School of Film and Media

MED9028M: MEDIA ECOLOGIES 1
Module Guide 2014–15

Level M (Semester A)
Credits: 15

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Module Synopsis

This module proposes that we might usefully look beyond the main lines of investigation in traditional media studies to address contemporary media transformations. It explores certain lines of enquiry around ideas of nature and technology that can be characterized as ‘ecological’. As William Merrin points out, ‘the popularity of the ecological metaphor is a recognition that something is happening today that has transformed the simpler structures of the broadcast era and led to a more complex and continually evolving system whose levels and relationships are on a similar scale to those of the natural world and which can only be grasped in a similar, holistic way’ (2014, 44). Media, within the networked, digital context of the twenty-first century, are relationally entangled, multiply connected and transformed within dynamic technical, socio–political and psychic systems. Where, in the past, individual media forms could be conceived as comfortably self-contained and distinctive, today these forms are experienced as a type of informational content that we access on multiple devices and in multiple contexts. Long
established boundaries between modes, practices and conventions of media have become diffuse. We ask how we might move beyond relatively static and compartmentalizing models of media analysis, challenging traditional concepts and models of subjectivity, textuality, media power, production and reception to generate new approaches which might enable us to more satisfactorily engage with this transformation of media. We need to respecify and study mediation more processually, ecologically and reflexively. In particular, the affective/ sensory, non-representational turn in media and cultural phenomena in the context of digitality means that we must recognize that a syllabus focused through a representational paradigm is inadequate to the task of capturing important aspects of media ecologies. The implications for the study of media are considerable. Merrin again: ‘(The) ecological approach is largely incompatible with the mainstream discipline and its specialized study of communication, of particular media forms or of isolated elements of the linear model. Media ecology is not a term that can be used lightly. It implies a world view: it evokes a world’ (2014, 47).

Students will be encouraged to interrogate media ecologies and, concomitantly, their own medial activity. The module rejects any conception of media ecology as something we exist ‘in’ and, in contrast, examines a multiplicity of processes to which we are all constituent, a media system to which we continually contribute and are unable to step ‘outside’ of. We will understand these relations as the source of issues which impact so comprehensively that they cannot be addressed in a simple coda to established disciplinary approaches, nor by carving off a new field to deal with such issues separately. Again, as collectively maintained by the otherwise divergent theoretical approaches which students will explore here, media ecological relations fundamentally reconfigure established conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, this module aspires to provide an indispensable set of critical tools for students making and thinking about media today, tools which enable our continuing use and production of media to remain reflexive.

**Learning Outcomes**

On completion of this module students will be able to:

1. Interrogate and evaluate from a range of methodological positions and theoretical perspectives, the ecological relations between media forms and/or aesthetics.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which media production, consumption and circulation is bound up with social control and the exercise of power.

3. Reflect on the ways in which established cultural assumptions have been challenged by the advent of new technologies and changing social conditions.

4. Explore the complexities of contemporary media in a processual context and demonstrate an understanding of its political implications.

5. Conduct research in this complex interdisciplinarily constituted area of knowledge and compose an advanced essay on some aspects of debates about contemporary media cultures.

Learning and Teaching Methods and Activities

This module is organized around the principle of ‘Student as Producer’ – a model of curriculum development which has become more and more integral to the University of Lincoln’s agenda for teaching and learning in recent years. A Student as Producer-inspired curriculum should attempt to shift the focus from a solely instructional paradigm to one in which students can have some say in the direction their learning activities take. It should, in other words, attempt to create a general research ethos. Student as Producer insists that all students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, should learn through a process of live research in such a way that they become involved in aspects of the design and delivery of their course. No longer merely an ‘object’ of the process of education, an appendage to knowledge–production expected to passively replicate what is delivered (ie. ‘Student as Consumer’), the student is encouraged to work collaboratively with other students and with tutors in order, ultimately (and beyond the academy), to ‘be able to recognize themselves in a social world of their own design’. This entails, as far as possible, a minimization of the division of roles between tutor and student whilst also maintaining the authority of the tutor.

Weekly two hour sessions will comprise discussion of certain key concepts, theories, phenomena and debates which tutors will identify as initial points for orientation. Discussion will be supported by set readings and other materials. In some sessions, tutors may wish to provide a more formal lecture, but, throughout, students will be required to suitably research and prepare for participation in detailed group discussion and ‘lightning talks’ (see below). As we will detail in the opening session, you should each
identify a contemporary media example to serve as the principal focus of your research and essay. We will consider together what might constitute appropriate focal points for your research. Though not limited to these suggestions, you could choose: a social networking or other website, a digital image or set of images, an application, software, a device, a service. The onus is on you to bring to bear concepts and theories discussed in critically interrogating how your example works in the context of, and contributes to the ongoing transformation of, contemporary media ecologies.

As befits a module which places emphasis on Student as Producer, the weekly session will place importance on giving you the opportunity to open sessions with your ideas, questions and suggestions. Most of the sessions will begin with ‘lightning talks’, one of the main tools which we will use to present and air ideas towards our research. The lightning talk – which will be fully introduced, demonstrated and discussed in the first session – is an innovative and increasingly popular presentation methodology which has some distinct advantages over typical PowerPoint based presentations. It places the emphasis on the generation of strong and clear ideas delivered succinctly and with as little ‘flab’ as possible. For our purposes, each lightning talk will be accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation of twenty slides, slides automatically timed to advance after fifteen seconds. Thus, each talk will be five minutes in duration. The topic of your lightning talks will be your ongoing research into the examples, concepts and debates you have determined to focus upon. You should aim to give a minimum of two lightning talks on your ongoing research over the course of the semester. Lightning talks can, of course, oversimplify complex issues, so they will be followed by a period of group reflection and discussion on the ideas raised. Along with discussion of set readings and other selected materials, these talks will provide an important basis for furthering the module’s research aims as we proceed.

In summary, it is hoped that this module will stimulate research on a live topic of intense interest to you, significant aspects of which will be determined by you. Your essay should take all feedback to your ideas into account in writing up your considered response to the assignment brief. Although the lightning talks are themselves not assessed, our feedback for your essays will include reference to the extent to which you have contributed to the research ethos of the module. The research task has been deliberately formulated to permit a wide range of possible approaches. We will discuss the nature of the essays to be written, possible approaches, focuses, case studies, etc. together throughout the module. There will be an opportunity for you later in the module to have an individual tutorial with one of the teaching team to discuss the assignment.
Assessment Method

Assessment is by an essay of 3000 words (100%). See the assignment brief at the end of this module guide. Marking criteria are set out below – please note that conscientious contribution to the week-on-week research process, and the feedback you will be given as response, will undoubtedly help strengthen your ideas and arguments as you prepare for the essay. Please take note of feedback provided in all activities: this consists not merely of marks awarded for the one item of assessment on this module, but the answers given in sessions to points you raise about the subject and reactions to contributions you make in discussions. Remember, too, if you want to gain the most from any module, that there are strong connections between attendance, preparation, participation, understanding, enjoyment, achievement, and satisfaction. Meaningful learning is more than the result of intermittent exposure to teaching; it depends very much on what students, individually and collectively, bring to the experience.

Marking Criteria

- Understanding of relevant theories and concepts
- Sophistication of analysis and use of appropriate evidence/examples
- Structure and coherence of argument
- Originality and independence of thought
- Range and academic relevance of material consulted
- Style and Presentation
- Adherence to formal requirements
- Contribution to research ethos of the module, and extent to which feedback (to lightning talks and other input) from tutors and peers has been built upon in the essay

Schedule

Media Ecologies 1 is taught on Wednesdays from 10:00–12:00 in MB1007. It is important to engage in reading each week to support your contribution to
the sessions and ongoing research. Each week, we will identify and provide essential readings with which you should engage in preparation for the following week’s session.

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<td><strong>Aesthetics and/as perception</strong> (RC)</td>
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<td><strong>Summary of module and discussion of assignments</strong> (DL/RC)</td>
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**Indicative Reading**
Here is a bibliography which indicates something of the scope of the module and books which will be useful for you to consult over the semester. Other readings will be suggested as we proceed. Many, but not all, of these books can be found in the university library. Please make use of the inter-library loan scheme if you have difficulty finding texts. Some readings and materials are likely to be communicated via the module’s Blackboard site. You are advised to check this site on a regular basis for these and other announcements.
Health and Safety

There are no activities in this module that fall outside those covered by the University’s standing Health and Safety policies and procedures. Students should avoid prolonged working with computers and take regular breaks. Where primary research is undertaken off the campus make sure a colleague knows where you are going, whom you are meeting and when you expect to return. Where appropriate a tutor should also be emailed with this information. Take a mobile phone with you if possible.
Assignment Brief
You must submit an essay electronically via Blackboard (word count: 3000 words (± 5%)) on or before the deadline of: Friday 9th January 2014 (by 11.59pm) which responds to the following:

Identify a contemporary media example, phenomenon, event or process and show how it might be understood in terms of an ecological perspective. This should be the culmination of research you have conducted over the course of the semester and presented for discussion in the manner described above in the main body of the module guide.

All essays must be composed and submitted to Blackboard in Microsoft Word compatible file format. The text should be double spaced and the page layout should include a 3 cm margin on the left and a 2 cm margin top, bottom and right. The essay should also include illustrations where relevant and these should be numbered (Fig. 1, etc), captioned and placed in sequence at the end. All research sources utilised must be acknowledged and referenced within the essay using the Harvard referencing system as this is defined in The Complete Guide to Harvard Referencing available from the Library Portal and on Blackboard. You must provide a full bibliography with your essay. Quotations are included in the word count, which must be adhered to.

It is essential that submitted assignments contain a title page with the following information:
• Module title and correct code (Media Ecologies 1, MED9028M)
• Module Co–ordinator’s name (Dr. Dean Lockwood)
• Your name, enrolment number and course.
• The submission date

Documents submitted through Blackboard must be Word documents. Restrict the name you give the file to 10 characters or fewer. Just use letters and numerals in the file name (Blackboard may reject file names containing other characters) and do not put spaces in the file name.

Feedback will be made available in written form on the module Blackboard site.

A note on Wikipedia: Use the Internet with care when doing academic research. Googling a topic will frequently take you to a Wikipedia page. By all means use it to gain an initial overview of a topic or to refresh existing knowledge. Do not, however, assume it is a definitive and authoritative source and refrain from quoting it or citing it as a reference. In other words,
it may be acceptable to use as a starting point; it should not become part of your end product.