

Media Practices in a Material World

Fall 2015, Sociology 116/Media, Communication, and Culture

Instructor: Joseph Klett (jklett@ucsc.edu; always include "SOCY116" in subject line)

Class hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am–11:45am in Social Sciences 2, room 075

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3:30pm in College Eight, room 325

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Over the course of sixteen episodes, you are going to learn one simple trick that will help you live a more meaningful, more productive, and more satisfying life. You're also going to learn how kinds of media can manipulate your desires in order to communicate unrealistic ideas -- for example, that one simple trick could *ever* help you live a more meaningful, productive, or satisfying life.

Don't feel bad. It's a cultural thing.

Let's start with our origin stories. How did American mass media take the nation by storm -- and to the dissatisfaction of hippies and snobs alike? We will study how this conflict changes over time as America's messy love affair with capitalism and democracy drags on. We're talking about the broadcasting of information, which is as old as the first printing press in Boston (1640) and topics like "Measles Kills 30 in Boston" (1650). Some say what we find in the digital age is not some historical revolution, but more of the same. But is it? Remote control helicopters were once just for failed attempts to fly an iced tea into a wading pool; now they shoot missiles at State enemies and deliver iced tea with stunning accuracy. As media, drones show us things we've simply never seen before.

In the second section of class, we delve into those social practices that seem to emerge alongside media technology. Personal technology took a big leap forward in 1979 with the Walkman: unlike portable broadcast technologies, the Walkman was widely adopted by those looking to control the soundtrack to their lives with their own libraries of music. Now the goal of personalization has become the gold standard for most forms of technology. How does this affect systems of communication that began long before personalization? How does increased use of personalized technology affect a social practice like -- let's pick a good example - *SEX*? We know that in American culture "sex sells," but what do media representations of sexuality and gender return back to our culture? The particularities of media companies and the designs of media technologies place constraints on the way that people act and think. And that produces cultural change. Changing the means of production offers new "disruptions" in the economy, after which new individuals lay claim to those means and call the shots. Sometimes they do this to become the rich and powerful; sometime they do this to avoid those people.

In the third part of class, we will consider what all this means. Like: why do we use media to talk about how much we don't like media? How are people deciding what "media" means in this discussion? And what ideals from American culture are framing the conversation? Political talk tends to oppose technology to culture so that gains in one lead to losses in the other. But depending on the case, technology could be good or bad; culture too. Are video games good or bad? Are they technology or culture? To understand what games are doing, we must understand what people do with them, and how they feel about it. But how do we interpret what others think when we can't access their perspective, their experience, or their ideas? Are we as connected as we think we are? Are we as connected as we *want* to be?

COURSE READINGS

There is one required text for this course. Get a copy! The book is available at the Literary Guillotine:

Brooke Gladstone. 2011. *The Influencing Machine*. WW Norton.

All other readings are found in the 'Resources' folder on eCommons, except where a link is provided.

LEARNING GOALS

- You will know the difference between the concepts media, the Media, and mediums such that you can identify examples of each when you see them in the wild (i.e., anywhere not on the syllabus);
- You will understand the big debates among sociologists and other social scientists who study media, such that you can illustrate each perspective in the argument using an empirical example;
- You will work with others to analyze and critique empirical data such that you can effectively communicate this to the class in ways clear and convincing, using media to help.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (% of final grade; all work submitted after the deadline will receive a 10% deduction per 24 hours)

- A) *Class Participation* (10%): You are expected to attend lecture well-read and well-prepared to discuss the readings prior to the start of class. Your undivided attention is expected at each lecture. Computers may *only* be used for taking notes and sharing work. Do not come to class to sleep. You get one unexcused absence; additional unexcused absences will receive a 2% deduction.
- B) *Live Feed* (40%): You will work in a group to create a 15-minute presentation for the class. Your group will have a single topic about which you will gather data throughout the quarter. You will together and separately analyze these data. You will meet regularly as a group to discuss your most recent findings. In Week 10, your group will present to the class with 5 minutes of Q&A. Your presentation will be graded by your classmates. More details will be provided in class.
- C) *Media Journal* (25%): There will be five journal entries required throughout the quarter. I will provide you with a worksheet. Here you will provide an analysis of your on-going 'Live Feed' research, an evaluation of your group's work process, and cite the data you've collected. The journals are due 10/9, 10/23, 11/6, 11/20 and 12/4 (always by 9pm).
- D) *Final Paper* (25%): You will complete a final paper of 10-15 pages, double-spaced (3,000 word minimum). The details of this assignment will be discussed in class. The Final Paper is due in your drop box at 9pm on December 10.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

You are expected to follow the University guidelines for academic honesty. Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Attribution and proper citations are expected for all ideas that are not your own. If you have any doubts, please speak to me *before* the assignment is due. For more information on penalties for plagiarism, see *The Navigator* (<http://reg.ucsc.edu/navigator/>) and the *UCSC Student Policies and Regulations Handbook* (<http://www2.ucsc.edu/judicial/handbook.shtml>).

SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMODATIONS

All students should be able to participate in this course. Please address any special needs you may have with me at the beginning of the quarter, or when a challenge arises. If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter or at least two week prior to an exam. Contact DRC at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

COURSE OUTLINE (things marked 'VIEW' will be presented in class)

Thursday 9/24, EPISODE 0

Media Practices in a Material World

1. Introduction, syllabus and class mechanics

Tuesday 9/29, EPISODE 1

The Three Ms in Practice: Media, the Media, and Mediums

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'Introduction' and 'In the Beginning'
2. Michael Schudson, 'Media Effects'
3. Raymond Williams, 'The Meanings of Culture'

NO CLASS, Thursday 10/1Part I: Amassing Media

Tuesday 10/6, EPISODE 2

The Influencing Machine: Broadcasting power and censorship and NPR

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'The American Exception'
2. Michael Schudson, 'The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism'
3. Edward Herman and Robert McChesny, *The Global Media*

VIEW: *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* (Kirby Dick, 2007)

Thursday 10/8, EPISODE 3

You Will Buy My Argument: Propaganda in the broadcast era

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'Existential Angst'
2. Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule!*
3. Ari Adut, 'A Theory of the Public Sphere'

VIEW: *The Century of the Self* (Adam Curtis, 2002)

Tuesday 10/13, EPISODE 4

(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction: Discontents of the broadcast era

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'Canis Journalisticus' and 'Birds on a Wire'
2. David Weinberger, *Too Big to Know*
3. Roland Barthes, 'Operation Margarine' and 'Myth Today'

VIEW: *Merchants of Cool* (Frontline, 2001)

Thursday 10/15, EPISODE 5

"Sit down, digital...": All media was 'new' media at some point

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'News You Can't Use'

2. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, *New Media 1740-1915*
 3. Eric Klinenberg, *Convergence: News Production in a Digital Age*
- VIEW: Bruce Sterling, 'Shaping Things' (2011)

Tuesday 10/20, EPISODE 6

Phones, Drones and other Appliances that Stay Awake while We Sleep

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'The Great Refusal'
 2. Brian Chen, *Always On*
 3. Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock*
 4. LISTEN: <http://www.npr.org/2014/03/22/292794454/breaking-news-robot-reports-an-earthquake>
- VIEW: 'Spaced Out' (VICE Motherboard, 2014)

Part II: Using and Getting Used by Media

Thursday 10/22, EPISODE 7

The Secret Theater: When media goes portable

1. Shuhei Hosokawa, 'The Walkman Effect'
 2. Michael Bull, 'The Audio-Visual iPod'
 3. Tia DeNora, 'Music as Technology of the Self'
- VIEW: danah boyd, 'It's Complicated' (2014)

Tuesday 10/27, EPISODE 8

Algorithms: My computer makes me do bad things

1. Daniel Beunza and David Stark, 'Ecologies of Value in a Wall Street Trading Room'
 2. Tarleton Gillespie, 'The Relevance of Algorithms'
 3. David Lavery, 'As Big Data Grows, a New Role Emerges: The Chief Data Officer':
<http://asmarterplanet.com/blog/2014/02/chief-data-officer.html>
- VIEW: *Money & Speed* (VPRO, 2012)

Thursday 10/29, EPISODE 9

The Sexual Reproduction of Culture

1. Jason Orne, 'Sexual Racism'
 2. Richard Dyer, 'Stereotyping'
 3. Kevin Lewis, 'The Limits of Racial Prejudice'
- VIEW: Aziz Anzari and Eric Klinenberg, 'Modern Romance' (2015)

Tuesday 11/3, EPISODE 10

Cash Machine: This service takes a surcharge

1. William Bielby and Denise Bielby, 'Making Hits'
 2. Jonathan Sterne, 'There is no Music Industry'
 3. Robert Reich, 'Is Big Tech Too Powerful?'
- VIEW: *Generation Like* (Frontline, 2014)

Thursday 11/5, EPISODE 11

Passing Notes on Class: Bootlegs, samizdat, pirate radio and Pirate Bay

1. Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*
2. Scott Timberg, 'The Creative Class is a Lie'
3. David Lowery, 'Meet the New Boss, Worse than the Old Boss?'

VIEW: *RIP! A Remix Manifesto* (Brett Gaylor, 2008)

Part III: Like Talking to a Wall (with a Touchscreen Built-in)

Tuesday 11/10, EPISODE 12

Machines of Loving Grace: Better living through technology

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'Bias'
2. Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not A Gadget*
3. Paul DiMaggio et al., 'Social Implications of the Internet'

VIEW: *Black Mirror*, 'The Entire History of You' (BBC, 2011)

Thursday 11/12, EPISODE 13

Vidya: The gamification of society

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'War' and 'Objectivity'
2. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*
3. Brian McKernan, 'The Morality of Play'

VIEW: *Second Skin* (Juan Carlos Pineiro, 2008)

Tuesday 11/17, EPISODE 14

Bad Newspeople: Is technology destroying culture??

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'Disclosure' and 'The Matrix in Me'
2. Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*
3. Diana Mutz and Byron Reeves, 'The New Videomalaise'

VIEW: *Black Mirror*, 'The Waldo Moment' (BBC, 2013)

Thursday 11/19, EPISODE 15

Bad News, People: Technology is destroying culture!

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'The Influencing Machines' and 'Um, Panic?'
2. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*
3. Matt Ratto, 'Ethics of Seamless Infrastructures'
4. James Fahn, 'Feel me? The Promise and Perils of Sensor-based Journalism':
http://www.cjr.org/feature/feel_me.php

VIEW: *Digital Amnesia* (VPRO, 2014)

Tuesday 11/24, EPISODE 16

You don't have to "Save" the Internet (but it couldn't hurt)

1. Brooke Gladstone, 'I, Robot' and 'I, Media'
2. Solon Borocas, Sophie Hood, and Malte Ziewitz, 'Governing Algorithms'
3. Douglas Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed*

VIEW: *The Internet's Own Boy* (Brian Knappenberger, 2014)

NO CLASS, Thursday 11/26

Part IV: Presentations

Tuesday 12/1, Live Feeds 1-4

Thursday 12/3, Live Feeds 5-8