Introduction to the Cultures of the Web
LLCU 607: Winter 2021

Professor: Cecily Raynor
Zoom Classroom: (students will be provided with the Zoom link over email)
Schedule: Mondays, 1pm-4pm
Zoom Office Hours: T, Th 11:30-12:30 or by appointment
E-mail: Cecily.raynor@mcgill.ca

I. Class Description: What languages, communities and identities form in the technoscapes of the Web, a dynamic, often ephemeral and seemingly place-less space? How do researchers approach a territory that is multimodal in its very design --visual, textual, and auditory-- jumping across platforms and applications and ever on the move through mobile devices? This course will provide students with the historical and theoretical underpinnings needed to enter into the Web as a research arena. In doing so, we will consider new architectures for engaging our web-saturated human experience along with the constraints of digital environments as a new medium. We will look at enduring technologies with a historical footprint as well as emerging media and apps (including TikTok, Parler, Twitch and Discord). Many of our case studies will come from the Americas and Europe, but students are encouraged to explore their own geographic and language interests within the transnational traditions of the Web. This course also provides an introduction to select digital humanities methods specifically tailored to web content including web analytics, web-scraping and web visualizations.

II. Objectives: This course has three intersecting goals: 1) to provide students with a theoretical framework for analyzing the web as a cultural territory; 2) to familiarize students with a series of digital primary texts from various genres (short texts, film, audio, social media platforms, experimental media, GIFs, MEMES, digital narratives); 3) to support students in undertaking their own research on web-based cultural production, in which they engage theoretical and cultural questions related to the themes of the course.

III. Class Format: In its entirety, this course will be delivered remotely over Zoom, will take the mixed form of a seminar, comprised of lectures, tutorials, student presentations and class discussion. Therefore, it is essential that students be prepared to actively participate. Because the success of the sessions will depend on student contributions, all participants must read the material before class to be able to contribute their ideas, views and comments. Please note that all theoretical texts described below will be available on MyCourses either as a downloadable PDFs or via links. In situations in which I have included the entirety of a text for students’ reference, the page numbers for the selected readings required for each session are specified.

Note on Remote Learning: There are 2 hours and 50 minutes of fixed instruction per week for this course. Students are permitted two unexcused absences. For students who miss a session on Zoom, weekly course materials, lecture slides and links to student presentations will be organized weekly and available on MyCourses. Students will be able to respond to weekly discussion questions on MyCourses in addition to traditional class participation. Connectivity or time zone concerns that result in an absence will be addressed individually with the instructor, as they may be considered grounds for an excused absence depending on the circumstance.

IV. Grading

1. Participation and Digital Portfolio (20%): Students are expected to come to class having read all of the readings for that session. The participation grade will be based on their contribution to class discussions, measured not only by frequency but also by quality. Failure to actively participate in class discussions and/or to come prepared will negatively impact your grade. Students will be given weekly assignments that they will complete on their individual WordPress sites. **These assignments are due by the beginning of each Monday's class session.** Each task, which will
include reflections on the weekly readings as well as digital methods such as web-scraping and analytics, will be clearly outlined in the Assignments section of MyCourses. Length (generally 300-500 words) and format will vary for creative prompts. The totality of the assignments will constitute an individual Digital Portfolio for each student and will be graded as a completed project at the end of the semester. In order to protect privacy and security, students are not required to include personal information (McGill or otherwise) on their sites. They also have the option of keeping their sites in privacy mode and providing the instructor with a password for individual consultation.

2. Oral Presentation (10%): Students will give one 15-20-minute oral presentation on a theoretical text or methodology related to the Web. They may also include an analysis of a reading’s relationship to a primary text (textual, audio, visual), explore a tool, or a digital project. Students may choose to use audio-visual materials (screen shares of web-based materials, along with Keynote, PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.) to aid in their presentations.

3. Short Essay (30%): Students will write an investigative essay of 10-15 pages. This first essay can be elaborated upon for the final essay and serve as a working paper towards its extension. MLA Style Guidelines must be followed. The due date for the short essay is Friday, March 5th by midnight.

4. Final Essay (40%): The remaining 40% of the grade will be dedicated to the final essay, consisting of 20-25 pages. These essays will critically engage a topic of investigation of the student’s choice. Please consult the MLA Style Guidelines and submit the essay electronically. Late essays will not be accepted.

V. Course Outline

Week 1: Monday, January 11th, “Course Introduction, Web History and Modes of Analysis”

Readings:

Katherine Hayles, “Print is Flat, Code is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis”


Digital Sources:
“History of Computers – from the Abacus to the iPhone.” *Explain That Stuff.*
Video: “How the Internet Works”

Week 2: Monday, January 18th, “Decolonization and Marginality: Web on the Periphery”

Readings:


Digital Sources:
Tumblr: www.tumblr.com

“Queering the Map” URL: https://www.queeringthemap.com/


“**Optional Reading:** “Chapter Four: Unicorns, Janitors, Ninjas, Wizards, and Rock Stars” Data Feminism. Laura Klein and Catherine D'Ignazio, MIT Open Press, 2019. URL: https://bookbook.pubpub.org/pub/fcshwhq6

Week 3: Monday, January 25th, “Internet Archives: The Web as a Historical Document”

In-Class Tutorial on Unicode: Quinn Dombrowski, Stanford University

Readings:


Digital Sources: https://archive.org/

Week 4: Monday, February 1st, “The Free and Open Source Software Movement (FOSS) and Net Neutrality”

Readings:
Davis et al. “The Social Shaping of the Brazilian Internet: Historicizing the interactions between states, corporations, and NGOs in Information and Communication Technology, Development and Diffusion”


Week 5: Monday, February 8th, Cuba: The Intranet, el “Paquete Semanal,” and a Late-blooming Mobile Internet Economy

Readings:

Digital Sources:
VICE video report: “This is Cuba’s Netflix, Hulu, and Spotify – all without the internet” (2015, 7 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTTno8D-b2E
Music video: La Diosa “ El paquete semanal” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rcZlGiwh

Week 6: Monday, February 15th, “Online Gaming as Cultural Production”

Readings:


Digital Sources:
Twitch: https://www.twitch.tv/

“Why This Mexican-American Designed A Video Game That Simulates Border Crossings” https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/border-crossing-video-game_n_58b5c8f3e4b0780bac2dc22a

Short Film: “Tata’s Gift” (Los Cenzontles, 2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlGEjj394FM (8 min)

Week 7: Monday, February 22nd, “AI and Bot-Generated Fiction”
(Students create their own bots)

Readings:

This syllabus is a live document and is subject to change

Last updated: December 23rd, 2020

Digital Sources:
https://twitter.com/home

Anna Anthropy, Queers in Love at the End of the World (California, no date)
URL: https://w.itch.io/end-of-the-world
Nick Montfort, "Taroko Gorge" (2009)
URL: https://nickm.com/taroko_gorge/


Week 8: Monday, March 1st, Reading Week (Short Essays are due Friday, March 5th by midnight)

Week 9: Monday, March 8th, “Digital Waste, Glitch, and Error"


Digital Sources:
Boca de lixo (1993) Dir. Eduardo Coutinho
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRGCB7uTCUo (opening sequence)


Week 10: Friday, March 13th, “Immersive Media, Techno-femme/feminized/feminism and Digital Identities”

Readings:


Digital Sources:
URL: http://hyper-reality.co/ (short film)

Week 11: Friday, March 20th, “Social Media Narratives and Communities”
Readings:


Digital Sources:
Twitter Hashtags: #distractinglysexy URL: https://twitter.com/hashtag/distractinglysexy?lang=en
#staymadabby URL: https://twitter.com/search?q=%23staymadabby&src=typed_query
“#ShareBlackStories on Instagram.” Instagram Info Center. Posted on February 12, 2019 URL: https://instagram-press.com/blog/2019/02/12/shareblackstories-on-instagram/

Week 12: Friday, March 27th, “Visual Ephemerality and Remix: MEMES and GIFs"

Readings:


Digital Sources:
Anna Anthropy, “Games, memes, interactive fictions”, W.itch.io URL: https://w.itch.io/

#Wastelandmemes URL: https://twitter.com/hashtag/WasteLandMemes?src=hashtag_click
Sor Juana memes URL: https://www.pinterest.ca/an_valerio/memes-de-sor-juana-in%C3%A9s-de-la-cruz/

Week 13: Friday, April 3rd, “Cellphilms and Web-Based Short Films"

Readings:

MacEntee et al. “What’s a Cellphilm?: Integrating Mobile Phone Technology and Participatory Visual Research and Activism” Sense Publishers, 2016


Digital Sources:
Sangre y Levadura (Colombia, 2015, dir. Juan Carlos Mazo, 5:00) URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esF-hTT3jdQ
Rojo en el bosque sangriento (Argentina, 2006, dir. Tetsuo Lumiere, 4:04)
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SINsGagzVJI
Due-Low-Fi - I’ll Shoot You First (Argentina, c. 2008, dir. Tetsuo Lumiere, 3:02)
URL: https://vimeo.com/120332957
El Algoritmo del Alma (Mexico, 2019, dir. Israel Gomez, 6:58)
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpFEmy26vjl&feature=emb_title
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_HWRcs4tz8

Week 14: Friday, April 10th, “Mobile Futures and Emerging Media”

Readings:

David Gilbert. “Even QAnon Is Abandoning Parler, the Far-Right’s Answer to Twitter.” Vice, 2020.

Poniewozik et al. “48 Hours in the Strange and Beautiful World of TikTok” New York Times, October 2019
URL: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/10/arts/TIK-TOK.html

Digital Sources:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parler
https://www.tiktok.com/en/

FINAL PAPERS DUE BY EMAIL BY MIDNIGHT ON THE 20th of April 2021

IMPORTANT: According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations at www.mcgill.ca.

VI. Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

VII. Submission of Assignments in French

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).

VIII. A Note on Student Inclusion
As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

IX. Remote Delivery

This course will be delivered entirely online, which might be a challenging experience. If you have any concerns, you can contact me or refer to McGill's Student-specific Guidelines for Remote Teaching and Learning and Remote Learning Resources.

X. Recording of Sessions

Some portions of the online sessions might be recorded. You will be notified through a ‘pop-up’ box in Zoom if a lecture or portion of a class is being recorded. By remaining in sessions that are recorded, you agree to the recording, and you understand that your image, voice, and name may be disclosed to classmates. You also understand that recordings will be made available in myCourses to students registered in the course.

XI. Intellectual property

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or medium without the explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. Please refer to McGill’s Guidelines for Instructors and Students on Remote Teaching and Learning for further information.

XII. Netiquette

The University recognizes the importance of maintaining teaching spaces that are respectful and inclusive for all involved. To this end, offensive, violent, or harmful language arising in contexts such as the following may be cause for disciplinary action:

1. Username (use only your legal or preferred name)
2. Visual backgrounds
3. "Chat" boxes

To maintain a clear and uninterrupted learning space for all, you should keep your microphone muted throughout your class, unless invited by the instructor to speak. You should follow instructors’ directions about the use of the “chat” function on remote learning platforms.

Remember that we are communicating through technology and online platforms but still require the warmth and understanding of human social interactions. The most important rule in netiquette is to always remember the human(s) behind the machine(s). Always treat your instructor and classmates with respect in Zoom sessions, emails, or any other communication. Disrespectful interactions and comments will not be tolerated.