

Designing Digital Media for Culture and Community

Winter 2004

Joint Offering UC San Diego Sixth College/Department of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies 197 – SSB 253

Physical session: Wednesday – January 5, 2005 (first meeting): 10 am – 12:50 pm

Course Description

Digital media has reached a level of pervasiveness that has begun to fundamentally alter how we perform our basic social activities. Technological infrastructures have begun to “mediate” and therefore intervene in the interactions one has with other people, information, objects, and architecture. With the mantra of speed, the turnover period for faster, more complex, and more intelligent technologies has decreased in an increasingly competitive global market. However, the questions of design, culture, and communities still remain largely unexplored. The “digital divide” is an increasingly prosaic though appropriate term that begins to describe the inequities associated with access to technology. It has placed certain communities, and their traditional modes of perseverance, at risk of even deeper isolation from an external world that will begin to define new modes of existence and well-being. These stratifications link to and correlate with ethnicity, particularly to ethnic groups within postcolonial environments. The differences between the “haves and have-nots” who control and are familiar with new technologies could potentially accentuate power dynamics already associated with ethnic difference.

In this course, we focus as designers of new media on questions of culture and community. We will build on a small yet growing set of research studying how new media can begin to serve as a tool of empowerment rather than stratification. We will begin to study the impacts of technology on larger scales at first through readings and introductory sketches. We will proceed to more concrete readings focusing on the impacts of specific media projects on particular social domains (whether they be artistic/architectural, educational, or community-focused). This section of the course will involve the creation of a basic mockup that researches a particular institution and proposes a set of media-based interventions. For the last 60% of the course, we will then begin work in teams of 3-4 with a specific set of communities where contacts already exist. We will explore the issues regarding contacting and engaging the communities we will work with. The goal of this final project for the course will be the design, mockup, and basic prototype of a technology that can enable this community according to needs that the group may express. This final project will thus be focused on the fieldwork, design, and development of a meaningful technology for the community in question. Through a set of juried reviews, in the tradition of a design studio, work will be evaluated and critiqued.

The seminar consists of lectures, student presentations of the readings, collaborative design brainstorming sessions, labs for basic software training, and likely two juried reviews to evaluate final projects at multiple stages.

Instructor

Lecturer : Ramesh Srinivasan, Doctoral Candidate – Harvard University Graduate School of Design, rsriniva@gmail.com; Guest Professor: Ross Frank, UC San Diego Department of Ethnic Studies; Office Hours by appointment

Lab and Course Assistant: Helena Bristow – sbristow@ucsd.edu

Pedagogical Objectives

Students will (1) gain a basic conceptual understanding of the implications of new Internet-based concepts on multiple levels of scale (theoretical, social, urban, ethnic, and community-based), (2) learn and implement important skills of merging the design of digital media with an important focus toward the cultural and social empowerment of the community with which they are working.

Prerequisites

Multimedia Development and Programming Experience is a plus as is experience in Design and Social Science Research. If none of these fits you, please seek permission from the Instructor.

Organization of the Course

There will be weekly readings/assignments, a larger mockup design project and the final community-centered technology as a basic prototype. The project will be developed throughout the entire course, within phases: community introduction and fieldwork, case study, scenario design, midterm reviews/mockup, and prototype. The software required for the assignments – Internet-based sketching tools-- will be tutored in outside-of –classtime optional sessions as the course progresses. We will essentially use three software packages: Dreamweaver, Flash, Photoshop, but of course use of other software or hardware is welcome and encouraged where appropriate.

Mockup Design Project

The mockup Design Project will be given at the second week of class and will be due at the conclusion of the fifth week. This basic project will focus on a brief proposal of a digital design intervention within a certain specific social sector, and will complement the increasingly specific and bounded readings that we will be focusing on. The project will be done solely individually, while the Final Project will be done in teams of 4. Much more detail on this project will be given during the course, including potential examples, etc. The goal of this project will be to have students begin to move from the practice of conceptualizing and theorizing to specific creations and scenarios that can be informed by an understanding of environment, context, and theory.

Final Project

The final project will involve the selection, fieldwork, scenario mockup, and basic prototype of a community-empowering/enabling technology. This project will be created throughout the course of the term, and will be presented at a midterm and final juried review. The project will be likely accomplished in heterogeneous (in terms of background) teams of 4 depending on the choice of students. The final project will be due during finals week, and be presented during the final exam session in the review form.

Reading materials

Reading materials will be assigned on a weekly basis and will include articles and essays from literature, journals and online articles. As indicated on the schedule, readings will be assigned after each class and will be important for the next week's session. Readings will be heavily front loaded so as to arm the student with a variety of materials from which project design can follow. Many reading materials will be available online linked to the course web site. Others may be available as course reserves or should be purchased privately. Students will be responsible for presenting the weekly readings, leading and motivating the discussions in the context of the general theme of the course, and enabling a collaborative design process/brainstorm to emerge from the discussion during each class.

Grading

The breakdown for course grading will be as follows:

70% - Final Project (evaluation will include scenarios, fieldwork, mockups, reviews, and final prototype)

15% - Attendance, & Active Participation

15% - Reading Presentation/Class moderation

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Course (Schedule, Background, Potential Projects)

Readings:

1. Borges, Jorge Luis "The Garden of Forking Paths" and "The Library of Babel" from *Ficciones* (http://www.english.swt.edu/cohen_p/avant-garde/Literature/Borges/Garden.html and http://jubal.westnet.com/hyperdiscordia/library_of_babel.html)
2. Virilio, Paul "Speed, Information, and Cyber Alarm!" http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=72 + "The Vision Machine"
3. McLuhan, Marshall "Understanding Media" chapters (1-2)
4. Benjamin, Walter "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>)
5. Johnson, S. (1999). *Interface culture: How new technology transforms the way we create and communicate*. San Francisco: HarperEdge. Pp. 1-26.

Assgt: Precedents of relevant community media projects -- surveys for class

Week 2: Theories of Media – The Human Condition and the Flows of Information (selection of communities for Final Project)

1. Lessig, Lawrence "Cyberspace's Constitution" from Lessig, Lawrence, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*, Basic Books, 2000
2. Foucault, Michel : "Of Other Spaces (Heterotopias)"
3. Mitchell, William J., "Antitectonics: The Poetics of Virtuality." In [The Virtual Dimension: Architecture, Representation, and Crash Culture](#), ed. John Beckmann, 205-217. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998.
4. Latour, Bruno "Paris: Invisible City" (<http://www.ensmp.fr/~latour/virtual/> + **passage from coursework (picon)**)
5. Webber, Melvin "Urbanization and Communications," in *Communications Technology and Social Policy* 299 (G. Gerbner, L. Gross & W. Melody ed. 1973)

Week 3: Landscape, Architecture, and Urbanism

1. Putnam, Robert: Excerpt from [Bowling Alone](#) "Against the Tide: Social movements and the net" (pp. 148-80)
2. Castells, Manuel. "Communal Heavens." In *The Power of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, pp. 1-20 and 65-67.
3. Donath, Judith: "Identity and Deception in the virtual community"
4. Wellman, B. and Gulia, M. "Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone"
5. Kollock, Peter : "Design Issues for Online Communities" (from Smith and Kollock)

Week 4: Identity, Macro-Scale Communities

1. Appadurai, Arjun – "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy"
2. Shaw, Alan – *Social Constructionism: Designing Media within the Inner-City* (introduction and chapter 1) -- <http://xenia.media.mit.edu/~acs/introduction.html> AND <http://xenia.media.mit.edu/~acs/chapter1.html>
3. "Defiant Images – The Kayapo Appropriation of Video" – Terrence Turner, *Anthropology Review*

4. Srinivasan, Ramesh – “Village Voice” (Cultural Institutions and Digital Technology”) + “Tribal Peace”
5. Smith, B. et. al. “Active Information Producers: Silver Stringers, Junior Journalists” (<http://www.research.ibm.com/journal/sj/393/part2/smith.html>)

Week 5: Cultural Difference - Communities and Digital Media

MIDTERM REVIEW

1. Hinton, L. *Flutes of fire : essays on California Indian languages*. Chapters 5 and 6
2. Shipek, F. *Delfina Cuero: her autobiography*.
3. Basso, K. *Wisdom Sits in Places: landscape and language among the Western Apache*, Chapter X.
4. Ball, Martin W. "People Speaking Silently to Themselves": An Examination of Keith Basso's Philosophical Speculations on 'Sense of Place' in Apache Cultures." *American Indian Quarterly*, 26:3, 460-478.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_indian_quarterly/toc/aig26.3.html
5. TBA relating to San Diego and the Tribal Digital Village

Week 6: Ethnographic Research, Cultural Studies, and Methodology (guest lecture: Professor Ross Frank – Department of Ethnic Studies)

1. Campbell, Joseph – “The Power of Myth” chs. 1 and 2
2. Davenport, G. and Murtaugh, Michael – Automatist Storytelling Systems and the Shifting Sands of Story (<http://www.research.ibm.com/journal/sj/363/davenport.html>)
3. McCloud, Scott – Understanding Comics
4. Davenport, G. et al “Synergistic Storyscapes and Constructionist Cinematic Sharing” (IBM Systems Journal 2000)-- <http://www.research.ibm.com/journal/sj/393/part1/davenport.html>

Week 7: Storytelling, Cultural Narratives, and Hypermedia

1. Shedroff, Nathan, Information Interaction Design: A Unified Field Theory of Design, In: Jacobson, R., (ed.), Information Design, MIT Press, 2000; pp. 267-293.
2. Norman, D. The Design of Everyday Things (**ch: to be decided**)
3. IDEO and Sacred World Foundation precedents <http://www.ideo.com/> and <http://www.sacredworld.com/>
4. Tufte, Edward – Visual Explanations, pp. 13-26

Week 8: First Juried Review of Community Design Work – presentation of mockups, storyboards, and initial fieldwork

1. Anderson, Benedict: “Imagined Communities: chs. 1-3
2. Christopher Mele: “Cyberspace and Disadvantaged Communities: the internet as a tool for collective action” (in Smith and Kollock) – (<http://sociology.buffalo.edu/cyberspace-mele.htm>)
3. Wodzicko, K. – Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, and Interviews -- pp. 16-31 && 43-67
4. Jeremijenko, N. (<http://cat.nyu.edu/natalie/projectdatabase/#statement>)

Week 9: Communities, Collective Actions, Critical Public Art no reading assigned

Week 10: Class meeting – Preparations for Final Review no reading assigned

Week 11: Final Review: Presentation of Prototypes, Mockups, Scenario and Storyboards, Fieldwork and Documentation