

ENG 5020: Topics in Media and Modern Culture

Experimental Media

Meets Tuesdays, 12:50–3:35pm

Professor Scott Richmond

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Office Hours:

In office: Wednesdays, 3–5pm.
By Skype: Wednesdays, 6–8pm.
And by appointment.

1. Course Description

What can you do with a medium? How far can you push it? If you push it too far, what happens? Are the consequences only aesthetic? Or might they be ethical or political? This course approaches the question of medium and mediation by studying experimental and radical practices across a variety of media. Our primary concern will be with technical media: film, video, and digital media. However, the impetus for experimentation with technical media flows not only from the properties of a medium, but also from experimental practices across all areas of cultural production. Because of this, we will, of necessity, turn our attention to other experimental aesthetic practices in the visual, literary, and performing arts. Approximately the first two thirds of the course will be organized historically around these experimental media practices. The final third of the course will be organized around original research projects—scholarly, creative, or both.

2. Learning Outcomes, &c.

The boilerplate—courtesy of the Department of English, neoliberalism, and bureaucratic anxieties about accreditation:

By the end of the course, successful students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of course topic(s).
2. Demonstrate expertise in close reading, analysis, and argument.
3. Think creatively and generate fresh perspectives.
4. Conduct advanced research by developing a research question; locating, evaluating, and integrating primary and secondary resources; and placing project in the context of relevant scholarship.
5. Write with fluency, clarity, and style.

The actual thing—because I believe in good teaching, but that stuff above sure doesn't capture what good teaching looks like, especially with the material we have in front of us this semester. The actual thing here is probably going to give you heart palpitations, since almost everything here is going to be collaboratively generated and negotiated.

Here is what I want to do with you guys this semester: I hope to do is to give you an encounter with a variety of radical practices—esthetic, political, ethical, and otherwise. These

encounters are the real heart and soul of the course. They will often be difficult, in various and unexpected ways. The real thing I'm trying to teach you is how to be in a room with something you don't understand for a while, how to show up for that encounter, and then how to do something meaningful in response to this encounter. But I can't really teach that, so what I'm going to do is put you in a room with something you don't understand for a while, and we'll all hold hands, and then we will see what happens.

But what that really means is we're going to come up with some learning outcomes ourselves.

3. How this Course is Taught

A course is a medium, too. We will be experimental, too, with the projects, methods, means, and ends of learning. Most of this is going to mean making decisions for yourselves. This syllabus is more provisional than most, because I'd like us to be able to change what we plan to do in response to what we do in fact do. I will cede as much power as possible over the course of the semester.

This course is divided into two units. The first is entitled "A brief history of media experimentation," and pretty much does what it says. We'll encounter a bunch of radical, experimental, and avant-garde works of art, typically (but not totally) based in technical media (film, video, etc.).

The second unit of the course is entitled "Experimental computing." In this unit, we'll have a sustained encounter with ways of using the digital computer experimentally as a medium. Our central (but not our only) case for attending to experimental computing will be the game form.

By explicit design, almost all of the material we will be encountering this semester is challenging: obscure, boring, sexually explicit, depicting nudity, violent, racially charged, politically radical, and so on. I am well aware that most of what I am asking you to do encounter. My only requirements for you this semester, things that cannot be negotiated or revised, are that (1) you engage this work, as generously as possible, despite its manifest difficulty; and (2) you are willing to rise to the substantial challenge of the course materials and methods (or willing, in any event, to do your best—which is all I, or anybody, can ask).

4. Coursework

Work during the term: Work during the term includes two categories of work:

—*Critical responses.* These short papers (3-5pp) are a sustained critical consideration of a single work, according to whatever criteria you choose. We have some decisions to make about these, which we'll negotiate in the first class.

—*Small Twine project.* As preparation for the final project, all students will prepare a small project using Twine, the free, online game development tool. This is the only thing I'll be bossy/structured about: everybody will do basically the same thing, and with tools and structure that I'll provide. More information about this TBD, and then TBA.

Final project: Your final project will probably take one of two forms: a traditional research paper or an experimental game. I probably don't have to explain much about the research paper option beyond stating the length: 15-18pp. The game format is largely TBD, but I suspect the majority will be (a) group projects, and (b) made in Twine. If you're a real coder or a real loner (or both), you can work alone in some other format.

Graduate student requirements: The bureaucracy demands I include a section on additional graduate work in my syllabus. Graduate students will be expected to contribute an additional “critical response” in some format. Their final paper or project will be expected to represent approximately 1/3 more work than undergraduate students. Graduate final papers will be 20-25pp, and any contribution to “critical making” “digital humanities”-type projects (e.g. Twine project) are expected to be approximately 1/3 greater than undergraduate counterparts.

5. Grades and Grading

Grades don’t interest me very much. Also, not surprisingly, I want to leave as much of this up to you as possible. Rubrics will be generated collaboratively. If you all decide it’s worthwhile, work this semester may be substantially commented on or even evaluated by your peers. We will also negotiate much of this in the first class.

6. Boring Housekeeping

—*Email.* I am more or less constantly drowning in email. I will generally respond to emails I deem response-worthy within 24 hours, and promise one within two business days (I am sometimes away over weekends). Do not expect or rely on a response before then, especially if it is a time-sensitive manner. If I do not think the email requires a response, I may not respond.

The department requests and requires that you use your Wayne State email address. I will do so as well. This is to prevent FERPA violations. Don’t ask.

Please write emails in reasonably standard English. Computers have full keyboards, and emails do not have 140-character limits. I may have facial piercings and visible tattoos and a ridiculous little ponytail, but at heart I am an old fuddy-duddy. I do not wish to have to work to decipher your emails (and neither do other professors or potential employers, clients, or vendors). If an email to me is not sufficiently professional and respectful, I will simply not respond to it.

When you send me email, **PLEASE** use the email address listed here: scr@wayne.edu. If you use the LDAP/Directory server on Webmail, you very well may end up sending mail to the other Scott Richmond who teaches at Wayne State in the Communications department—and who does not reply to emails (at least not ones sent from me or meant for me).

—*Office hours.* My office hours are listed right on top of the first page. There’s a reason for that. I encourage all students to take advantage of my office hours. I encourage students who want extra help to use my office hours. I encourage students who want to tell me about how awesome a movie they’ve seen is to use my office hours. I encourage students who want to know more about what we’ve read to use my office hours. I encourage students who want advice on how to get the most out of their education to use my office hours. I promise you that using office hours will improve both your performance and your enjoyment of my class.

Because I understand that many of you work full-time and cannot come to campus at times other than class times, I will also hold office hours by Skype. There will be signup sheets for both in-person and Skype meetings outside my office in 5057 Woodward. That said, you do not need to sign up for office hours; they are there only for traffic management purposes, and, in the absence of students signed up, are on a first-come first-served basis. I will also meet with you (in person or via Skype) by appointment. In short, I am available to you outside of class. Please take advantage of me.

Finally, please be aware that most semesters, the office hours times I devise have to be moved around early in the semester to accommodate committee obligations that have yet to

be scheduled. Please be sure to check signup sheets and the Blackboard site for the most current information for my office hours.

—*Plagiarism and academic dishonesty. I do not tolerate plagiarism.* Not even a little bit, of any kind. No matter how seemingly insignificant, *any* plagiarism (or other academic dishonesty) of *any kind at any point* in the course will result in the following: (a) a failing grade for the course, *and* (b) I will report you to the relevant departments and colleges (to wit: the Departments of English and Communications, the Colleges of Liberal Arts & Sciences and Fine, Performing & Communication Arts). I *routinely* catch students plagiarizing in this course, and it always ends badly for the student—worse than a bad grade. Plagiarism has apparently cost students financial aid and NCAA eligibility. The legalistic definitions of plagiarism are below, but if you have *any* questions about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or other academic dishonesty, please *ask me*. Embarrassment is really the lesser of two evils, here.

—*Withdrawing.* You may withdraw from the class. Whether or not you receive a WP (withdrew with a passing grade) or WF (withdrew from a failing grade) will be calculated based on your marks for your submitted work with the same relative weighting they would have otherwise. Please be polite and let me know you are withdrawing before filing the request online. The deadline for withdrawing is Sunday, March 29. After this date, you will be required to complete the course.

—*Incompletes.* I will not, except under the most extreme, documented circumstances, even consider giving an incomplete. The University's policy on incompletes is as follows: "The mark of I—Incomplete, is given to either an undergraduate or a graduate student when he/she has not completed all of the course work as planned for the term and *when there is, in the judgment of the instructor, a reasonable probability that the student can complete the course successfully without again attending regular class sessions.* The student should be passing at the time the grade of 'I' is given. A written contract specifying the work to be completed should be signed by the student and instructor. Responsibility for completing all course work rests with the student" (2009-2011 WSU Undergraduate Bulletin, 40; emphasis added).

—*Student services.* I encourage *all* students, even those doing well, to visit both the Writing Center (information below), in particular their Study Skills Workshops and Study Skills Counseling services. Really. Honestly. Truly. I believe in them. Even students who think they do not need—and even those who, in fact, do not need—such extracurricular help will still benefit from it.

7. Boilerplate

Anyway, I this is the stuff I have to cut-and-paste on all my syllabi, which is required in exactly the same spirit of the neoliberal ideology of education-as-consumable and syllabus-as-contract, and the same anxieties about accreditation as well as other forms of bureaucratic ass-covering that produce those faintly stupid learning outcomes. Ahem.

—*Religious holidays.* Because of the extraordinary variety of religious affiliations of the University student body and staff, the Academic Calendar makes no provisions for religious holidays. However, it is University policy to respect the faith and religious obligations of the individual. Students with classes or examinations that conflict with their religious observances are expected to notify their instructors well in advance so that mutually agreeable alternatives may be worked out.

—*Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and cheating.* Academic misbehavior means any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the institution or subvert the education process. All forms of academic misbehavior are prohibited at Wayne State University, as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct (<http://www.doso.wayne.edu/student-conduct-services.html>). Students who commit or assist in committing dishonest acts are subject to downgrading (to a failing grade for the test, paper, or other course-related activity in question, or for the entire course) and/or additional sanctions as described in the Student Code of Conduct.

- *Cheating.* Intentionally using or attempting to use, or intentionally providing or attempting to provide, unauthorized materials, information or assistance in any academic exercise. Examples include: (a) copying from another student's test paper; (b) allowing another student to copy from a test paper; (c) using unauthorized material such as a "cheat sheet" during an exam.

- *Fabrication.* Intentional and unauthorized falsification of any information or citation. Examples include: (a) citation of information not taken from the source indicated; (b) listing sources in a bibliography not used in a research paper.

- *Plagiarism.* To take and use another's words or ideas as one's own. Examples include: (a) failure to use appropriate referencing when using the words or ideas of other persons; (b) altering the language, paraphrasing, omitting, rearranging, or forming new combinations of words in an attempt to make the thoughts of another appear as your own.

- *Other forms of academic misbehavior* include, but are not limited to: (a) unauthorized use of resources, or any attempt to limit another student's access to educational resources, or any attempt to alter equipment so as to lead to an incorrect answer for subsequent users; (b) enlisting the assistance of a substitute in the taking of examinations; (c) violating course rules as defined in the course syllabus or other written information provided to the student; (d) selling, buying or stealing all or part of an un-administered test or answers to the test; (e) changing or altering a grade on a test or other academic grade records.

—*Course drops and withdrawals.* In the first two weeks of the (full) term, students can drop this class and receive 100% tuition and course fee cancellation. After the end of the second week there is no tuition or fee cancellation. Students who wish to withdraw from the class can initiate a withdrawal request on Pipeline. You will receive a transcript notation of WP (passing), WF (failing), or WN (no graded work) at the time of withdrawal. No withdrawals can be initiated after the end of the tenth week. Students enrolled in the 10th week and beyond will receive a grade. Because withdrawing from courses may have negative academic and financial consequences, students considering course withdrawal should make sure they fully understand all the consequences before taking this step. More information on this can be found at: <http://reg.wayne.edu/pdf-policies/students.pdf>

—*The Academic Success Center (1600 Undergraduate Library)* assists students with content in select courses and in strengthening study skills. Visit www.success.wayne.edu for schedules and information on study skills workshops, tutoring and supplemental instruction (primarily in 1000 and 2000 level courses).

—*The Writing Center.* The Writing Center (2nd floor, UGL) provides individual tutoring consultations free of charge for students at Wayne State University. Undergraduate students in General Education courses, including composition courses, receive priority for tutoring appointments. The Writing Center serves as a resource for writers, providing tutoring sessions

on the range of activities in the writing process – considering the audience, analyzing the assignment or genre, brainstorming, researching, writing drafts, revising, editing, and preparing documentation. The Writing Center is not an editing or proofreading service; rather, students are guided as they engage collaboratively in the process of academic writing, from developing an idea to editing for grammar and mechanics. To make an appointment, consult the Writing Center website: <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/writing/>. To submit material for online tutoring, consult the Writing Center HOOT website (Hypertext One-on-One Tutoring): <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/unit-inner.asp?WebPageID=1330>.

Instructors may require individual students to attend the Writing Center to receive tutoring on a specific assignment, skill, or aspect of the writing process. Instructors may also require individual students to attend the Writing Center to receive instruction in grammar and mechanics. Instructors may not require entire classes to attend the Writing Center. For more information about the Writing Center, please contact the Director, Jule Wallis (phone: 7-2544; email: au1145@wayne.edu).

—*Class recordings.* Students need prior written permission from the instructor before recording any portion of this class. If permission is granted, the audio and/or video recording is to be used only for the student's personal instructional use. Such recordings are not intended for a wider public audience, such as postings to the internet or sharing with others. Students registered with Student Disabilities Services (SDS) who wish to record class materials must present their specific accommodation to the instructor, who will subsequently comply with the request unless there is some specific reason why s/he cannot, such as discussion of confidential or protected information.

—*For students with disabilities.* If you have a documented disability that requires accommodations, you will need to register with Student Disability Services for coordination of your academic accommodations. The Student Disability Services Office is located in 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library, (313) 577-1851/577-3365 (TTY). <http://studentdisability.wayne.edu>. Once your accommodation is in place, someone can meet with you privately to discuss your special needs.

Student Disability Services' mission is to assist the university in creating an accessible community where students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to fully participate in their educational experience at Wayne State University.

Students who are registered with Student Disability Services and who are eligible for alternate testing accommodations such as extended test time and/or a distraction-reduced environment should present the required test permit to the professor at least one week in advance of the exam. Federal law requires that a student registered with SDS is entitled to the reasonable accommodations specified in the student's accommodation letter, which might include allowing the student to take the final exam on a day different than the rest of the class.

If you feel that you may need an accommodation in this course based on the impact of a documented disability, please feel free to contact me (Scott) privately to discuss your specific needs. The Student Disabilities Services Office coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Course Materials

There are no required books for this course. All course readings will be made available by PDF on the “Content” section of the Blackboard website. You **must** have some way of accessing the readings in class. My preference is hard copy.

Course Schedule, Week-by-week

Week 1, January 13: Introductions and Experiments

Unit 1: A brief history of media experimentation.

Week 2, January 20: What is an “experimental medium”? Eadweard Muybridge and Modernism

Read: Tom Gunning, “Never Seen This Picture Before: Muybridge in Multiplicity”; Stanley Cavell, “Music Discomposed”

Look at: Eadweard Muybridge chronophotographs

Listen: Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Gesang der Jünglinge*

Week 3, January 27: What is “media experimentation”? John Cage

Read: Branden Joseph, “The Social Turn,” from *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*; John Cage, “Experimental Music,” “Experimental Music: Doctrine,” and “Indeterminacy,” from *Silence*

Listen: Alvin Lucier, *I am Sitting in a Room*

Look at & listen: John Cage performances

Week 4, February 3: Experience and Experiment: Feminist, Queer, and Underground Film
Screen: Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon*; Kenneth Anger, *Fireworks*; Jack Smith, *Flaming Creatures*.

Read: P. Adams Sitney, “Meshes of the Afternoon,” from *Visionary Film*; Susan Sontag on *Flaming Creatures* and “Notes on Camp”; Richard Dyer, “Underground and After,” from *Now You See It*; Ara Osterweil, “Introduction” and “Andy Warhol, Porn Realist,” from *Flesh Cinema*

Week 5, February 10: Pushing the Limits of the Medium: Structural Film

Screen: Tony Conrad, *The Flicker*; Paul Sharits, *Ray Gun Virus*; Len Lye, *Free Radicals*; Robert Breer, *Recreation, A Man and His Dog Out for Air*, and *Fistfight*; Stan Brakhage, *Mothlight*; Ken Jacobs, *Capitalism: Child Labor*.

Read: P. Adams Sitney, “Structural Film” from *Visionary Film*; Branden Joseph, “The Flicker” from *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*

Week 6: February 17: Andy Warhol, Fucking Genius

Screen: *Blow Job*, *My Hustler*, selected *Screen Tests*

Read: Damon R. Young, “The Vicarious Look”; Scott C. Richmond, “Vulgar Boredom”

Week 7: February 24: The Body as Medium: Documenting Performance Art

View: Bas Jan Ader, *I’m Too Sad to Tell You*, *Broken Fall (Organic)*; Mieko Shiomi, *Disappearing Music for Face*; Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*; Chris Burden, *Shoot*; Ulay & Abramovic, *Relation in Time*, *The Other: Rest Energy*, and *AAA AAA*; Bruce Nauman, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner*, *Pinchneck*, *Lip Synch*, *Bouncing Balls*.

Read: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Synthesis of One’s Own Body” from *Phenomenology of Perception*; Marshall McLuhan, from *Understanding Media*

Week 8: March 3: Video Art

Screen: Marlon Riggs, *Tongues Untied*

View: Nam June Paik, *Microphone Television* and others; Takeshi Murata, *Monster Movie* and *Infinite Doors*

Read: Kate Mondloch, selections from *Screens*

Week 9: March 10: Relations as Media: Relational Aesthetics

Read: George Maciunas, “(Fluxus) Manifesto”; Clare Bishop, “Participatory Art”; Nicolas Bourriaud, from *Relational Aesthetics*; Jacques Rancière, “Politicized Art” and other excerpts from *The Politics of Aesthetics*

Look at: Relational works by Carsten Heller, Rikrit Taravaniya, and others

Friday, March 13: All critical responses are due.

March 17: No class. Have a great spring break!

Unit 2: Experimental computing.

Week 10: March 24: An Introduction to Twine, and to Play

Read: Laura Hudson, “Twine, the Video Game Technology for All”; Ian Bogost, from *How to Do Things with Videogames*

Play: Indie and art games: Bogost, *Cow Clicker*; Jason Rohrer, *Passage*; Zoe Quinn, *Depression Quest*; Anna Anthropy, *Queers in Love at the End of the World* and *Dys4ia*; molleindustria, *Every Day the Same Dream*; David O’Reilly, *Mountain*

Week 11: March 31: Analyzing Games

Read: Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play,” “The Classification of Games,” from *Man, Play, and Games*; Anna Anthropy, from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*.

Workshop: Game design workshop

Make and turn in: Twine Assignments.

Week 12: April 7: New Media Art

View: John Simon, *Every Icon*; Barbara Lattanzi, *Optical De-Dramatization Engine*; John Whitney, *Matrix III*; John Whitney and Larry Cuba, *Arabesque*

Read: Andrew Johnston, “Models of Code and the Architecture of Digital Time”; James J. Hodge, “The Deep Opacity of Contemporary Technics” (on Arcangel) and “Lateral Time” from *Animate Archaeology*; Mark B. N. Hansen, “Technical Repetition and Digital Art”

Complete: Game proposal and or final paper proposal

Week 13: April 14: Presentation and discussion of projects-in-progress

Week 14: April 21: Game Criticism

Read: Patrick Jagoda, “Network Games” and “Gamification and Other Forms of Play”; David Golumbia, “Games without Play”

Reading day, April 28: Voluntary critiques.

Tuesday, May 5, 10:40am-1:10pm: Final project presentations