CMS.950

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TA: Greg Dancer, filmduck@mit.edu

11:30am–3:30pm Wednesdays, GAMBIT, N25-372
Screenings/Playings: 5pm-7pm most Mondays, the Trope Tank, 14N-233
Office hours by appointment

This syllabus is tentative. This version is from October 10.

Sep 5	The Screen Saver (first meeting in 26-139)
Sep 12	The Video Game I
Sep 19	The Video Game II
Sep 26	The Video Game III
Oct 3	The Video Game IV
Oct 10	The Video Game V: Critiques
Oct 17	The Book I
Oct 24	The Book II
Oct 31	The Book III
Nov 7	The Book IV: Critiques
Nov 14	The Music Video I
Nov 21	The Music Video II
Nov 28	The Music Video III
Dec 5	The Music Video IV: Critiques
Dec 12	Revision studio

Major units for the Spring (even more tentative):

The Dynamic Site
The Social Space
Computational Art

Purpose and Format of the Course

The ultimate point of this workshop is not just to become better at media production, but to become better comparative media scholars by understanding media production and media technologies more deeply.

CMS.950 uses a studio format. A typical Wednesday will include an in-class production exercise, "mini-lectures" from the instructor or TA about technical topics, discussion of the readings, and discussion of the relationship of our technical work to our critical perspectives. There may be a short time in class for work on projects.

We will meet on many Monday evenings for "screenings/playings," in which we focus on experiencing media rather than creating it. This semester these Monday meetings will allow us to experience video games, books, and music videos together.

The three projects are individual projects, which means each student has sole responsibility for framing and completing his or her project. Students are encouraged to help each other and to build on exiting work that others have done; it is necessary, for reasons of proper academic conduct, to appropriately document the work others do on one's own projects and to detail the outside material that is used in them. Presentations of projects in critiques should explain the work done, the result, and the way that the project led to a better understanding of the media form being studied.

Each unit should progress as follows: Students come to class meeting #1 with a short preliminary proposal on paper, outlining the content that interests them based on their critical and aesthetic concerns and listing the specific technologies to be used. After a day of technical work and discussion, students revise their proposals, submit them by email, and do some initial work on their projects for class #2. By class #3 project work is in full swing. Projects are done by class #4, which is used for presentation and critique. The video game project involves development of an interactive system that others will use, so there is an additional class set aside for testing and tuning.

Although projects are individual, students will be encouraged to work with and learn from each other in several ways. Group exercises in class are one of these. Also, some students who know certain technologies and forms well may wish to help others rather than doing the technical exercise on a particular Wednesday. All students will still do a project for all units and will still present their projects during critiques. During in-class exercises, however, some students may opt to help others.

During the last Wednesday meeting, students are invited to revise one of the three projects they have completed based on reflection and critiques from the instructor, the TA, and peers. The revision studio will not have technical exercises or structured discussion, and students will not be evaluated on how well they revise. This studio is simply an opportunity to polish a portfolio item or a project that is meaningful as part of one's artistic practice. Students will be encouraged to consult each other as well as the TA and instructor in revising.

Sep 5 Wed	The Screen Saver Python and programming	Oct 29 Mon	Screening/Playing Multilinear books
Sep 10 Mon	Screening/Playing Early console, computer games	Oct 31 Wed	The Book III Xerography and binding
Sep 12 Wed	The Video Game I Interactive fiction	Nov 5 Mon	Screening/Playing Book potluck
(Sep 17	No Screening/Playing)	Nov 7 Wed	The Book IV: Critiques
Sep 19 Wed	The Video Game II Arcade/action in pygame	(Nov 12	No Screening/Playing)
(Sep 24	No Screening/Playing)	Nov 14 Wed	The Music Video I Digital video editing
Sep 26 Wed	The Video Game III BASIC games	Nov 19 Mon	Screening/Playing The 1980s
Oct 1 Mon	Screening/Playing Early console, computer games	Nov 21 Wed	The Music Video II Super 8 film production
Oct 3 Wed	The Video Game IV Testing & tuning workshop	Nov 26 Mon	Screening/Playing The 1990s
(Oct 7	No Screening/Playing)	Nov 28 Wed	The Music Video III Super 8 film editing
Oct 10 Wed	The Video Game V: Critiques	Dec 3 Mon	Screening/Playing The 2000s
Oct 15 Mon	Screening/Playing Editions	Dec 5 Wed	The Music Video IV: Critiques
Oct 17 Wed	The Book I Digital book design	(Dec 10	No Screening/Playing)
Oct 22 Mon	Screening/Playing Artists' Books	Dec 12 Wed	Revision studio
Oct 24 Wed	The Book II Bow & Arrow Press workshop		

Sep 5   The Screen Saver
         Nothing needs to be brought to class.
         Exercise 1: Program a "terminal saver" in Python.
         Exercise 2: Program an OS X screen saver in Objective C.

Sep 12   The Video Game I
         Bring a printed preliminary video game project proposal with at least
         questions and concrete ideas.
         Exercise 1: Modify and understand a simple Python video game.
         Exercise 2: Design, write & program a short Inform 6 interactive fiction piece.
         Readings: "Face It, Tiger, You Just Hit the Jackpot: Reading and Playing
         Cadre's *Varicella,"* Nick Montfort and Stuart Moulthrop.

Sep 19   The Video Game II
         Project proposal should be finished and work on projects should have started.
         Exercise: Design and develop a shoot-em-up using pygame.
         Readings: "Video Games and Computer Holding Power" from *The Second
         Self*, Sherry Turkle; "*Star Raiders:* Dramatic Interaction in a Small World,"
         Brenda Laurel.

Sep 26   The Video Game III
         Continue project work outside of class time.
         Exercise: Close reading of BASIC games.
         Reading: Selected BASIC games and their descriptions.

Oct 3   The Video Game IV
         Bring a fully functional game in need of testing, tuning, and polishing.
         No exercises or readings — use studio time for testing and tuning.

Oct 10   The Video Game V: Critiques
         Bring projects and be ready with a short presentation.

Oct 17   The Book I
          Bring a printed preliminary book project proposal with at least questions and
          concrete ideas.
          Exercise: Design and lay out a book (text provided) for a particular purpose.
          Readings: "Something about Book Design" by Jan Tschichold, 1932 (JSTOR;
          access from MIT); "Consistent Correlation Between Book Page and Type
          Area" by Jan Tschichold, 1991; "Purple dotted underlines: Microsoft word
          and the end of writing" by Sandy Baldwin, 2002.

Oct 24   The Book II
          Project proposal should be finished and work on projects should have started.
          Exercise: Meet at the Bow & Arrow Press. All studio time will be used for a
          letterpress exercise and for printing eduction on-site.
          Readings: Selections from *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Marshall McLuhan; "The
          Unacknowledged Revolution" from *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*,
          Elizabeth L. Eisenstein.

Oct 31   The Book III
          Continue project work outside of class time. Books to be printed on demand
          will need to be completed and ordered well in advance of November 7.
          Exercise 1: Book production using xerography.
          Exercise 2: Simple binding (saddle stitching, pamphlet binding).
          Reading: "The Xerox Degree of Art" from *Conceptual Art and the Politics of
          Publicity*, Alexander Alberro.

Nov 7   The Book IV: Critiques
          Bring projects (your books) and be ready with a short presentation. You do
          not need to use the computer to present your books.

Nov 14   The Music Video I
Bring a printed preliminary music video project proposal with at least
questions and concrete ideas. Also, bring video materials that you have shot
or collected.
Exercise 1: Digital video editing.
Exercise 2: Divide into teams, plan and storyboard Super 8 films.
Reading: "What is Digital Cinema," Lev Manovich; a selection from *Film
Sense,* Sergei Eisentein.

Nov 21   The Music Video II
Project proposal should be finished and work on projects should have started.
Exercise: Super 8 film production. Teams will get a camera and two cartridges
of film and will have studio time to shoot footage. Instructor and TA will be
on call (but not on location) to help. Shooting must be completed and
cartridges turned in so film can be developed for next week.
Reading: "Format," *The Super 8 Book,* Lenny Lipton. "Do-It-Yourself" from
Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film, Patricia Zimmerman.

Nov 28   The Music Video III
Continue project work outside of class time.
Exercise: Super 8 editing. Cut and splice film. Super 8 films will be screened
in class at the end of class.
Reading: "Editing," *The Super 8 Book,* Lenny Lipton. "The Musical Film and
Recorded Popular Music," Alan Williams.

Dec 5   The Music Video IV: Critiques
Submit your video *beforehand* so a reel can be put together; you should also be
prepared to show your video yourself. Videos should be five minutes or less;
no more than five minutes of each will be screened.

Dec 12   Revision studio
Bring a project and at least one substantial revision idea. Focus on making
one or two substantial revisions rather than trying to address a laundry list of
minor concerns.

Evaluation

Grades given will be determined on October 7, November 7, and December 5 during critiques, and will be based equally on each project:

1/3   Video game project
1/3   Book project
1/3   Music video project

Critiques allow students to show their projects to everyone in the course so that these projects can be discussed at that point, and later on, by students, the instructor, and the TA. We may also have guests who attend critiques. Please come to these three meetings.

The criteria for grading is the same as in every other class at MIT:

A   Exceptionally good performance, demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

B   Good performance, demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C   Adequate performance, demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

D   Minimally acceptable performance, demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

The performance and understanding that is being sought here is not mastery over media technologies. That is, you do not have to be an expert programer, book designer, or video editor to earn an A, and being such does not guarantee you an A. To earn this grade, you must do projects that allow you to draw insightful connections between the materiality of media production and our critical approach to media.