Addressing Media in Fiction

Digital Humanities 150
An undergrad course for 108 students
UVic | Winter 2020 | M R: 10-11:20am
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jentery.github.io/dh150/ (PDF without notes)

Contents:

- Description
- Aims
- Background
- Structure
- Materials
- Schedule
- Assignments
- Policies
- Acknowledgements

Description

Media are everywhere. This course examines how people compose fiction with them. How do we approach media and fiction together? How do we read but also watch, see, play, and listen to fiction? How is fiction designed and experienced?

This course is not a technical course. It does not, for instance, involve any quantitative methods or computer programming. Please also note that, by "media," I mean "audio, image, and text," not "the media" or mass communications and their outlets. Since this is an introductory course open to all undergraduate students at UVic, I will not assume you have any experience with media or digital studies.

Aims

This course encourages you to:

- Interpret the design and use of audio, image, and text for storytelling. We'll experiment with various techniques for watching, seeing, playing, reading, and listening to media and fiction.

- Communicate persuasively with audio, image, and text. You'll have opportunities to compose both with and about each of these media.
- Build a vocabulary for engaging media and fiction from the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Make a simple website and some content for it. No worries if you've never made your own site. I'll provide you with examples and templates, and I will assume no experience in web design or content management.

These four aims should apply to work across disciplines and occupations.

Background

My name is Jentery Sayers. I'm an associate professor of English and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought (CSPT), and I direct the Praxis Studio for Comparative Media Studies. I've been at UVic since 2011, and I did my PhD at the University of Washington. Most of my work is in the field of comparative media studies. I teach courses on American fiction, cultural studies, media, and prototyping.

This course has a history (since 2009 or so) of combining media concepts with media practice. The content is grounded in the humanities, but with questions relevant to the arts and sciences, too. I've taught this course numerous times, with a variety of themes. I like to anchor inquiry in how "this becomes that"—how, for instance, media are composed and then change over time—and I find the humanities to be central to matters of media and technology because they demonstrate why history, fiction, language, and culture are fundamental to not only innovation but also the values of design. How is stuff made, by whom, for whom, and under what assumptions? Engaging such questions demands attention to processes *and* things. Media aren't just products or ideas.

Structure

I've designed this course to unfold through a series of modules. I hope they provide you with a framework for what we'll study and a map for how we'll approach it.

- "What Are Media?": on defining audio, image, text and their relation to fiction
- "Making a Website": on using HTML and CSS to compose and publish audio, images, and text
- "Media Aesthetics": on evaluating how we sense and make sense of media and fiction
- "Audio in Fiction": on ways of listening to and playing fiction
- "Images in Fiction": on ways of seeing, watching, and playing fiction
- "Text in Fiction": on ways of reading and playing fiction
- "Prototyping with Media and Fiction": on speculations informed by media aesthetics
- "Remembering Media": on what we did and learned this term

We'll meet twice each week. The course will combine lectures and class discussions with workshops. I will often dedicate an entire meeting to a workshop, where you'll respond to

prompts and worksheets I'll distribute. The prompts will guide your study and practice of media, including how you make your own content with audio, image, and text.

Materials

There are no required books or textbooks for this course; however, I recommend purchasing *Fun Home* as well as copies of *Gone Home* and *Undertale*, both of which you could play with friends.

Here's a list of what we'll study in the order we'll study them:

- Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, *M00D OF THE M0MENT*
- Nalo Hopkinson, "Message in a Bottle"
- Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre, *War of the Worlds*
- Lucille Fletcher, *Sorry, Wrong Number*
- Janina Matthewson, Jeffrey Cranor, and Mary Epworth, *Within the Wires* (one episode)
- Maeve Higgins, Ian Chillag, and Jennifer Mills, *Everything Is Alive* (one episode)
- Fandor, "Show and Tell: The Movie Voiceover"
- Marina Kittaka, *Secrets Agent*
- Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (selections)
- Emil Ferris, *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* (selections)
- Amanda Strong and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*
- Fulbright Company, *Gone Home*
- N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (selections)
- Porpentine and Brenda Neotenomie, *With Those We Love Alive*
- Toby Fox and Temmie Chang, *Undertale*
- Avery Alder, *Simple World*

Most of these materials are available online or in the public domain. When neither is the case, I'm providing passcode-protected access according to fair dealing guidelines. See me for the ID and passcode. Where applicable, I've donated to artists's Patreon accounts or the like.

Schedule

Here's the schedule for the course. I link to materials, including notes, readings, audio, games, and videos, that we'll discuss during class. Please study those materials in advance, and see me for a passcode where applicable. If I need to change the schedule, then I will notify you during class at least a week in advance of the change.

To keep us on schedule and help all of us plan ahead, expect an email from me to everyone once (and only once) per week. If you're not receiving that weekly email, then please let me know.

Introductions

We'll begin by introducing ourselves, reviewing the syllabus, and talking about the aims and assumptions of the course.

M 6 January

Hello! It's day one. Please read the syllabus when you have a moment.

What Are Media?

This module defines and prompts discussion about key terms, including "media" and "fiction," used throughout the course. It also engages fundamental questions of message and address in studies of media and fiction.

R 9 January

Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, *M00D OF THE M0MENT* (2007; 1:53 minutes)

Notes, "Definitions"

M 13 January

Nalo Hopkinson, "Message in a Bottle" (2005; 25 pages)

Notes, "Why Media?"

Please find a partner for workshops this term. I'll elaborate during class.

Making a Website

This module focuses on using a text editor to compose a simple website in HTML and CSS.

R 16 January

Notes, "Composing a Site"

Please ensure you have access to a text editor.

M 20 January

Notes, "Publishing a Site"

Notes, "Prompts"

Please determine the URL for your UVic website. (It will include your NetLink ID.) Please also ensure you have access to Cyberduck. (You may want to install it on your computer.)

Media Aesthetics

This module outlines one way to approach media and fiction together.

R 23 January

Notes, "The 20 M's"

Notes, "Apparatuses"

Please provide me with the URL for your course website. I'll circulate an online form for this purpose.

Audio in Fiction

This module focuses on the use of acousmatics, soundscapes, and voiceover in fiction.

M 27 January

Notes, "Audio and Fiction"

R 30 January

Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre, *War of the Worlds* (1938; 59:19 minutes)

M 3 February

Lucille Fletcher, *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1943; 29:56 minutes)

R 6 February

Janina Matthewson, Jeffrey Cranor, and Mary Epworth, *Within the Wires* (2016; Season 1, Cassette 1; 23:12 minutes; transcript)

Maeve Higgins, Ian Chillag, and Jennifer Mills, *Everything Is Alive* (2018; Episode 2; transcript; 21:25 minutes)

M 10 February

Fandor, "Show and Tell: The Movie Voiceover" (2018; Parts 1 and 2; 9:48 minutes)

Marina Kittaka, *Secrets Agent* (2014; play for at least 30 minutes)

Images in Fiction

This module focuses on the use of frames, windows, cartooning, and subjective shots in fiction.

M 13 February

Notes, "Images and Fiction"

The first half of your log is due today. Reading break is next week (February 17-21).

R 24 February

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (coming soon) (2006; selections)

M 27 February

Emil Ferris, *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* (coming soon) (2017; selections)

Note that the 29th is the last day to withdraw from the course without penalty of failure.

R 2 March

Amanda Strong and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)* (2019; 19:14 minutes)

M 5 March

Fulbright Company, *Gone Home* (2013; play or watch no-commentary gameplay for at least 60 minutes)

Text in Fiction

This module focuses on the use of typefaces, links, rules, and theatre of mind in fiction.

R 9 March

Notes, "Text and Fiction"

M 12 March

N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (coming soon) (2015; selections)

R 16 March

Porpentine and Brenda Neotenomie, *With Those We Love Alive* (2014; play for at least 45 minutes)

M 19 March

Toby Fox and Temmie Chang, *Undertale* (2015; play or watch no-commentary gameplay for at least 60 minutes)

R 23 March

Avery Alder, *Simple World* (2013; 10 pages)

Prototyping with Media and Fiction

This module focuses on using audio, image, and text to prototype what you want to see in the world.

M 26 March

Notes, "Types of Prototypes"

R 30 March

Notes, "Prototyping as Speculation"

Remembering Media

This module focuses on recapping and reflecting on what we learned this term.

R 2 April

Notes, "Review"

The second half of your log is due today.

The final exam will be scheduled for some time in April. I help you to prepare for it during this meeting.

Assignments

I'm asking you to:

- Keep a log of your work, marked at the middle and end of term (each of these two marks will be 25% of your final grade)
- Submit worksheets for four workshops (each 5% of your mark)
- Take an exam at the end of term (30% of your final mark)

I will provide you with prompts for each of these assignments. Except for the exam, which you'll submit to me in person, all of the assignments will be submitted online. You'll create a URL and website (public or private) for your log, and the worksheets will be online forms. The log will contain seven, eight, or nine entries (three or four submitted at the middle of term, and four or five more submitted at the end of term). Each entry should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to compose, plus revisions to the log prior to submission.

There are no essays or presentations required for this course.

Policies

Here are policies for the course. I'll review each of them during our first meeting, but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns about them.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course. It is open to all undergraduate students at UVic.

Assessment

The final exam and one half of your log are required to pass this course. Failure to complete these two assignments will result in a failing N grade (calculated as a 0 for your GPA).

I will use UVic's undergraduate grading scale to produce rubrics for each assignment in this course and assess your work. I do not post marks outside my office, and I do not use plagiarism detection software.

Late Submissions and Extensions

If you need to request an extension or you're concerned about the possibility of a late submission, then please email me. I recommend that you do not fall behind on any assignment, if possible, but I understand that extensions may be necessary for numerous reasons.

Communications

The best way to communicate with me is in person, either by appointment or during my office hours, which are Mondays, 1-3pm, in CLE D334. You are also welcome to email me at jentery@uvic.ca. I respond to work email between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

You are also welcome to communicate with Yu-Hsuan, Faith, and Ian in person or by email or appointment. TAs for this course are able to provide guidance on your work, but please see me with any questions about your marks and how assignments are assessed.

Feedback

Yu-Hsuan, Faith, Ian, and I will provide feedback on your logs. We'll do so in writing, and feedback will be distributed in person during class. I will provide feedback in person (by appointment) on your exam.

Throughout the term, I'll request feedback (verbal and in writing) from you on how the course is going. I'll also ask you to complete Course Experience Surveys at the end of the term (during our last meeting).

Attendance and Participation

Weekly attendance in undergraduate courses is expected. If you must miss class, then please notify me ahead of time by email. Cases of continuous, unexplained absence may negatively affect your grade, log, exam, and performance in workshops. Attendance and active participation in discussions and workshops are part of fulfilling the course requirements.

Laptops and Mobile Devices

Laptops and mobile devices are welcome in (but not required for) this course.

Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. You and I are expected to adhere to UVic's equity and human rights policies. You should alert me immediately if you have any questions about these policies and their application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity

You and I are expected to adhere to UVic's academic integrity policy and be aware of the policies for the evaluation of student course work. Violations of the integrity policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review. I do not use software to detect plagiarism in essays or any other assignments.

Accessibility and Accommodation

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) as soon as possible. CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Basic Needs

I want you to thrive in this course and everywhere else. Please let me know as early as possible if you have any concerns or if you require any assistance to succeed. I'll do my best to help.

If you need to cover gaps in care, then please don't hesitate to bring your children to class. Babies who are nursing are always welcome, as I do not want you to choose between feeding your child and continuing your education.

UVic takes student mental health very seriously, with a website full of resources. We offer services such as assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills concerns. Services for students also include crisis and emergency mental health consultation and confidential assessment, counselling services (individual and small group), and referrals. Many of these programs are connected with Health Services, which is located at the Petersen Health Centre (Lower Parking Lot #5, off Sinclair Road, behind the residence cafeteria). Many offices have walk-in hours as well as appointments.

The Student Services website lists several policies that you might want to know about and may make your life at UVic safer and easier. Only some of them are directly related to this course, but they're still important.

Acknowledgements

As a faculty member who has the privilege to live and work as a guest on these lands, I acknowledge with respect that the University of Victoria is located on the unceded territory of the Lkwungen peoples and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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