Theory Workshop #4
Communication and Identity

Comm 181F
San Jose State U
Dr. T.M. Coopman

This Workshop

These workshops are self-paced overviews and information references that provide critical knowledge to help you succeed in this course.

This workshop covers tips theories of technology that provide background for your course research project.

This workshop is based on material from:

Burentt, R. and Marshal, P.D. (2003). *Web Theory: An Introduction.* New York: Routledge

Info Tech

Technologies of information and communication are technocultural hybrids.

They transcend their status of the "thing."

By enabling a new interface between the self, the other, and the broader world, media technologies become part of the self, the other, and the broader world.

In many ways, media forms the building blocks of the social construction of reality.

Most of what you know, you learned second-hand via the media.

Cyberculture Theory

The earliest views of the web identity argued that the web led to a radical deconstructive effect on both identity and culture.

Related to post-modernity, this perspective saw the web as another new phenomenon that was fragmenting modernity.

The web provided the opportunity to abandon the confines of the limited self.

This view is limited because it is based on small sub or co-cultural experiences on the web as opposed to wider usage.

Dystopic, Utopic Views

Web as dystopic: alienating, divisive, insulates us from the physical world.

Web as utopic: uniting, freeing, democratizing, exposes us to a wider world.

Dichotomistic (either/or) perspectives are an over-simplification of a complex system and seek to use the web in service of specific ideological and theoretical agendas.

Major Web Tropes*

Anonymity: disconnecting the physical and virtual self, to go and do without being noticed. It gives us space to construct a more ideal representation of the self.

Largely an illusion in the era of cookies, "free" email that is analyzed by software, and social networking services.

Major Web Tropes*

Language: Web as English-speaking (+/-65%) and culturally designed from a western perspective.

This is diminishing as China and other nations seek to contain the openness and the steady rise of non-western users with lowering costs and more non-English software.

Major Web Tropes*

Narcissism: elaborate expressions of self (Facebook) blend the public/private aspects of identity. A type of media voyeurism of self-completion where the "user" not the audience is the focus (unlike traditional media).

We demand personalization and customization and are increasingly willing to expose our deeper selves to get it. Every new application invites and encourages us to reveal more. We are our own commodity. We are sold to ourselves and pay to create content that is sold to the highest bidder.

Major Web Tropes*

Gender: still the center of identity construction. Initially a "male" space designed and built by men this gender bias in terms of users has almost disappeared.

This is aided by the rise of "feminine" consumer culture. Does the web present a challenge to traditional female/male dichotomies or show us that such stark divisions (non-linear/linear, consumption/production) needs to be broadly rethought?

Collective Identities/ Networks

Perhaps most interesting are the new **collective identities** formed online.

The web provides many opportunities to belong and any easy way to join/quit new communities that we may have never encountered in our own physical spaces.

It allows us to safely explore other ways of being and knowing.

Moreover, we can maintain our relationships as we physically re-locate.

Tasks

To earn credit you need to post a substantive 100+ word comment on this workshop's wiki page and complete the following tasks and bring them to class.

For the in class workshop think about how these concepts and ideas reflect, contradict, or interact with C4 in Castells, the *Time* article and Baym interview, and your own experiences with self-representation online.

1. Select examples (1 each) from the workshop and C4 in Castells, the Time article, and Baym, interview that focus on communication and identity.

2. Write a sentence or two on how these examples relate to each other.

3. Write a few sentences on how these examples interact with your own experiences of the self-representation.

4. Teams will discuss and compare their tasks and prepare a 10 minute presentation on the topic of the workshop. This is not just a reading of each students task submission but a coherent discussion where the elements interact and support each other. One team will be chosen at random to present.

5. Turn in tasks sheets for credit.