Media, Technologies, and Culture
An Introduction to Media and Cultural Studies

COMM 125, XXXX, Instructor: XXXXX
Section XX: Day and time, Rm XXXX
Office Hours: XXXX
Phone or txt: XXXX
E-mail: XXXX
Blog: XXXX

Course Description
This course examines historical, theoretical, aesthetic (artistic), and practical approaches to understanding and using media over the past century. Every innovation in media technology has been paralleled by transformations in the social, cultural, and political public spheres throughout the world. Students will leave this course with an understanding of the key concepts and theories regarding media, old and new, and the basic technical and creative artistic skills necessary to communicate using a variety of complementary technologies that comprise “the media.” The social and cultural languages of the 21st century are networked, global, and interactive. We, as citizens of this networked world, must learn to read, write, and speak these new languages – to be literate in the so-called “digital age.”

“In what follows we shall be questioning concerning technology. Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences or topics. The way is a way of thinking. All ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary. We shall be questioning concerning technology, and in so doing we should like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology. When we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological within its own bounds.”

–Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 1955

Required Texts
1. How to Read a Film: Movies, Media and Beyond by James Monaco (Oxford, 2009)
3. The Medium is the Massage by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (Gingko, 2001)
4. Television: Technology and Cultural Form by Raymond Williams (Routledge, 2003)
5. Convergence Culture, Revised Ed. by Henry Jenkins (NYU Press, 2008)
6. Alternative and Activist New Media by Leah Lievrouw (Polity, 2011)
7. PDF Files available on the course blog – listed with an asterisk (*)

Recommended Text
1. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Ed. (MLA, 2009)
Required Hardware
1. Motion Imaging Device - Smart Phone or Digital Camera/Camcorder
2. Storage - Flash Drive (USB) or Portable Hard Drive (USB) or Cloud account

Learning Objectives
Upon completion of this course students will be able to:
1. Understand and discuss the key works and ideas that have developed within the fields of media and cultural studies.
2. Critique media and cultural texts by artists and makers using critical, historical, and theoretical frameworks drawn from class readings, discussions, and screenings.
3. Apply critical, historical, artistic, and theoretical frameworks examined throughout the course to media and cultural texts not covered in class.
4. Demonstrate an ability to read critically, write clearly, and research and argue effectively as the foundational skills upon which media and cultural studies depend.
5. Use electronic and digital media for research, presentation, and creative production at a basic level of proficiency.
6. Complete a final project that incorporates creative artistic production and critical research practice.

Course Requirements
Class/Screening Attendance. Students are required to attend all class/screening sessions. Absences due to sickness must be documented in writing. More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course. In addition, students must check the course blog – comm125.org – between class sessions for new information pertaining to class discussion and readings.

Discussion Questions. Students are expected to complete each reading assignment and to formulate one substantive question for presentation during class discussion. Students must post this question to the course blog (as a comment) by midnight prior to class meeting time.

Blog Posts. Students will create and maintain an individual blog and post to it weekly. See course schedule for more details.

Screening Reports/Critical Essays. Students will complete and post to their blog two (2) short screening reports and three (3) critical essays responding to a media-based theme (determined by the instructor) drawn from class lectures, discussions, readings, and screenings.

Critique Sessions. Students will present their final projects at work-in-progress critique sessions to fellow class members. Presentations should focus on integrating student work into the context of the media and topics featured throughout the course.

Final Research-based Project/Presentation + Writeup. Students will complete a final project addressing a social justice topic in a rigorous and creative manner. Students will present their project in class using media and technology to illustrate or amplify their argument.

Grade Breakdown
Attendance/Blog (20%), Critique Session (20%), Midterm Essay Exam (25%), Final Project/Presentation + Writeup (35%).
Course Logistics

Incompletes or Missing Papers/Projects. No late assignments or projects will be accepted for any reason except for a documented medical emergency. Incompletes will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Midterm exam essays and final papers/projects are due at the beginning of class on the due date.

Academic Integrity. Saint Mary’s College expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from students. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade and be reported to the Office of Advising. If you have any doubts or questions about these policies, consult the student handbook and/or confer with the professor. The MLA Handbook provides concise advice on how to avoid plagiarism – read chapter 2.

Student Disability Services. Student Disability Services extends reasonable and appropriate accommodations that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements for individuals with qualifying disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Office at (925) 631-4358 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation, policies, guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the following address on the Saint Mary’s website: http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sds

Class Schedule

UNIT I: FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES – THEORY AND PRACTICE

Week 1

28 August: Introduction to Media Studies - Follow the Stones
View: The Rolling Stones – concert film footage, music videos, and television clips

30 August: Film Art
View: Blade Runner, Ridley Scott, 1982 (USA)
Read: James Monaco, How to Read a Film, introduction and chapter 1
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

Week 2

4 September: Film Technology
View: Sympathy for the Devil (trailer), Jean-Luc Godard, 1968 (France)
Read: James Monaco, How to Read a Film, chapter 2
John Cantine et al., Shot by Shot, chapters 1-3
James Monaco, How to Read a Film, chapter 4 [recommended – film history]
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

6 September: Film Language
View: Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2011 (Thailand)
Read: James Monaco, How to Read a Film, chapter 3
John Cantine et al., Shot by Shot, chapters 4-6
Blog: SCREENING REPORT 1
Lab: Blogs and Digital Video
Week 3

11 September: Print and Electronic Media
View: Network, Sidney Lumet, 1976 (USA)
Read: James Monaco, How to Read a Film, chapter 6
      John Cantine et al., Shot by Shot, chapters 7-9
      James Monaco, How to Read a Film, chapter 5 [recommended – film theory]
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

13 September: Digital Media
View: BLADE RUNNER revisited >3.6 gigapixels, François Vautier, 2010 (France)
Read: James Monaco, How to Read a Film, chapter 7
      John Cantine et al., Shot by Shot, chapters 10-12
Blog: SCREENING REPORT 2
Lab: Blog Images and Online Video

UNIT II: MEDIUM THEORY AND TELEVISION STUDIES

Week 4

18 September: Medium Theory
View: Rebirth of a Nation, DJ Spooky, 2007 (USA)
Read: McLuhan and Fiore, The Medium is the Massage, p.1-91
      MLA Handbook, chapters 1 and 2 [recommended]
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

20 September: Technological Determinism
Hear: The Medium is the Massage, Marshall McLuhan, Columbia,1968 (USA)
Read: McLuhan and Fiore, The Medium is the Massage, p.92-160
Blog: CRITICAL ESSAY 1
Lab: Shooting Video

Week 5

25 September: Technology and Society
View: Quatermass and the Pit, Nigel Kneale, BBC, 1958-1959 (UK)
Read: Raymond Williams, Television, chapters 1 to 3
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

27 September: Flow
View: This is Now!, Marcio Puga, Mauricio Massaia, & Per Thoresson, 2012 (Australia)
Read: Raymond Williams, Television, chapters 4 to 6
Blog: CRITICAL ESSAY 2
Lab: Editing Video

UNIT III: TELEVISION/POST-TELEVISION/NEW MEDIA

Week 6

2 October: Convergence, Audiences and Knowledge Communities
View: Survivor: Cook Islands, Mark Burnett, CBS, 2006 (USA)
      American Idol: Season 8, Adam Lambert, FOX, 2009 (USA)
Read: Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture, introduction and chapters 1 and 2
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes
4 October: Transmedia
View: The Animatrix (trailer), Peter Chung et al., 2003 (USA/Japan)
Read: Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture, chapter 3
Blog: CRITICAL ESSAY 3
Lab: Production/Postproduction Troubleshooting

Week 7
9 October: Fans and Participatory Culture
View: Star Wars Uncut, Crowd Sourced Fan Film, 2010 (USA)
Read: Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture, chapter 4
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

11 October: Roots of Activist and Alternative New Media
View: Anarchy in the UK, Sex Pistols, 1978 (UK)
[I Can’t Get No] Satisfaction, Devo, 1977 (USA)
Read: Leah Lievrouw, Alt and Activist New Media, chapters 1 and 2
Due: CRITIQUE SESSION 1
Blog: Critique Session Response 1

Week 8
16 October: Culture Jamming and Alternative Computing
View: Sonic Outlaws, Craig Baldwin/Negativland, 1995 (USA)
Read: Leah Lievrouw, Alt and Activist New Media, chapters 3 and 4
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

18 October: NO CLASS - MIDTERM HOLIDAY

Week 9
23 October: Participatory Journalism and Mediated Mobilization
View: Boingboing.net, Twitter and Facebook (Cyberspace)
Three Big Pigs, Egor Zhgun, 2011 (Russia)
Read: Leah Lievrouw, Alt and Activist New Media, chapters 5 and 6
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

25 October: Commons Knowledge and Mediation
Read: Leah Lievrouw, Alt and Activist New Media, chapters 7 and 8
Due: CRITIQUE SESSION 2
Blog: Critique Session Response 2

UNIT IV: MAPPING CONTEMPORARY MEDIA CULTURE

Week 10
30 October: Plasticity
View: Waltz with Bashir, Ari Folman, 2008 (Israel)
Read: *Catherine Malabou, What Should We Do with Our Brain? (excerpts)
Due: Discussion Question/Screening Notes

1 November: Posthumanism
View: Overview: ICT Virtual Humans, Institute for Creative Technologies, 2011 (USA)
Read: *Paul Virilio, The Information Bomb (excerpts)
Due: CRITIQUE SESSION 3
Blog: Critique Session Response 3
Week 11

6 November: Gaming
View: *Dead Island* (trailer), Techland, 2011 (USA)
*Call of Duty: Black Ops* (trailer), Treyarch, 2010 (USA)
Read: “Alex Galloway, “Origins of the First Person Shooter”

8 November: Resistance
Read: “Lisa Nakamura, “Cyberrace”
Due: CRITIQUE SESSION 4
Blog: Critique Session Response 4

Week 12

13 November: Telepresence
“All You Need is Love,” *Our World*, BBC, 1967 (UK)

15 November: Genre
Read: “Jennifer Egan, “Black Box”
Due: CRITIQUE SESSION 5
Blog: Critique Session Response 5

Week 13

20 November: NO CLASS – Prepare for Presentations

22 November: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 14

27 November: Final Creative Project Presentations/Critique Session

29 November: Final Creative Project Presentations/Critique Session

Week 15

4 December: Final Creative Project Presentations/Critique Session

6 December: Final Creative Project Presentations/Critique Session

Week 16

13 December: Final Creative Project Submission – Final Exam Session
Due: FINAL PROJECTS + WRITE-UPS (posted to blog and linked on course blog)
Guides to Research, Writing, and Artistic Production in Media and Cultural Studies
(Preferred editions are listed, but any edition will work – earlier editions of many of these books can be found cheap as used copies on Amazon).

Research and Writing

A Short Guide to Writing about Film, 8th Ed. by Timothy Corrigan (Pearson, 2012)
How to Do Media and Cultural Studies by Jane Stokes (Sage, 2003)
Economical Writing, 2nd Ed. by Deirdre McCloskey (Waveland, 1999)

Film and Video Production

Video Basics, 7th Ed. by Herb Zettl (Wadsworth, 2012)
The Shut Up and Shoot Documentary Guide by Anthony Q. Artis (Focal, 2007)

Film and Video Editing

The Technique of Film Editing, 2nd Ed. by Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar (Focal, 2009)
In the Blink of an Eye, 2nd Ed. by Walter Murch (Silman-James, 2001)

Screenwriting

Writing in Pictures by Joseph McBride (Vintage, 2012)
Screenplay by Syd Field (Delta, 2005)

Design and New Media

The Non-Designer’s Design Book, 3rd Ed. by Robin Williams (Peachpit Press, 2008)
Visual Quickstart Guides (Peachpit Press) [on specific software applications and hardware]
Linda.com (available through SMC) [on specific software applications and hardware]

The Lightning Field, Walter De Maria, 1977