

## English 5330: Convergence Culture

Professor C. Guertin Fall 2007  
Mondays 6.00-9.00 pm PH 310

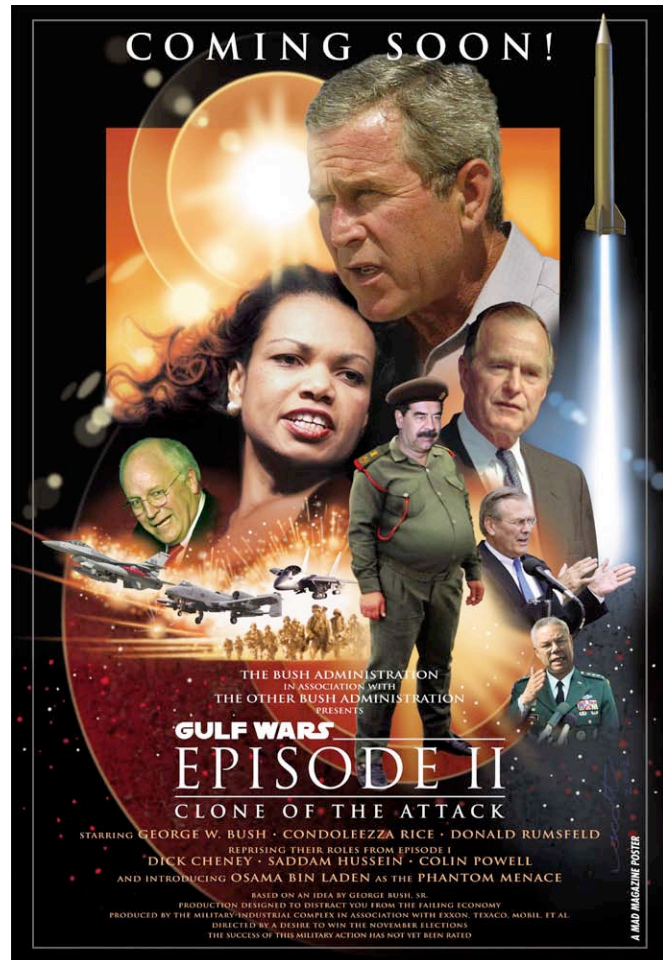
E-Mail: [carolyn.guertin@gmail.com](mailto:carolyn.guertin@gmail.com)  
Office: eCreate Lab, PH 311  
Office Hours: MW by appointment  
Skype: carolyn\_guertin

'Convergence Culture', as Henry Jenkins defines it, is that overlapping membrane where modalities meet, where old and new media absorb or reject each other, and where local and global interfaces collide. Convergence creates a social intersection or a networked public where media producer and consumer morph, fuse or splinter as they interact via increasingly collaborative practices.

We will explore this notion of convergence across a broad spectrum of theories about culture, technologies and media ecologies. Criticism grounded in ideas about subjectivity, interaction, authorship and/or spectatorship, activism and community will form the foundation for our discussions.

Examining works and forms as diverse as *Harry Potter*, *Lost*, *Star Wars*, *American Idol*, *The Matrix*, blogs, webcams, podcasting, 3D recording, *Keitai* (cellphone) culture, net.art, rhizomes, (media) ecologies, surveillance, game mods, and fan culture, we will discover how they reflect the re-making of the art of storytelling for the digital age.

Using historical antecedents in user-centered events like Situationism and Happenings as a starting point, we will interrogate the artificial separation of politics and aesthetics implicit in high-brow cultural forms. We will explore how contemporary participatory culture collapses binaries such as active and passive, author and reader, performer and spectator, public and private, and artifice and the real.



**“Are you consumers or real participants?”**  
~ Situationist-inspired graffiti on the Sorbonne,  
May 1968

**Course Texts:**

- ° Bishop, Claire. *Participation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT. 2006. 0-262-52464-3. pb [P]
- ° Harold, Christine. *OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. 0-8166-4954-5 hc [OS]
- ° Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York UP, 2006. 0-8147-4281-5 hc [CC]
- ° Jason Reitman, *Thank You For Smoking*. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2005. Rent DVD or VHS.
- ° Wachowski Brothers, *The Matrix*. Warner Brothers, 1999. Rent 'DVD or VHS.

**Recommended advance readings:**

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Parts I & II, pp. 11-34  
Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" from *Simulacra and Simulations*,  
<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard/ baudrillard-simulacra-and-simulations.html>  
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "4.3: The Multitude Against Empire" from *Empire*,  
pp. 393-413

**Schedule:**

**Week 1: Aug 27<sup>th</sup> - The Politics of Participation**

Reading: Reinaldo Laddaga, "From Work to Conversation: Writing & Citizenship in a Global Age" from *PMLA* (122.2): 2007. PDF: 449-463.

In-Class Screening: Adam Curtis' *Century of the Self*, Pts I & II

**Week 2: Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Labour Day, no class

**Week 3: Sept 10<sup>th</sup> - Activated Spectatorship and the Commodified Self**

Reading: Jacques Rancière, "Problems and Transformations in Critical Art" [P 83-93]  
Umberto Eco: "Poetics of the Open Work" [P 20-40]  
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, from *Empire*, "4.3 The Multitude Against Empire" [PDF: 393-413]  
Geert Lovink, "Blogging, The Nihilist Impulse" Online:  
<http://www.networkcultures.org/geert/2006/03/24/blogging-the-nihilist-impulse/>  
Geert Lovink: "Toward A Mass Psychology of the Net":  
<http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh11/11lov.html>

In-Class Screening: Adam Curtis' *Century of the Self*, Pts III & IV

**Week 4: Sept 17<sup>th</sup> - Predecessors in Participatory Culture**

Reading: Guy Debord, "Towards a Situationist International" [P 96-101]  
Alan Kaprow, "Notes on the Elimination of the Audience" [P 102-104]  
Peter Burger, "The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-Garde" [P 46-53]  
Félix Guattari, "Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm [P 79-82]  
Harold, "Detours and Drifts: Situationist International & the Art of Resistance" [OS 1-26]

**Week 5: Sept 24<sup>th</sup> - Social Space in Knowledge Communities**

Reading: Pierre Lévy, excerpts from *Collective Intelligence* [PDF: 13-19, 129-141]

Jenkins, "Introduction" & "Spoiling *Survivor*: Anatomy of a Knowledge Community" [CC 1-58]

Piper Davis, "Space in *Lost*" [online: URL TBA]

**Guest lecturer: Piper Davis**

**Week 6: Oct 1<sup>st</sup> - Collective Intelligence, Culture Jamming and Audience Response**

Reading: Mark Dery, "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of the Signs" [[http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture\\_jamming/#000005#more](http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more)]

Pierre Lévy, excerpts from *Collective Intelligence* [PDF: 13-19, 209-223]

Jenkins, "Buying Into *American Idol*: How We Are Being Sold on Reality TV" [CC 59-92]

**Week 7: Oct 8<sup>th</sup> - Transmedia Storytelling**

Reading: Jenkins, "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* & Transmedia Storytelling" [CC 93-130]

Film (to be watched on your own time): *The Matrix* (1999).

**Week 8: Oct 15<sup>th</sup> - Media Mash-Ups**

Reading: Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's *Star Wars*? Grassroots Creativity Meets the Media Industry" [CC 131-168]

Nicolas Bourriard, "Relational Aesthetics" [P 160-171]

In-Class Screening: Demo of Will Wright's *Spore*, 35 minutes

[Online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8dvMDFOFnA>]

**Week 9: Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> - New Media Literacies**

Reading: Jenkins "Why Heather Can Write: Media Literacy and the *Harry Potter* Wars" [CC 169-205]

**Week 10: Oct 29<sup>th</sup> - Collective Work, Social Space and Postcolonial Subjects**

Reading: Okwui Enwezor, "The Production of Social Space as Artwork" from *Collectivism After Modernism* [PDF 223-251]

**Week 11: Nov 5<sup>th</sup> - Participatory Politics**

Reading: Jenkins: "Photoshop for Democracy: The New Relationship Between Politics and Popular Culture." and "Conclusion" [CC 206-260]

Group Material, "On Democracy" [P 135-137]

Joseph Beuys, "I Am Searching For Field Character" [P -125-126]

**Week 12: Nov 12<sup>th</sup> – Adbusting: Art as Activism**

Reading: Harold, "Introduction: The Brand Politics of Consuming Publics" [OS xiii-xxxiii];

"Anti-Logos: Sabotaging The Brand Through Parody" [OS 27-69] & "Intermezzo" [OS 70-72]

Lars Bang Larsen, "Social Aesthetics" [P 172-183]

Film: (to be watched on your own time): *Thank You For Smoking*

**Week 13: Nov 19<sup>th</sup>- Hacktivism and The Remix**

Reading: Harold, “Pranks, Rumors, Hoaxes: ‘Dressing Up’ and Folding as Rhetorical Action” [OS 73-112]

Harold, “Pirates and Hijackers: Creative Publics & Politics of ‘Owned Culture’” [OS 113-132]  
Rirkrit Tiravanija, “No Ghosts in the Wall” [P 149-153]

Game: *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*

[Windows Only, free download: <http://www.columbinegame.com/download.htm>]

In-Class screening: *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* Trailer, 3 minutes

[Online: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-846592551728203166>]

**Week 14: Nov 26<sup>th</sup>- What Happened to the Revolution?**

Reading: Hal Foster, “Chat Rooms” [P 190-195]

Helen Kambouri and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, “The Banality of Blogging, Or How Does The Web Affect The Private/Public Dichotomy” in *Re-Public: Re-Imagining Democracy*:

<http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=165>

Édouard Glissant, “Poetics of Relation” [P 71-78]

Motherboard/LawHat al-um, “The Digital Mosque”:

<http://www.notam02.no/motherboard/digimosque.html>

**Week 15: Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> - The Future of Convergence**

Reading: Howard Rheingold, “Smart Mobs: The Power of the Mobile Many” [PDF: 157-182]

Harold, “Inventing Publics: Kairos and Intellectual Property Law” AND “Conclusion: From Private Rights to Common Goods: OurSpace as a Creative Commons” [OS 133-166]

**Course Requirements:**

**Participation:** Be sure to read all of the assigned readings before each Monday’s class and come with prepared questions. This is a seminar class and so you should take an active part in discussion. **(10%)**

**Class Bulletin Board Plus Weekly Responses:** A discussion forum for readings, and overflow discussion about seminars or topics discussed in class. I expect each student to post a response to the week’s readings (250-500 words) each week before class. You should also be prepared to actively engage with the course materials and with each other in that forum. **(10%)**

**Seminar:** Everyone is required to give a 60-minute seminar presentation on the topic or topics for that week’s class. If you are presenting on an excerpt of a larger work or a small essay by a single theorist, I would hope that you would read the work in its entirety or familiarize yourself with a theorist’s major ideas beyond the scope of a single essay, giving us in turn the benefit of your research. If you wish to assign additional or recommended readings for your seminar, you may do so, but please be mindful of your classmates’ already full schedules. Since we are discussing popular culture and the rhetoric and aesthetics of new media forms, I would expect that everyone would use visual or extra-textual aids of some kind (images, music, film or video clips, powerpoint presentation, handouts etc.) to supplement his or her discussion. Your presentation should be geared to your classmates’ ears rather than to their eyes—that is to say, do remember to entertain us, not just inform us. Please hand in your notes, slides and other media in a legible format on the evening of your presentation. **(30%)**

**Major Essay (50%):** A paper of 25 pages or an equivalent number of screens in digital or other media or up to five minutes of digital video. You should emulate another genre in your essay, especially incorporating electronic media or adding electronic supplements to a printed paper. You might choose to add images, animation or other devices—in RL or SL—that best express how your topic engages with the realities, contexts and requirements of convergence culture. You will be graded on your creativity in applying the theories of the course as well as your abilities to research, build an argument, and write a coherent essay. You may make visual as well as textual arguments, but be sure that the substance of your theoretical engagement is spelled out and not left to speculation. Your paper should respond directly to the course material, major theme we have discussed or to the thinking of one of its theorists directly. It may be on a new topic or derived from your seminar presentation, but, if the latter, should contain substantially (i.e. more than 60%) new material and research.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>% of Grade</b>
<b>Participation</b>		<b>10%</b>
<b>Weekly Responses</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Seminar</b>	<b>As chosen</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Major Essay (in the style of another genre)</b>	<b>26 Nov 07</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

## **Policies**

### **Attendance Policy**

As a seminar course, attendance is naturally mandatory. If you cannot attend for exceptional circumstances, please discuss this with me. Absences will affect not only your work, but your classmates'.

### **Grading**

Your grade is based on how well you meet the requirements of each assignment (creativity, application of theory, sound design principles, grammar, spelling, quality of your argument), as well as your general participation. As much as possible, I will try to give you full information about why you have received the grade you did and how you might improve it at the next go.

### **Late Work**

If you foresee problems making a deadline, please discuss this with me in advance. Extensions can often be arranged (once) for reasonable conditions. Any work that is handed in late, without provision having been made, will lose 2% per day.

### **Academic Integrity & Scholastic Dishonesty**

[http://www.uta.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/academic\\_integrity.php](http://www.uta.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/academic_integrity.php)

#### **Introduction**

It is the policy of the University of Texas at Arlington to uphold and support standards of personal honesty and integrity for all students consistent with the goals of a community of scholars and students seeking knowledge and truth. Furthermore, it is the policy of the University to enforce these standards through fair and objective procedures governing instances of alleged dishonesty, cheating, and other academic/non-academic misconduct.

### **What is Academic Integrity?**

Academic integrity is defined as being a firm adherence to a code or standard of values. It is a commitment on the part of the students, faculty and staff, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values:

- Honesty • Truth • Fairness • Respect • Responsibility

### **Student Responsibility**

You can assume responsibility in two ways. First, if you choose to take the risk associated with scholastic dishonesty and any other violation of the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline, you must assume responsibility for your behaviors and accept the consequences. In an academic community, the standards for integrity are high. Second, if you are aware of scholastic dishonesty and any other conduct violations on part of others, you have the responsibility to report it to the professor or the assistant dean of students/director of student judicial affairs. The decision to do so is another moral dilemma to be faced as you define who you are.

### **What Constitutes Scholastic Dishonesty?**

#### **Cheating**

- Copying another's test or assignment.
- Communication with another during an exam or assignment (i.e. written, oral or otherwise).
- Giving or seeking aid from another when not permitted by the instructor.
- Possessing or using unauthorized materials during the test.
- Buying, using, stealing, transporting, or soliciting a test, draft of a test, or answer key.

#### **Plagiarism**

- Using someone else's work in your assignment without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Making slight variations in the language and then failing to give credit to the source.

#### **Collusion**

- Without authorization, collaborating with another when preparing an assignment.

All cases and suspected cases will be dealt with via official channels.