

History 82  
*Histories of Digital Media*  
Fall 2014  
Professor Burke

This course is an overly ambitious attempt to cover a great deal of ground, interweaving cultural histories of networks, simulations, information, computing, gaming and online communication. Students taking this course are responsible first and foremost for making their own judicious decisions about which of many strands in that weave to focus on and pursue at greater depth through a semester-long project.

The reading load for this course is **heavy**, but in many cases it is aimed at giving students an immersive sampler of a wide range of topics. Many of our readings are both part of the scholarship about digital culture and documents of the history of digital culture. I expect students to make a serious attempt to engage the whole of the materials assigned in a given week, but engagement in many cases should involve getting an impressionistic sense of the issues, spirit and terminology in that material, with an eye to further investigation during class discussion.

Students are encouraged to do real-time online information seeking relevant to the issues of a given class meeting during class discussion. Please do not access distracting or irrelevant material or take care of personal business unrelated to the class during a course meeting, unless you're prepared to discuss your multitasking as a digital practice.

This course is intended to pose but not answer questions of scope and framing for students. Some of the most important that we will engage are:

Is the history of digital culture best understood as a small and recent part of much wider histories of media, communication, mass-scale social networks, intellectual property, information management and/or simulation?

Is the history of digital culture best understood as the accidental or unintended consequence of a modern and largely technological history of computing, information and networking?

Is the history of digital culture best understood as a very specific cultural history that begins with the invention of the Internet and continues in the present? If so, how does the early history of digital culture shape or determine current experiences?

All students must make at least one written comment per week on the issues raised by the readings before each class session, at the latest on each Sunday by 9pm. Comments may be made either on the public weblog of the class, on the class

Twitter feed, or on the class Tumblr. Students must also post at least four links, images or gifs relevant to a particular class meeting to the class Tumblr by the end of the semester. (It would be best to do that periodically rather than all four on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, but it's up to each of you.) The class weblog will have at least one question or thought posted by the professor at the beginning of each week's work (e.g., by Tuesday 5pm.) to direct or inform the reading of students.

Students will be responsible for developing a semester-long project on a particular question or problem in the history of digital culture. This project will include four preparatory assignments, each graded separately from the final project:

By October 17, a one-page personal meditation on a contemporary digital practice, platform, text, or problem that explains why you find this example interesting and speculates about how or whether its history might prove interesting or informative.

By November 3, a two-page personal meditation on a single item from the course's public "meta-list" of possible, probable and interesting topics that could sustain a project. Each student writer should describe why they find this particular item or issue of interest, and what they suspect or estimate to be some of the key questions or problems surrounding this issue. This meditation should include a plan for developing the final project. All projects should include some component of historical investigation or inquiry.

By November 17, a 2-4 page bibliographic essay about important materials, sources, or documents relevant to the project.

The final project, which should be a substantive work of analysis and interpretation, is due by December 16<sup>th</sup>.

## **Is Digital Culture Really Digital? A Sampler of Some Other Histories**

Monday September 1

Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know*, Introduction

Hobart and Schiffman, *Information Ages*, pp. 1-8

Jon Peterson, *Playing at the World*, pp. 212-282

\*Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars From Gutenberg to Gates*, pp. 1-82

Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, "Of Codes and Coda: Meaning in Telegraph

Messages", *Historical Social Research*, 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20762432>

## **Imagining a Computer Culture in an Atomic Age**

Monday September 8

Arthur C. Clarke, "The Nine Billion Names of God",  
[http://downlode.org/Etext/nine\\_billion\\_names\\_of\\_god.html](http://downlode.org/Etext/nine_billion_names_of_god.html)  
Ted Friedman, *Electric Dreams*, Chapter Two and Three

Film: *Desk Set*

*Colossus the Forbin Project* (in-class)  
*Star Trek*, "The Ultimate Computer" (in-class)

Monday September 15

Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think",  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/>  
Paul Edwards, *The Closed World*, Chapter 1. (Tripod ebook)  
David Mindell, "Cybernetics: Knowledge Domains in Engineering Systems",  
<http://21stcenturywiener.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Cybernetics-by-D.A.-Mindell.pdf>  
Fred Turner, *Counterculture to Cyberculture*, Chapter 1 and 2  
Alex Wright, *Cataloging the World: Paul Otlet and the Birth of the Information Age*,  
selection

## **In the Beginning Was the Command Line: Digital Culture as Subculture**

Monday September 22

\*Hafner, *Where Wizards Stay Up Late*  
\*Steven Levy, *Hackers*  
Wikipedia entries on GENIE and Compuserve

Film: *Tron*

Monday September 29

\*John Brunner, *The Shockwave Rider*  
Ted Nelson, *Dream Machines*, selection  
Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence*, selection  
Neal Stephenson, "Mother Earth Mother Board", *Wired*,  
[http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/4.12/ffglass\\_pr.html](http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/4.12/ffglass_pr.html)

Monday October 6

\*William Gibson, *Neuromancer*  
*EFFector*, Issues 0-11  
Eric Raymond, "The Jargon File", <http://www.catb.org/jargon/html/index.html>,  
Appendix B

Bruce Sterling, "The Hacker Crackdown", Part 4,  
<http://www.mit.edu/hacker/part4.html>

Film (in-class): *Sneakers*  
Film (in-class): *War Games*

FALL BREAK

Monday October 20

Consumer Guide to Usenet,

<http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps61858/www2.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/usenet.html>

Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace"

Randal Woodland, "Queer Spaces, Modem Boys and Pagan Statues"

Laura Miller, "Women and Children First: Gender and the Settling of the Electronic Frontier"

Lisa Nakamura, "Race In/For Cyberspace"

Howard Rheingold, "A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community"

Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, selection

Hands-on: LambdaMOO

Hands-on: Chatbots

Hands-on: Usenet

Monday October 27

David Kushner, *Masters of Doom*, selection

Hands-on: Zork and Adventure

Demonstration: Ultima Online

Richard Bartle, "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades",

<http://mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm>

Rebecca Solnit, "The Garden of Merging Paths"

Michael Wolff, *Burn Rate*, selection

Nina Munk, *Fools Rush In*, selection

Film (in-class): *Ghost in the Shell*

Film (in-class): *The Matrix*

**Here Comes Everybody**

Monday November 3

Claire Potter and Renee Romano, *Doing Recent History*, Introduction

Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web*, short selection

*World Wide Web* (journal) 1998 issues  
*IEEE Computing*, March-April 1997  
Justin Hall, *links.net*,  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zQXJqAMAsM&list=PL7F0mjMP03B5v3pJGUfC6unDS\\_FVmbNTb](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zQXJqAMAsM&list=PL7F0mjMP03B5v3pJGUfC6unDS_FVmbNTb)  
Clay Shirky, "Power Laws, Weblogs and Inequality"  
Last Night of the SFRT, <http://www.dm.net/~centaur/lastsfirt.txt>  
Joshua Quittner, "Billions Registered",  
[http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/2.10/mcdonalds\\_pr.html](http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/2.10/mcdonalds_pr.html)  
A. Galey, "Reading the Book of Mozilla: Web Browsers and the Materiality of Digital Texts"

Monday November 10

Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Life of Networked Teens*  
Bonnie Nardi, *My Life as a Night-Elf Priest*, Chapter 4

Hands-on: Twitter  
Hands-on: Facebook  
Meet-up in World of Warcraft (or other FTP virtual world)

Michael Wesich, "The Machine Is Us/Ing Us",  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g)  
Ben Folds, "Ode to Merton/Chatroulette Live",  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bBkuFqKsd0>

Monday November 17

Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, selection  
Steven Levy, *In the Plex*, selection  
John Battelle, *The Search*, selection

Ethan Zuckerman, *Rewire*, Chapter 4  
Linda Herrera, *Revolution in the Era of Social Media: Egyptian Popular Insurrection and the Internet*, selection

Monday November 24

Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*

Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, selection  
N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think*, selection  
Mat Honan, "I Liked Everything I Saw on Facebook For Two Days",  
<http://www.wired.com/2014/08/i-liked-everything-i-saw-on-facebook-for-two-days-heres-what-it-did-to-me>

Hands-on: Wikipedia

Hands-on: 500px

Monday December 1

Gabriella Coleman, *Coding Freedom*, selection

Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower Spy*, selection

Andrew Russell, *Open Standards and the Digital Age*, Chapter 8

Adrian Johns, *Piracy*, pp. 401-518

Hands-on: Wikileaks

Film: *The Internet's Own Boy*

Monday December 8

Eugeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*

Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything*, selection

Jaron Lanier, *Who Owns the Future?*, selection