a way to engage with a specific topic in relation to your own work or in relation to a topic we have dealt with in class.

Project Proposal Presentation:

In week 10 each student will present the work on their final projects. These will be ten minute presentations. You should clearly state your argument, the focus of your project and the theoretical and methodological trajectories with which your work engages. Let us know where you are, what still needs to be completed and where you are running into roadblocks. You will turn in a written version of this proposal to me for feedback.

Course Readings:

Books + a course reader will be available at Cougar Copies

David Bell. *An Introduction to Cybercultures*

Lisa Nakamura. *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity on the Internet*

Siva Vaidhyanathan. *The Anarchist in the Library*

Rosemary J. Coombe. *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Property*

Michael Brown. *Who Owns Native Culture?*

Lawrence Lessig. *Free Culture*

Nelson, Tu and Hines, editors. *Technicolor: Race, Technology and Everyday Life*

Neil Blair Christensen. *Inuit in Cyberspace: Embedding Offline Identities Online*

Yochiai Benkler. *The Wealth of Networks*

STUDENT EVALUATIONS:

Students will be evaluated based on their critical engagement with the reading assignments, the sophistication and rigor of their written assignments and the professional quality of their oral presentations.

Oral presentations (individual)	15%
Oral presentations (group)	10%
Critical analysis papers	10%
Close readings	15%
Final Project	50%

NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS are accepted except in the case of a **documented** emergency, a **documented** university sponsored event or a **documented** observance of a religious holiday.

PLAGARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Students who violate the University's policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty will be subject to disciplinary action including: failure of the specific assignment and/or failure of the class. Plagiarism includes not providing proper citation for ANY work including information found on any website, book, pamphlet, etc. Or copying in full or part someone else's work (including fellow students).

Reading Schedule:

week one: 8.22

intro: digital cultures| digital divides
the importance of materiality and the diffusion of power
cultural studies theoretical perspective

sign up for presentations

week two: 8.29

reading: an introduction to cybercultures; d. bell chapters 1-4; free labor; t. terranova (online) + jobs in cyberspace; a. ross (reader) + the culture industry; adorno and horkheimer (reader) + the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction; w. Benjamin (reader)

week three: 9.05

reading: technicolor; a nelson et al (editors) chapters 1-6 + an introduction to cybercultures; d. bell chapters 5-10

material story presentations

week four: 9.12

reading: cybertypes; l. nakamura + race in cyberspace: an introduction; kolko, nakamura, rodman; (reader)+ two lectures; m. foucault (reader)

material story presentations

week five: 9.19

readings: technicolor chapter 10-11; + margins in the wires; silver (reader); + erasing @race; kolko (reader); + i'll take my stand in Dixie-net; mcpherson (reader) + a rape in cyberspace; dibbell (reader) + the revenge of the yellowfaced cyborg terminator; ow (reader) + local/global negotiations; i. ang (reader)

week six: 9.26

readings: inuit in cyberspace; Christensen + for a cultural future; e. michaelis (reader); + gone digital; christen (handout in class); Indonesia on my mind; i. ang (reader)

week seven: 10.03

readings: free culture; lessig + net neutrality act (online) + digital millennium copyright act (online)

week eight: 10.10

readings: who owns native culture; brown + wipo report (online) + unesco report (online)

week nine: 10.17

readings: the cultural life of intellectual property; r. coombe;

week ten: 10.24

project proposal presentations

week eleven: 10.31

readings: + freedom of expression (chapters 1-2; online); k. mcleod + modes of creativity and the register of ownership; j. leach (reader) + some properties of culture and persons; f. myers (reader) + square pegs in round holes?; b. boating (reader) + who got left out of the property grab again; a. seeger

week twelve: 11.07

readings: the wealth of networks chapters 5-7 ; y. benckler + the anarchist in the library; s. vaidhyathan

week thirteen: 11.14

readings: the wealth of networks chapters 8-10; y. benckler + the romance of the public domain; chunder and saunder (reader) + the opposite of property; j. boyle (online)

week fourteen: 11.21: NO CLASS UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY

week fifteen: 11.28: NO CLASS WORK ON FINAL PROJECTS

week sixteen: 12.05 FINAL CLASS WRAP UP