

Composing Digital Media

[Fall 2017]

<https://cdmsfall2017.wordpress.com/>

Katie Bird
Keb133@pitt.edu
Office Hours: T 11-2:00, Th 11:30-2
& by appointment, CL436

CL435, Digital Media Lab
T/TH 9:30-10:45

Description/Objectives

Welcome to Composing Digital Media. CDM is a “W” writing intensive and time intensive course. In this course we will rethink and rework the definitional boundaries of what counts as writing, how we write, and what we choose as tools to write with. Composing is as much about “putting things together” as it is about taking things apart through questioning, development, and revision. In addition to composing what we may think of traditional pieces of alphabetic writing, we will be composing with video, audio, and other visual media. We will think about how contemporary forms of digital media, digital making, and digital consumption have been informed by and alter our conceptions of historical analog media. We will think about how digital, material, and analog compositions function when placed into different historical contexts, digital platforms, institutions, and social/public spaces. As such, we will revisit a handful of themes again and again:

- **Accessibility:** What ways does digital making and consumption open or close access for certain populations of readers and makers.
- **Context:** Where, When, and from Whom did this come from? Where, When, and to Whom is it going?
- **Ethics:** What responsibility do we have to authors, to audiences, and to objects when we remake, remediate, translate, transform digital texts.
- **Process:** How and why might we make visible the labor beyond digital composition.

As a writing intensive class meant to help you work on the mechanics of our “writing” broadly conceived, this class entails serious public engagement with the processes of creation and revision. You’ll be expected to share your work in progress and comment on the work of others – both in class and outside of class. We will spend a significant portion of class-time doing hands-on experiments with digital and analog tools testing out and troubleshooting together with different approaches to making. In this sense, CDM will function much like a lab class, a studio space, and workshop environment.

Expectations of Student Input

The impact of the class, the richness of the projects, and your development with digital composing largely depends on our interaction and participation as a group. You will be expected to:

- speak up with ideas, questions, clarifications, challenges during class discussion
- offer detailed technical and conceptual feedback (both written and spoken) between individual peers and small group sessions
- suggest, execute, and promote alternative pathways or workarounds to projects
- articulate and address successes and setbacks in your own process and progress throughout course
- help others, let others help you
- set aside additional time for completion of class projects outside of class, for each major project, you should expect to spend 20 hours minimum outside of class on the project
- be in contact and collaboration with your group (in and out of class) for support, feedback, and help. group texts and group emails are hugely helpful for this.

Finally, I think a reason behind this course name is caught in the act of “Composing Digital Media” rather than Digital Media Composition. While you will complete this course with 3 composed final products, your learning in this class will come not from what is done, but in the doing; not in the final product, but in the work and collaboration along the way.

Course Website/Updated Course Schedule:

<https://cdmfall2017.wordpress.com/>

You will be expected to regularly visit the course schedule and course blog for updates on readings, assignments, and class notes. If you miss a class, go to the course blog for the day first, and then follow-up by email with any additional questions. Course schedule is updated regularly, please check it often.

Assignments/Grading

Tutorial/Reflection Blog Posts

Each week students will post a short blog entry (250-300 words) on their WordPress portfolio by Monday evening at 6PM. Directions for the blog post will be posted on the course blog on Thursdays during class. Posts will either be a reflection on a completed project, troubleshooting, or a helpful tutorial for other students. You are expected to comment once a week on at least one group member's post.

[Project #1] Digital Archives, Circulation, and Remediation: (Historical) Fiction Photo Essay

Students will compose a photo essay in the style of Mills. The photo essay will be inspired by their photographic findings searching through online Public Domain collections and remediate the photos into a fictionalized, pseudo-fiction story or contemplative essay. The photo essay must include: recorded narration, images from the Public Domain and the web (under Fair Use), and manipulated images from Photoshop. The photo essay will be presented as an exported video SlideShow from Powerpoint/Keynote. Link to full parameters TBA.

[Project #2] Digital Accessibility and Universal Design: Audio Description

Students will compose two samples of Audio Description to accompany a scene from a TV show or Movie. The two descriptions will **follow guidelines on narrative clarity (for visually impaired audiences)**. The first project, technical or objective description, will be written, recorded, and edited with a group. The second project, creative description, will focus on subjective writing, recorded tone, and edited for mood by the individual student. link to full parameters TBA.

[Project #3] Digital Experiments & Play, Video Investigation (Pechakucha & Video Essay)

Students will compose two videographic projects. The first, a short 60 second experiment. The second, a longer investigation, or “essay,” into a question, theme, idea, or further experimentation raised during the play and experiment with a single film or television program. This project emphasizes a close, sustained, playful, and hands-on engagement with a single film or program to encourage new, critical, and open-ended approaches to the study of film and other media. Students will be completing these projects in stages and will be submitting rough cuts and workshopping draft version with the class during the course of the project. See full parameters TBA.

Final Project (Optional)

If students choose to complete the optional Final Project in the course, they will propose their own form of digital composition. This can include any of the forms already covered by the course (Photo essay, Video, Audio, or any digital form of composition not discussed in class (i.e. web design, video game/online game, a Social Media platform study (Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, Pinterest, etc), digital publishing, etc. Students will be required to submit an abstract of no less than 250 words describing the goals, audience, methodology, tools,

and relevance to the course objectives. Final projects must be accompanied by a class presentation during final's week. See full parameters here.

Contract Grading

Having been both a student and instructor of digital media composition, my firm belief is that this learning experience will be the most useful, exciting, productive, and challenging for you *if and only if* you are allowed to take risks, play, make mistakes, experiment, improvise, and even fail. For most of you, these tools, platforms, and kinds of assignments will pose many challenges and frustrations, but hopefully as many rewards. In order to recognize and reward the process itself, encourage risk-taking and mistakes, and ultimately foster group support and ongoing revision, I propose to you an alternative to traditional assessment/grading.

Following the scholarship of Colleen A. Reilly/Anthony T. Atkins's **Rewarding Risk: Designing Aspirational Assessment Processes for Digital Writing Projects** and Jason Mittell's **Specifications Grading**, this class will utilize the method of **contract grading** for the bulk of course projects and assignments.

Link to our class grading contract

Open Commenting Questions (1/9-1/17)

Signed Contract in Class, Due (1/18)

If you would like to see your signed copy, please visit me in office hours.

Policies

Gender Expression

This class recognizes students of all gender expressions and identities. If you prefer to be called by a different name and/or have a preferred pronoun, please let me know.

The 'R' Rating

Some of the assigned media is rated 'R' or unrated: there may be violence, language, and sexuality that could be considered objectionable or difficult for students. If a film makes you uncomfortable, you're free to leave the room, but be aware that "mature content" may become part of our discussions. I also advise that you read-up on the film or media ahead of time and speak to me about your concerns so we can discuss viewing options. I also recognize that specific content can pose a safety or mental health risk for individuals coping with symptoms of PTSD related to sexual, violent, or long-term trauma. I will do my best to announce material that may be common PTSD triggers and you are under no obligation to disclose this to me unless it is part of your disability.

Attendance

Because this is an intensive hands-on workshop, discussion is central to the work of the course. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in conversation. You are allowed two absences, though it is strongly recommended that you strive for perfect attendance. A third will affect your grade, and a fourth is grounds for failure. Students in this situation may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances. You're responsible for finding out about and making up any work you miss.

You'll be considered late to class if you arrive more than five minutes after the start of the class period. Three late arrivals count as one absence.

Participation

For

this class, your participation is measured by your willingness to engage with all the course material in a given day: including lecture, active lab work, group feedback, and the class discussion.

Late/Missing Work

You'll be turning in assignments every week and assignments must be turned in on time. Final versions of projects must be turned in on the due date. Failure to do so will void the grading contract. Grade will be lowered a half-letter grade for every day the project is late.

Email Communication Policy

Each student is issued a University email address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. Students are expected to read email sent to this account on a regular basis. **Here is a link to the University's full Email Communication Policy.** I check my email a couple times a day (usually in the afternoon) and rarely after 6 PM. Keep this in mind while working on assignments the night before they are due and be sure to contact me or set up an in-person meeting in advance.

University Policies

Plagiarism

Here is a link to the English department's helpful guide to defining and avoid plagiarism.

Most importantly, the department's guideline states that plagiarism occurs when:

1. "You quote directly from a source without using quotation marks and adequately acknowledging the source. "Sources" include books, magazines, newspapers, journal articles, Web pages, lectures, notes, letters, movies, musical lyrics. In some cases, even a single word, if it's distinctive, constitutes plagiarism if not properly attributed with quotation marks and some sort of citation.
2. You paraphrase a source without acknowledging it.
3. You paraphrase too closely to the original (substituting synonyms for some of the original words), even if you do acknowledge the source.
4. You use someone else's idea, argument, interpretation, facts or supporting evidence without indicating your dependence on it (with a footnote or textual citation), even if you modify or elaborate the idea or argument.
5. You fabricate a source or quotation to give the appearance of having done required research.
6. You turn in someone else's work, in whatever form, as your own."

All instances of plagiarism will result in no credit for the assignment and a report to the Dean.

Here is a link to the Dietrich's school policy on plagiarism

The Writing Center

Located in 317-B Student Center, 4024 O’Hara St., **Here is a link to the Writing Center**. The Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Although you should not expect consultants to correct your papers for you, they can assist you in learning to organize, edit, and revise your essays. Their services are free, but you should call ahead (412-624-6556) or make an appointment online. **Here is a link to the Writing Center’s online appointment scheduling**.

Other Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me (your instructor) and the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, 412-228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Pitt offers free personal and academic counseling at the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930). Specialized counseling services are available to victims of sexual assault; you can contact the sexual assault services coordinator via the main UCC phone line during weekday business hours or at 412-648-7856 (after 5 pm, Monday-Friday or on weekends). In a crisis situation, university police can also connect you with an on-call counselor affiliated with the UCC.

Schedule

*schedule will be updated regularly, please check often

Week One

M 8.28 Welcome & Introductions. Discuss Grading Contract.

– charting our personal digital histories of making

W 8.30 WordPress.com – Making Class Portfolio

– best practices for design & accessibility

HW: Work on WordPress site. Blog Post #1, (due this week only on Tuesday 9.5, 6PM)

Week Two – Begin Project #1, Photo Essay (Visualizing History & Information)

M 9.4 Labor Day, *No Class*

W 9.6 Examples of Photo Collage, Montage, Essay

view/”read” (in class):

Leanne Shapton, link to: [Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry](#)

Mike Mills, 1927. *Access via course drop box account.*

watch (in class):

- Eames Family: IBM – The Information Machine (World’s Fair, 1964)(TBD)
- *Mad Men*, S01E13 [“The Wheel,”](#)
- – Mike Mills (artist, filmmaker): *The Beginners* (selections, 3:10, 49:00, 1:33:00), *20th Century Women* (selections, 9:46), 1979 (MOCA, 2012), [Cisco: Tomorrow 60 Generic](#)(Ad, 2012)
- Jon Forsman/Elastic.TV: [The Americans](#) (Opening Titles, 2013-), [Link to interview with Forsman from Creative Babble.com](#), see more examples at this link to [artofthetitle.com](#)

- -Tim O’Neil/Digital Kitchen-LA: *Narcos* (Opening Credits, 2015), [Link to interview with O’Neil on artoftitle.com](#)
- HW: Research Year, Research related Media/Ephemera/Visual Culture, Blog Post #2 (Research)

Week Three

M 9.11 – *No Class*

W 9.13 Public Domain Images, Creative Commons, Fair Use

In class: Fair Use experiments, Finding Photos, Powerpoint Slide Show

HW: Find 20 Public Domain Photos (bring with you on external hard drive to class), Blog Post #3, Watch Photoshop Tutorials:

Adobe:

- [“Get to Know Photoshop,”](#)
- [“Edit Your First Photo”](#)
- [“Layer Basics”](#)
- Pick one other tutorial and explore other topics in [“User Guide”](#)

[Lynda.com \(Log in through Pitt Portal\)](#)

- [“Photoshop CC 2017 Essential Training: The Basics”](#) with Julienne Kost

Week Four -Beginning Photoshop

M 9.18 discuss Public Domain Photos,
make (in class): Slide-shows with slides

W 9.20 Photoshop Basics

HW: Work on Project #1, Blog Post #4

Week Five

M 9.25 Open-Lab Photoshop

W 9.27 Open-Lab Photoshop, meet in groups. Troubleshooting

- Recording Voiceover in Powerpoint
- HW: Finish Project #1, Blog Post #5

Week Six – Begin Project #2, Audio Description

M 10.2 . Project #1 Due. Workshop Photo Essays & Narration

HW: Finish Project #1 Final Changes, Read & Come prepared to discuss:

- Agnieszka Walczak, Louise Fryer, “Creative description: The impact of audio description style on presence in visually impaired audiences” *British Journal of Visual Impairment* (see Box>Project #2>Readings)
- Georgina Kleege, “Audio Description Described: Current Standards, Future Innovations, Larger Implications.” *Representations*. 135 (Summer 2016): 89-101. (see Box>Project #2>Readings)
- [The Audio Description Project, American Council for the Blind.](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA, 1990\)](#)

W 10.4 What is Audio Description?, Close-Captioning.

Watch Audio Descriptions: *Daredevil*, *Master of None*, *Call the Midwife*, *Anna Karenina* (Netflix)

In class: Practice writing – modes of audio description

HW:

- Find, Watch, & Listen to a TV Show or part of a Movie (with audio description, streaming or on Live-TV).
- Just Listen (audio only) to a show with/and without AD.
- Find a Movie or TV show without audio description that you want to work on for your project (streaming).
- Write: Blog Post #6

Week Seven

T 10.10 – *(class rescheduled from Monday 10.9)* Recording Audio, Best Practices.

Experiments in recording in different spaces.

HW: Find two scenes (3-5 minutes in length) from a film, TV show, or video game that doesn't already have audio description. Make sure you have access to it for class on Wednesday.

W 10.11 – *Listen to & Discuss Recordings, Group Troubleshoot, Open Lab*

Blog Post #7, two new recordings with timings to scene, download audio from source clip (bring recordings with you to class), watch audition tutorials:

- [“important and browse media”](#),
- [“set up a multitrack session”](#)
- [“visually fading or changing amplitude”](#)
- [“cut copy and paste audio in audition”](#)
- [“manipulate and adjust audio levels manually”](#)

Week Eight

M 10.16 Audacity Tutorial

W 10.18 Foley/Sound Atmosphere Experiments, Downloading Video

HW: Blog Post #8, work on projects

Week Nine

M 10.23 Synching to Video, Audacity Open Lab

W 10.25 Project #2 Due, Workshop Audio Scenes

- HW: Revision, Blog Post #9 (Project #2 reflection)

Week Ten – Begin Project #3, Video Experiments

M 10.30 Using Premiere,

- Sourcing/Importing Footage
- Premiere Tutorial Part 1, Exporting
- HW: Blog Post for Project #2, Due on page
- HW: Find media related to an outside project, Use OBS to capture entire TV show or entire Film you want to work with in-class on Wednesday. Must have the .mp4 file ready by 9:30 AM Wed.
- MUST have a portable-hard drive by Wednesday that is formatted for Macs or PC & MAC, if you aren't sure bring it in during office hours or email me.

W 11.1 Videographic Experiments

- Watch examples in-class:
 - LJ Frezza, [“Nothing”](#)
 - kogonada, [“Wes Anderson Centered”](#)

- Patrick Keating, [“Epigraph Exercise”](#)
- Kevin L. Ferguson, [“Edge”](#)
- Katie Bird (works in progress): “the man in the white hat,” “decoupage”
“American Cinema Editors, The *Gunsmoke*Dailies” (box)
- Student Pechakucha example: John Everett [“Cold Blood”](#)
- Check out more here: [“Audiovisualcy”](#)
- HW: Pechakucha (.mp4 file due on Box 8AM Monday),

Week Eleven

M 11.6 From Experiment to Essay, Project #3 Parameters

- Watch Pechakuchas
- Watch examples of Video Essays
 - Kevin B. Lee, [“Elements of an Essay Film”](#)
 - Jason Mittel, [“Adaptation.’s Anomalies”](#)
 - Kogonada, [“What is Neorealism”](#)
 - Allison de Fren, [“Fembot in a Red Dress”](#)
 - Katie Bird, (works in progress) “Steadicam Craft”

W 11. 8 Premiere Tutorial #2, Group Meetings

- Premiere Tutorial Part 2, working with text, effects
 - Experiment, Play with Film, 10 questions.

HW: Research Summary & Citations (Blog post #10 Part one), Project Abstract (Blog post #10, Part Two), Begin working on Video Essay

Week Twelve

M 11.13 Read Group’s Blog Posts, Group Meet-Up

W 11.15 Export Project (as-is) turn in to Box by 8:30 AM)

Watch Rough-Cuts

- HW: Work on video projects, blog post #11 (tutorial)

Week Thirteen

M 11.20 Open Lab, Meet with Groups, Final Project Discussion

W 11.22 *No Class, Thanksgiving Break*

HW: Watch Group’s projects, work on Project

Week Fourteen – Final Projects/Revision Lab

M 11.27 Project #3 Due, Watch Video Projects. Final Project artist’s statement due

W 11.29 Open Lab

F 12. 1 *Digital Showcase (CL501, TBA)*

HW: Blog Post #13

Week Fifteen – Final Projects/Revision Lab

M 12. 4 Open Lab

W 12. 6 *Last Class – Open Lab – Final Project Rough Drafts*

HW: Blog Post #14

Week Sixteen W 12.13 Final presentations, Final Projects Due, Final Revisions Due