Mediologies Midterm

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1. How has this class, and the readings involved, helped shape your perspectives on media, media studies, and media theory?

**Perspective**

I have always considered myself Colombian; my perspective was sculpted by this ethnicity and by my upbringing. I had never been confronted with how I was culturally coded while living in my small town; my neighbors had known me since before I spoke English, and my friends all knew my mother, the daughter of Indigenous Peoples of Colombia. It wasn’t until my first year in college that I ever questioned this identity.

Without this context, I was culturally coded as a white male, identified as such because of my skin tone. I now realize that while at the time I resented being identified as white, I was being ignorant. What I had never thought of was that all my life, this culturally coded identifier had provided me with privilege; I had been benefiting from my “whiteness” and not even knowing it, regardless of my position within the Class system. This realization altered my perspective in a fundamental way.

Andre Bazin says of perspective;

*“Perspective was the original sin of Western painting.”* (Bazin, 1967)

This is followed up by an explanation that photography shattered the understood power of perspective in the arts by being mediated through technology. This mediation allowed for a more “true” capturing of “realism”, and a fundamental shift in how “perspective” could be achieved.

I now realize that my taking up of photography, as a hobby and eventually a profession, was in part due to this crisis of identity.

*“Photography was conceptualized from the perspective of the individual positioned behind the lens—the one who sees the world.”(Azoulay, 2012)*

I wanted to capture my identity, my perspective, through the mediation of technology. This led eventually to where I am now, here at Pratt, currently investigating perspective, mediation, and how perspective can be mediated and remediated through technology.

This investigation has led me to two terms I consider ultimately essential to my understanding of perspective, perspectivization (including Perspectivation) and mediation. Perspectivation is the assignment of a particular perspective to a narrative through the use of language; however in my interpretation it is through the use of technological mediation.

*“On a more general and somewhat philosophic level, one might say that epistemic perspectivization is the hallmark of the subjectivity of human experience, and that linguistic* (technologic) *reflexes of perspectivization are the means by which privileged first-person experiences of speakers and hearers may become part of the common ground.” (GLOW 2016)*

I think of perspective as fluid, no longer constrained within the confines of a frame. With the advances of Digital Media and the technology behind and within the digital sphere, it is possible to alter perspective or at least to begin the process. Fox Harrell, founder of MIT’s Imagination, Computation and Expression Lab, believes that through the use of simulated virtual spaces, identity (and in extension, empathetic perspective) can be altered and then immediately experienced (from Latin, in + mediatus, within a mediator).

Dr. Harrell’s work deals with identity creation, experimentation, and interpretation within virtual spaces. For Harrell, it is not so much about the American dream, but the “Avatar Dream”(Harrell, Lim, 2017). The “Avatar Dream” is *“a culturally shared vision of a future in which, through a computer, people can become whomever or whatever we want to be”.*

This dream is more easily demonstrated than would be expected; Dr. Harrell, using an authoring platform called “Chimeria” has showcased this. Chimeria uses a two-pronged system of technical and experiential elements. These elements combine, allowing the user to create a virtual “surrogate”. Within this space identity and perspective are made malleable and can be shifted. The user is able to experience sociocultural environments through this techno-mediated surrogate identity, which allows for an empathetic connection to grow and begin the process of the changing of perspective (re-perspectivization).

This mediation of identity through technology is only the beginning. By remediating old media as modern tools for identity/perspective molding, it is possible to alter base components of perspective. It might even be possible to, through the remediation of technology, remediate certain risk previously thought unavoidable.

Thanks to this class and this program, my research has guided me directly into the hands of the designers of such technologies. Through Pratt, I met Kevin Yoo, CDO and co-founder of Wear.Works, whose company is working on wearable technology that remediates the risk blindness (specifically the risk of running a marathon) inherently produces. Not only have the readings from this class guided my research and theoretical understanding of media, they have opened my eyes to new perspectives, to new ideas, and to even more readings.

1. How have the knowledges and practices associated with new(er) media and cybernetics changed political questions? Consider forms of domination, surveillance, and control as well as forms of resistance, struggle, and transformation.

Because of the mediatory power and nature of “new media” and cybernetics, techno-scientific developments have been mediating shifts in world visual culture and politics. The methods of distributing this culture and politics, this conglomerate of techno-mediated “distribution platforms”(Wardrip-Fruin, 2003, pg. 16) can be loosely translated into “new media”.

The concept of framing media as “old” or “new” has been an ongoing and apparently endless process. Lev Manovich, in “*New Media from Borges to HTML*” (Wardrip-Fruin, 2003), tries over and over again (eight times in fact) to define the two. The New Media Reader starts off strong with this paper, since framing such an important concept, new media, is quintessential to understanding how this media affects culture, technology, and vice-versa.

One such “new” media is that of Cinema (though Manovich would disagree), its effect is described by Jonathan Beller in *“The Cinematic Mode of Production*”. Beller uses the language of cinema and imagery to explain away cultural effects and the power of cinematic imagery. The visuality mentioned by Beller is so pervasive, that it overwhelms culture and creates a visual unconscious.

*“The overall effect of an ever-increasing quantity of images is the radical alienation of consciousness, its isolation and separation, its inability to convincingly, “language” reality and thus its reduction to something on the order of a free-floating hallucination, cut away as it is from all ground.” (Beller, 2006, pg. 15)*

“New media” inherently remediates older technology and mediums in order to be “new ideas”. *“New media as material re-articulation, or encoding, of purely cultural tendencies (programs)—in short, as ideas rather than technologies.”* This leads to the use of “new media” for nefarious “accidental”(referencing Virilio’s concept of military machines as accident makers) purposes. For Virilio, a machine of war, is a machine of accidents, it creates accidents to hamper, injure, and kill the enemy. A tank takes an explosive shell (a bottled accident), and using complex technological mechanisms, delivers the “accidental” payload within millimeters of the intended target.

One of the descriptions of “new media” that really stood out to me was that of “New Media as Metamedia”(Wardrip-Fruin, 2003, *New Media from Borges to HTML*). Through Allen Feldman, the concept of the militarization of media, especially “new media” has been deeply ingrained in my understanding of this “Metamedia”. Feldman frequently discusses the militarization of media, and the mediatization of the military, something that should make perfect sense to anyone familiar with the Military Industrial Complex.

This “new media” of Metamedia is a violent, militarized media. It is our technology that creates this Metamedia; it is our geolocation tags, our online interactions, our “cookies”, and our cellphones. It is this content that defines metadata, a potentially deadly form of media according to David Cole. (Cole, 2014) According to NSA General Counsel Stewart Baker*, “metadata absolutely tells you everything about somebody’s life. If you have enough metadata, you don’t really need content.”* When quoted by Cole to General Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA and the NSA, Hayden responded with “Absolutely correct… We kill people based on metadata.”

In Simone Browne’s book, Dark Matters, this inherent militarization is indicated in detail through the emergence of technological surveillance techniques throughout American History (Browne, 2015). This culturally constructed militarized media of surveillance has framed the growth of this country, like a trellis for the vine of racism. Not only has this affected the growth and evolution of “new media”, such as VR, Haptics, Computing, and image making, it has also structured the growth of our society, leading directly to where we are today; living within a police state, a state full of surveillance tools, where our most useful object, a cellphone, is the best tool for our surveillance.

This shift from “Old Media” to “New Media” traces the historical shift from “Old Magic to New Magic” (Flusser, 2013). Vilem Flusser says this about the shift of magics, *“Prehistorical magic is a ritualization of models called ‘myths’ and the current magic, is a ritualization of models called ‘programs’.”* For Flusser, the difference is in the method of transmission, of distribution (Wardrip-Fruin, 2003, *New Media from Borges to HTML*). Myths, or “Old Magics” are orally transmitted from an ephemeral godlike power; programs are thus distributed instead through human “authors” by text (such as code).

Cybernetics relates directly into this topic of “New” vs “Old” magic and media, in the fact that the use of technology as a mediating tool is what separates the new from the old. In *“Medium is the Message”* (McLuhan, NMR, pg. 204), McLuhan brings up electric light as a medium, one I would argue is a “New Media” as well, especially according to Manovich.

*“The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized.”* (McLuhan, NMR, pg. 204),

By using technology to remediate basic human needs, through replacing organic body-parts with mechanic components, a cybernetic organism is created. This new being now has classification, but at the same time, cannot be classified, a ‘Homo sacer’.

According to Donna Haraway’s *“A Cyborg Manifesto”,* the rights, and lack of rights of the cyborg, this “new technological being”, is comparable to those of women. The cyborg however, has the perk of having been mediated through and within technology, which provides it freedom from many of the gendered and racialized aspects of “human” life. The cyborg is the ultimate mediation between humanity and technology, a merging of the two so total that there is no differentiation, only singularity. “The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity.” (NMR, *“A Cyborg Manifesto”,* 2003.)

The cyborg is the answer.

1. Discuss any text in this class that fires your passions. What direction(s) do you see it taking you? Describe the kind of work or practice it inspires you to (want to) undertake. You may discuss more than one text here, but begin with an idea that asked you to re-imagine some aspect of your understanding of the world.

Bell hooks’ “*The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators* was one of the texts in this class that absolutely shook my perspective to the core (hooks, 2010). Not only did it reinforce my understanding of perspectival bias, it helped to contextualize my own perspective/gaze as well as put in context perspectives/gazes that I don’t think I would have otherwise truly understood.

One of the topics that hooks’ essay really instilled in me, though never explicitly mentioned, is that of sousveillance. We have all lived in a surveillance state known as the USA, where CCTV cameras are all pervasive and there isn’t a un-surveilled corner in the country. What I had never thought about was the fact that every act of documentation of this system of surveillance was *sous*veillance, the looking from below*.* The oppositional gaze is inherently sousveillance, and in fact, I believe it to be the truest form of sousveillance possible.

This is because the origin of *sur*veillance is found within slavery, within colonization, and within the very history of the founding of our “great” country. The Oppositional Gaze is the inherent sousveillance of “post-slavery” Black life, a gaze steeped in resistance, struggle, and transformation.

Hooks writes about the use of this very same surveillance technology as forms of resistance, whether through controlling the visuality showcased in media, or through use of the oppositional gaze as a transformational struggle to “undo the structure of the classical narrative.” (Hooks, 2010) Hooks says, “White people in the film are unable to ‘see’ that race informs their looking relations.” however it is not just white people who sometimes miss the relational nature of race and looking.

In *“Troubling Vision”,* Nicole Fleetwood explores this concept of “Performance, Visuality, and Blackness.” Using a personal story from her childhood, Fleetwood helps the audience understand the weight of racially informed gazes, and shows from the perspective of her grandmother, what such a gaze can do.

*“How could the look and reserved hello of a little white girl reduce my grandmother who was the strongest person I knew to understanding herself as being fat, black, and ugly?” (*Fleetwood, 2011, Preface*)*

Fleetwood, in this summary preface, manages to shed light on exactly why understanding perspective is so important, and the incredible power of the gaze. The colonizing gaze of whiteness has been the dominating form of looking throughout American history, however, with the emergence of these “oppositional gazes” and with the use of sousveillance as a response to the surveillance of the colonizer, a paradigm shift began.

What Nicole Fleetwood and bell hooks do through their text, I want to be able to do through the building of a virtual narrative experience. Reading these papers on surveillance and the visuality of identity, as well as learning about remediation through technology, and how it can affect perspective, has truly inspired me.

All of this has changed my perspective, but it took an exceptional set of circumstances to do so. Like Fox Harrell and his “Avatar Dream”, I want to be able to use technology to alter identity and shift perspective fluidly. I have learned that through technological remediation, certain perspectives can be accessed, can be experienced, and can be learned from. The future holds many more technologies, and even more opportunities for their use in remediation.

Through the use of this technological remediation, specifically that of Haptic and other sensory technologies, many problems can be solved, interfaces perfected, and lives changed. I plan on using the theory I have learned through these readings to guide my work in building virtual narratives that help mediate perspectives. With proper technological remediation and lots of collaboration, I hope to have a working prototype of several narrative virtual experiences by the end of this program.

Imagine a world where education doesn’t exist within the confines of a classroom, where vivid virtual-sensory experiences can help a student understand a perspective, a world where every perspective is available to every individual, a totality of empathy through perspectival experiences. I think of the Futurists of Science Fiction --Clarke, Asimov, Le Guin, Bradbury, Wells, Dick-- and I dream of a world filled with the creations of the futurists of today.

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