

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film
Communication and Media Studies (COMS) 401.44 L06
Transmedia in the American Context
Winter 2017

Class dates: December 27, 2016 to January 6, 2017
Lectures and tutorials: December 27 to January 6 in Los Angeles, as arranged

Instructor: Kerry McArthur, PhD (ABD)

Office: TBA

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Office Hours: Upon request

Course Description

Transmedia in the American Context comprises an on-the-ground exploration of the immersive worlds of American transmedia, with expeditions to such relevant Los Angeles landmarks as Universal Studios, the California Science Center, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), the Hollywood Forever Cemetery, etc. Lectures and discussions consider the evolving concept of transmedia, drawing upon 19th-century European notions of reform opera, spectacle and the ‘total work of art’ (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) to interpret the contemporary phenomenon of media story-worlds unfolding through producer/audience networks. Critical examination of American transmedia products will evaluate issues around advertising, story branding, fan culture, commodity production and crowdfunding; media scholars Henry Jenkins and Dallas Smythe provide theoretical grounding for the course.

Additional Information

- No prerequisites
- The course takes a seminar format in which students lead the discussion and engage with the assigned readings
- This is a reading-, viewing- and writing-intensive course

Objectives of the Course

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the phenomenon of transmedia in an American context, with study of Los Angeles-based “total media” experiences. By the end of the course, you will be:

- Knowledgeable about the social and media theory that informs the study of transmedia;
- Attuned to transmedia production and audience reception issues within the media industries in North American contexts;
- Equipped to read more deeply into debates, both public and personally observed, on the transmedia industry;
- Comfortable using academic, policy and media sources to present the results of your thinking

and research.

Textbooks and readings

No required textbook, but a series of online scholarly articles from the University of Calgary library website (see Course Readings below).

Internet and electronic communication device information

Cellphones will be silenced and put away for the duration of class. Laptops and tablets may be used only for taking notes.

When contacting the instructor by e-mail, use the tag "COMS 401" in your subject line.

Assignments and Evaluation

You will be graded on four components:

1. Journal (30%): two journal entries due January 16, 2017; each entry approximately three pages (750 words)
2. Take-home quiz (15%): held January 30, 2017; open book. Time allowed: 24 hours
3. In-class presentation (20%): held in Calgary in late March 2017 (exact date TBA); presentation plus discussion should total approximately 30 minutes
4. Research project (35%): due April 12, 2017 (by midnight); paper length eight to 10 pages (2,000 to 2,500 words)

1. Journal (30%): Each student will keep a weekly journal (two complete entries) with observations and reflections upon the field trips and discussions held in Los Angeles. These entries **should be researched and at least partially written** while students are in LA, but may be completed and submitted when students have returned home to Calgary.
2. Take-home quiz (15%): Students will be quizzed on their knowledge and insights into the readings described in both Schedules A and B (below). You will have 24 hours to write and submit the quiz, which will be submitted via Drop Box on d2L.
3. In-class presentation (20%): Working in groups of four, students will present summaries of their assigned reading to the class (in Calgary in late March 2017). Groups will be responsible for preparing a Powerpoint slide deck with accompanying video/audio clips, then leading their classmates in a wrap-up discussion. The presentation plus discussion should total approximately 30 minutes.
4. Research project (35%): The research project will challenge the student to compare and critique the theoretical models examined throughout the course, and to apply these to a transmedia project of his/her choice. The project will comprise a paper of 8 to 10 pages (not including the References section); students must discuss their selected topic with the instructor before proceeding to the research and writing stages. Projects are due April 12, 2017 by midnight.

NOTE: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Registrar-scheduled final examination: No.

All assignments must be completed or a grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible; alternately, submit your essays to the instructor via Dropbox on d2L. If it is not possible to submit via either of these alternatives, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

- Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
- For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the University Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with

your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details:
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading System & Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades; percentage grades will be included to provide additional information on assessment.

The following chart outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. In calculating final grades in this course, letter grades will be converted to the midpoint of the percentage range, as shown in the final column of the table below.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department grade scale equivalents	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	00 - 49.99%	0%

* If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades.

** These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436>. If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 artsads@ucalgary.ca

<p>CAMPUS SECURITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	<p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333</p> <p>403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</p> <p>If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security</p>
<p>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	<p>http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</p> <p>403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca</p>
<p>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	<p>http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</p>
<p>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	<p>https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</p>
<p>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	<p>403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</p> <p>403-266-HELP (4357)</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</p> <p>If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.</p>

SCHEDULE A: RESIDENCY READINGS

Students are strongly encouraged to read the following three articles before or during the course as it begins in Los Angeles.

1. Jenkins, H. (2007, March 22). Transmedia storytelling 101. (Web log article). Retrieved from http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html

2. Jenkins, H. (1992). "Get a life!": Fans, poachers, nomads. In *Textual poachers: television fans & participatory culture*. New York, NY: Routledge. (Online book available through University of Calgary library)
3. Smythe, Dallas, W. (1981). On the audience commodity and its work, *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*, pp. 22–51. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. (Text available in University of Calgary library)

SCHEDULE B: COURSE READINGS

The following articles can be found in the University of Calgary library; the articles may be read during or after our residency in Los Angeles. Students will present in groups of four on these readings in Calgary in late March 2017 (exact date TBA).

1. **Transmedia and the Museum:** Kidd, J. (2014). The Transmedia Museum, *Museums in the New Mediascape*, Chapter 1, 23-40. (Chapter from online book in UofC library)
2. **Transmedia and Branding:** Clarke, M.J. (2014) Branded Worlds and Contracting Galaxies: The Case of Star Wars Galaxies, *Games and Culture*, 9(3), pp. 203-224.
3. **Transmedia and Commodity Products:** McGuigan, L. (2012). Consumers: The Commodity Product of Interactive Commercial Television, or, Is Dallas Smythe's Thesis More Germane Than Ever?, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36(4), pp. 288-304.
4. **Transmedia and Fan fiction:** Thomas, B. (2011). What is fan fiction, and why are people saying such nice things about it?, *StoryWorlds: A journal of narrative studies*, 3, pp. 1-24.
5. **Transmedia and Crowdfunding:** Scott, S. (2015). The moral economy of crowdfunding and the transformative capacity of fan-ancing, *New Media & Society*, 17(2), pp. 167-182.