ANTH 309
Anthropology of Digital Media & Cultures

Syllabus Spring 2016
T. 1:10-4:00pm, Anthropology Room 6
Anthropology, Wesleyan University

Dr. Jordan Kraemer, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Office hours: Tuesdays 4-5:00pm or by appointment
Office location: TBD
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Course description

Networked media technologies, from the Internet to mobile phones, are reshaping many aspects of daily life, selfhood, and society. While digital and electronic media seem to make the world smaller, ostensibly facilitating global flows of capital, people, goods, and ideas, this course examines how these technologies co-constitute particular kinds of subjects, accommodating some uses and modes of living more than others. Digital platforms and services, for example, are often designed with elite, technically savvy users in mind, yet are taken up transnationally in diverse and unexpected ways. Media, like other technologies, never exist separately from social life as independent agents of change, but instead emerge through contingent histories, material realities, constellations of discourse, and unequal distributions of power. This course introduces students to the anthropology of digital media and culture, drawing on empirical, ethnographic accounts from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including feminist technology studies, actor-network theory, queer theory critiques, new materialisms, postcolonial studies, and social informatics. Topics include space and place online, media publics, new transnationalisms, design anthropology, big data, social networks, virtuality and embodiment, the social construction of users, mobility, disability, and locatability, and telecommunication infrastructures.

We will consider emerging media practices in cross-cultural and transnational settings, to examine the situated contexts of design and use, while asking broadly what consequences these technologies have for our social worlds. This course requires intensive reading and writing, including a final project that can be undertaken in a variety of ways, such as an original ethnographic or creative project exploring an emerging media practice.

Required texts (available at Broad Street Books and on reserve in Olin)


All other materials will be available through the course Moodle or on reserve in Olin.

Course requirements

- Attendance & participation: 20%
- In-class presentation: 10%
- Short essay papers (2): 30%
- Project proposal & bibliography: 10%
- Final paper: 30%
Attendance & participation: 20%
This is a small reading-intensive seminar that requires everyone to come prepared to discuss the readings each week. Participation includes contributing to class discussions, listening actively to others, and being present and on time for each class meeting. Each student must also contribute at least once during the semester to shared class notes via Google docs.

In-class presentation: 10%
Students will each be responsible for introducing the readings and initiating discussion on one week. This will include a brief summary of each reading and questions for discussion.

Short essay papers: 30%
Two short essays (600-800 words, approx. 3 double-spaced pages) are due during the semester that engage with the readings to date (but not before the previous paper was due), on March 3 and April 14, by midnight on the course Moodle. Each paper will consist of a brief summary of the key arguments of three scholarly readings, followed by a discussion that puts the readings in conversation with each other.

Project proposal: 10%
You will propose your final project midway through the semester (due Thursday, April 21 by midnight, on the course Moodle). Please provide a 250 word (1 page) description of your topic and your approach (i.e., what your central argument might be), and append a 1 page bibliography. This project can take the form of an original research paper, a mini ethnography, or a multimedia project of some kind. If you wish to propose a creative or tech project, please contact me in advance for approval.

Final paper: 30%
Due Tuesday, May 10 by 5pm by email. Papers should be 2000-2500 words in length (~8-10pp), not including the bibliography/references cited, 1.5 or double-spaced, 11-12 pt font size, pages numbered, &c., unless I have approved an alternative project (a short paper may still be required). Any standard citation format is acceptable; if unsure, use Chicago or see me.

Policies

Email and communication: I will try to respond to all emails promptly, but please allow up to 24 hours for me to get back to you (and 48 hours over the weekend).

Attendance & Absences: Attendance is required as part of participation. You may miss one class meeting without excuse; otherwise, I will only excuse absences in rare circumstances (e.g., unexpected exigencies or religious observance), preferably with documentation. When possible, you must notify me in advance.

Extensions: I ordinarily do not grant extensions unless you make arrangements in advance (or under extenuating circumstances, as above).

Late work: Papers handed in after the deadline without prior approval will usually be penalized one-third of a full letter grade per day.

Technology in the classroom: Devices are permitted in the classroom when used to participate in class. Please minimize their use to prevent distracting yourself or others.

Disability: From Wesleyan’s Disability Resources: Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide
documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Honor Code: All your work must be in compliance with Wesleyan’s Honor Code. Please meet with me if you have questions about proper citations or avoiding plagiarism, or contact the Writing Workshop, http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/.
Course schedule

Week 1: January 26 — Introduction

1. Ricardo de Querol, “Zygmunt Bauman: ‘Social media are a trap.’” EL PAÍS. 
   [read in class]
2. Patricia G. Lange 2014, “Hey Watch This! Sharing the Self Through Media” (film); for trailer, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVuC3DsDJRg.

Week 2: February 2 — Technology, culture, capital


Week 3: February 9 — Media, community, society

3. Eli Pariser 2011, “Beware online ‘filter bubbles.’” TED talk, 
   [watch video before class].

Further reading

Week 4: February 16 — Ethnography of/on the Internet


Further reading
Week 5: February 23 — NO CLASS
Alternate assignment TBD

Week 6: March 1 — Social capital, networked publics
** FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE ONLINE THURSDAY MAR. 3, BY MIDNIGHT **

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*

Further reading
Pierre Bourdieu 1984, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste.*

Week 7: March 22 — Media(ted) selves, media ideologies


Further reading

Spring Break, March 4-21

Week 8: March 29 — Cyborgs: gender, power, difference


Further reading

**Week 9: April 5 — Sociality and social media**

2. danah boyd 2014 *It's Complicated.* Yale University Press. (selections)

*Further reading*

**Week 10: April 12 — Virtual places, transnational spaces**

**SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE ONLINE THURSDAY APRIL 14, BY MIDNIGHT**


*Further reading*
Bonnie Nardi, 2010 *My Life As A Night Elf Priest: An anthropological account of world of warcraft.* (selections)

**Week 11: April 19 — Mobility versus locatability: mobile media and place**

**FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE THURSDAY, APRIL 21, BY MIDNIGHT**


*Further reading*

**Week 12: April 26 — Users matter: new materialisms**


**Week 13: May 3 — Data and design**


*Further reading*
Biella Coleman 2015. *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The many faces of anonymous*

***FINAL PROJECT: DUE MAY 10 BY 5PM***