

MIT Visual Arts Program | Department of Architecture
Spring 2008

4.381/4.366 Introduction to Online Participatory Media: Zones of Emergency – Networks, Tactics, Breakdown

Mondays 7 – 10pm and Wednesdays 9:30am – 12:30pm, N51-315 IEL

Instructor

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Teaching Assistants

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The objective of this course is to introduce an overview of web-based platforms as means through which to explore the cultural, social, political, and economic impact of mediated communication. Hands-on design exercises and experiments are continually framed and examined by critical reflection and discussions. An overview of historical “art for all” and participatory art practices of early net-art and public art practices will show how digital communication and culture have altered the way in which collaboration occurs, changing conventional notions of authorship and giving rise to the collective elaboration of meaning.

The course is will be taught in two parts. The Monday Nights @ VAP Spring 2008 lecture series *Zones of Emergency*, which is open to the public, will function as a lab for this course. It is co-organized with VAP Director Ute Meta Bauer and Lecturer Jae Rhim Lee. Lectures will range from philosophical and cultural understandings of emergency to practical “on the ground” operating organizations to current use of networked technology examining its own breakdown. In contrast to the lecture series, class meetings on Wednesdays are for enrolled students only, and will be broken into two parts 1) lectures/screenings and 2) debate and short presentation by individual students or groups. Class attendance and participation is mandatory on both days. Enrollment is limited to 12 students.

We will address three major themes: 1) web as wild archive, 2) agents, users, creators, and 3) tactical opposition and breakdown. A brief description of each theme is described below. These themes will be integrated with the exercises to explore the ways in which participatory practices on the web can promote social critique and change while providing a site for artistic practice.

Course Requirements

This course is multidisciplinary in nature, combining aspects of theory, art, and technology. Students from various disciplines and backgrounds including but not limited to art practice, media studies, computer science, design, architecture, and engineering are encouraged to enroll. While students are not required to have any specialized technical experience, students will be expected to conceptualize, design and test their projects in real-world or

virtual scenarios. It is understood that students will produce a range of projects from simple small scale experiments to large scale participatory projects depending on their skills and interests. Collaboration and group work will be encouraged so students can benefit from a cross-disciplinary skill set. In addition to projects, students will be required to do periodic readings and participate in online forums and documentation. Course requirements include: mandatory attendance, completion of the weekly assignments, mid-term and final projects, presentations, and documentation of work completed for the course.

Grading

Total Grade = 15% attendance & class participation + 25% online forums and documentation + 25% midterm + 35% final project.

Lab fee

A lab fee of \$50 will be charged to your account on add date.

Reviews

Work in progress reviews will be conducted periodically to allow for peer input and collaborative learning. Final reviews will consist of formal presentations of work, followed by instructor-led critiques and feedback.

Unit 1: Web as Wild Archive

This unit will introduce the decentralized way in which data is structured, stored, distributed and accessed on the internet. Exercises will focus on researching, mining, compiling and representing existing online data with the purpose of examining issues raised by a specific cultural phenomenon, societal condition, or zone of emergency accessible on the web. This unit will include an overview of “art for all” and participatory practices of participation and performance art of the 1960s, early net art, and the history and development of network communication.

Unit 2: Agents, Users, Creators

The second unit will investigate the preconditions, motivations and typologies of participation. Exercises will focus on the distribution of an invitation and the resulting feedback loop generated between artist and respondents in order to gain practical experience of how dialogue and collaboration over the web differs from analog venues. We will look at platform design, affordances, constraints, and the cultural and political effects that they produce. How do synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication differ? What are the necessary conditions for sustained and meaningful online discourse? How can polyglot contributions from many sources form a coherent statement of intent? Exercises will be framed by critical perspectives on the democratization of media, free labor and collectivity.

Unit 3: Tactical Opposition and Breakdown

This final unit will explore how artists and activists have used the web and other networked technology to disrupt systems of government and corporate control, and respond to states of emergency. We will define a set of design principles to rethink how network technology may be used by individuals and ad hoc groups to communicate, deliver content, and propagate messages. How have online social spaces been designed as sites for political rallying and dissent? We will look at the way mobile communication transforms communities where internet access is limited and will explore uses of alternate networks – mesh networks, p2p distribution and SMS. The final project will be designed and implemented alongside this unit.

Schedule

Week 1 W Feb 6	Web as wild archive (in context) Course philosophy and expectations with overview of three units, introductions with backgrounds and interests Slide lecture on history of participation in art and performance, net art and early network communication In class exercise: collaborative profile Assign exercise #1: Understanding complexity, scope and scale. Define research prospectus. Readings: Bruce Sterling, The Hacker Crackdown, Part 1: Crashing the System, 1994 Bertolt Brecht – The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication, 1926
Week 2 M Feb 11 W Feb 13	Networks and the social sphere Workshop on web technology, platforms (html, php, ror, databases) Introduction to 4.391, Jae Rhim Lee and students. Short film screening. Lecture and discussion on emergency capacities and network technologies with Ken Horak from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Please come to class with an idea of the zone of emergency you would like to focus on. Readings: Joseph Beuys – I am looking for field character, 1973 Bettina Funcke – Urgency, 2004 Claire Bishop – Participation, p 10-13, 2006
Week 3 T Feb 19 W Feb 20	Authorship, authority, and anonymity Students present exercise #1 followed by critique and discussion of readings. Slide presentation and discussion on web as the social sphere, democratization of media, collectivity, and current practices Workshop on building networked systems through the work of Burak Arikan Project sketches due for review. Readings: Roland Barthes – The Death of the Author, 1968 Jaron Lanier – Digital Maoism: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism, 2006 Many-to-Many – Reactions to Digital Maoism: Many-to-many, 2006
Week 4 M Feb 25 W Feb 27	Concepts in collective circuits Lecture: On Rwanda – Alfredo Jaar, MIT Amnesty International Field trip to FEMA Bunker Site, the center for disaster operations for the region. Readings: André Breton – Excerpts from What is Surrealism?, 1978 Jürgen Habermas – “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” 1997 Kevin Kelly – Out of Control, Chapter 2: Hive Mind, 1994
Week 5 M Mar 3 W Mar 5	Labor and economics on the web Lecture: Networks, Tactics, Breakdown – Mark Tribe, NeuroTransmitter* In class discussion of lecture and readings. Students present first round prototypes for review. Readings: Tiziana Terranova – “Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy,” 2003 Yochai Benkler – The Wealth of Networks, Ch. 6., 2006 Georges Bataille – The Accursed Share, Volume 1: Consumption, 1949

* This syllabus may change as the course evolves according to the interest of the students. An updated version will be distributed. People with a * by their name need to be confirmed.

Week 6	Gamers, hacktivists
M Mar 10	Lecture: Health and Politics – Amar Kanwar, MIT Physician Without Borders*
W Mar 12	Presentation and workshop focused on mobile experience and games In class exercise: design a transaction between two or more people, document the transaction Readings: Manuel Castells – Excerpt from The Rise of the Network Society, 2000 Michel de Certeau – The Practice of Everyday Life, 1980
Week 7	Alternative networks, power, mobility
M Mar 17	Lecture: Border Issues – Teddy Cruz*, Ute Meta Bauer
W Mar 19	Presentation and workshop on emergency response using technology (SMS) Readings: Peter Bürger – The Negation of the Autonomy of Art, 2002 Henry Jenkins – Excerpt from Convergence Culture, 2006 Charles Perrow – Normal Accidents, p.15-32, 1999
Week 8	
M Mar 24	Spring Break
W Mar 26	Spring Break
Week 9	
M Mar 31	Lecture: Urban Planning and Architecture – Marjetica Potrc
W Apr 2	Individual meetings Readings: Mel Chin – “My Relation to Joseph Beuys Is Overrated,” 2001 John Maeda – Laws of Simplicity: #6 Context, #8 Trust, #9 Failure, 2006
Week 10	Networks, tactics, breakdown
M Apr 7	Lecture: Mel Chin
W Apr 9	Workshop on voting and open source, the work of Mako Hill Discussion of lecture and reading. Strategize for launching final projects Readings: Daniel Kimmage – Iraqi Insurgent Media, 2007 CAE – Excerpt from The Electronic Disturbance, 1994
Week 11	Tactical media
M Apr 14	Lecture: Thierry Nlandu
W Apr 16	Discussion of lecture and readings. Group work Readings: Donna Haraway – Cyborg Manifesto, 1985 Julian Dibbell – Rape in Cyberspace, 1993
Week 12	Embodied networks
M Apr 21	Holiday
W Apr 23	Workshop with Kelly Dobson* on embodied networks Student presentations of final project progress
Week 13	
M Apr 28	Lecture: Ntone Edjabe
W Apr 30	production/individual meetings
Week 14	
M May 5	Lecture: TBD
W May 7	production/individual meetings
Week 15	
M May 12	Final Review
W May 14	Final Review

Reading List – Extended

- Benkler, Yochai. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
- Bishop, Claire, ed. *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.
- Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 25–6
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Scholz, T., Lovink, G., *The Art of Free Cooperation*, MIT Press publication forthcoming, 2008.
- Russell, Adrienne, Mimi Ito, et al. *Networked Public Culture*. <http://networkedpublics.org/>
- Lessig, Lawrence, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.
- Ruscha, Edward. *Leave Any Information At the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- Lovink, Geert. *My first recession*. Rotterdam : V2/NAi Publishers, c2003.
- Oldenburg, R. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999.
- Goldberg, Roselee. *Performance: Live Art Since 1960*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998.
- Suriewicki, James. *Wisdom of the Crowds*. New York: Random House, 2004.
- Habermas, J., 1997. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere." In: Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, London: MIT.
- Levy, Pierre. *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emergening World in Cyberspace*. New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1999.
- Maeda, John. *Laws of Simplicity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.
- Anderson, Chris. *The Long Tail*. New York: Hyperion, 2006.
- Cox, Christoph, Daniel Warner, ed. *Audio Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Castells, Manuel, Mireia Fernandez-Ardévol, Jack Linchuan Qiu, Araba Sey. *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.
- Castells, M. *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, pp. 1-76.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964.
- Laurel, Brenda. *Computers As Theater*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1991.
- Breton, André. *What is Surrealism?* New York: Pathfinder, 1978.
- Popper, Frank. *The Art of the Electronic Age*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993.
- Lévy, Pierre. *Collective Intelligence*. New York: Plenum Publishing, 1997.
- Dune, Anthony, Fiona Raby. *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*. Switzerland: Birkhauser, 2001.
- Granovetter, Mark. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1973
- Kelly, Kevin. *Out of Control*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1994.
- Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture: Politics of the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.
- Tiziana Terranova, *Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy*, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/voluntary>
- Weiser, Mark. "The Computer for the 21st Century." *Scientific American*, pages 94-110, Sept. 1991.
- Winograd, Terry. *Interaction Spaces for the 21st Century Computing*, pages 259-276. New York: Addison-Wesley, 2000.
- McGonigal, Jane. "This Might Be A Game." Diss. U of California, Berkeley, 2006.
- Rustema, Reinder. "The Rise and Fall of DDS." Diss. U of Amsterdam, 2001
- Goriunova, O., Shulgin, A., *From Art on Networks to Art on Platforms* (Casestudies: Runme.org, Micromusic.net and Udaff.com) <http://molodiez.org/From%20Arton%20NetworkstoArt%20on%20Platforms-1.pdf>
- Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press, 2005.