

Dialogue with History: Pete Hocking

11, 12, 18, 19 July

Since at least the seventeenth century, Rhode Island has been a nexus for the intermingling of social ideas, political philosophy and cultural aesthetics. In Providence, we are uniquely suited to explore the cultural and historical interconnections of North America with Europe, South America, Africa and Asia.

A settlement of Europeans in the seventeenth century, Providence quickly grew into a mercantile power. Recent scholarship has documented Rhode Island's centrality to the Slave Trade, establishing both new ideas about the interconnectedness of the State with Africa and Central America and a better understanding of the complexity of the eighteenth and nineteenth century global economy. More positively, among the first of European-descents to open trade with Japan, Rhode Islanders exported and imported artifacts and ideas with Asia. As the first State to actively promote immigration, to support its growing textiles trade, Providence has been a multicultural city since the end of the eighteenth century. Given its proximity to New York and Boston, the city has also been a nexus for intellectual thought. The Providence Athenaeum was often the site of lively conversations about ideas from Europe as well as the place where important strains of American thought, being cultivated by Emerson, Thoreau, et al, were disseminated to and advanced by an eager community. Finally, as the first democratic European settlement in North America, Providence made unique contributions to the development of the American Constitution.

This course will engage several modes of learning in its goal of connecting local history to a larger global context. Through lectures and walking tours, we will explore the sites of significant history, the affect of international ideas on architecture and design, and the way that ideas establish public institutions. Along the way, we'll meet people involved in Rhode Island's contemporary public life and, in particular, discuss the ways that they engage digital media to advance their work. Visits will include the Rhode Island Foundation, web designers for non-profit organizations, State policy organizations, and local media companies. These walks will lay the foundation for exercises in psychogeography, an artistic means for exploring place, and allow students to gather digital source material for the other course modules.

Dialogue with Place: Catherine D'Ignazio

13, 14, 16, 17, 21 and 23 July

Students will plot the field of digital media in relationship to place, by locating and visiting key institutions and practitioners in the greater New England region. A series of short lectures, activities, student presentations and a hands-on workshop will provide a sense of the breadth of practice, from art to design to business, that the term "digital media" encompasses. A brief historical introduction will trace the development of the personal computer, the Internet, and other now-ubiquitous technologies against a wider background of globalization and socio-political transformation of the past 50 years.

We will see how the initial “placeless-ness” of cyberspace gave way to a near obsession with place (i.e., through Google Maps and GPS technologies), and near universal computing. Students will be introduced to a wide range of current technologies and will engage more deeply with the subject matter through short assignments, group discussions, and presentations. Students will build on the psychogeographic experiments begun in "Dialogue with History" module, and will create small works and prototypes that engage with the places that we visit together and the places from which the other students come (imagining place).

In considering Place, we will take a day trip to Boston and a two-day trip to New York City. As delineated on the Syllabus, guided reflections, short assignments and feedback will help students to synthesize their experiences on site visits with other course work.

Digital Media: In Dialogue with Other People: Daniel Peltz

24, 25, 26, and 27 July

Digital media are reframing how relationships are formed and maintained, through increasingly popular activities such as exchanging digital photographs, blogging, digital diaries, and collaborating on intellectual projects through joint authorship software. The contemporary landscape of creative and cultural practices offers a diverse set of opportunities to become a participant. New platforms have enabled mass collaboration to shift the way in which historical conventions like authorship, research, copyright, patents, and collaboration operate. Platforms such as Wikipedia, MySpace, Second Life, and YouTube harness the social network capacity of the Internet and open up new social spaces worthy of consideration.

This module will balance participation and reflection on new models for social exchange through digital media. Students will be challenged to engage in practice-based research, including participating in a collaborative digital video project based on the ongoing work of RISD.tv, a venture of the RISD video department that has been a platform for international exchanges between Cameroon, France and Providence. RISD.tv is based on a set of video collaboration tools that students will reflect on, utilize and revise in their exploration of social media.

Dialogue with Information: John Caserta
30 and 31 July, 1 and 2 August

“For the most part, it is easy these days to find what you're looking for; one hallmark of digital efficiency is that the more specific the query, the more efficient the query-based search. Megan and Rick, however, would like to help you find what you are not looking for. Between the two of them they've seen a lot, which is why they've built their lives-and this reconsidered version of the small private library-around the question of how to make certain that there are still surprises to be had.” (Lewis-Kraus, Gideon. "A World in Three Aisles." Harper's Magazine, May 2007, p47)

Although the lifeblood of any library is its cataloguing system, it is easy to sidestep this orderly process by wandering through it with no predetermined book in mind. You may browse in any section of the stacks, through the day's newspapers, the 'ready for shelving' cart or the 'new books' section.

Because we increasingly rely on the digital archive to quickly find what we are looking for, we are losing the pleasant surprise of stumbling across unexpected material. Particularly because the interface to many collections is a simple search form.

This session asks students to consider how to translate the joy of unexpected occurrences from the physical library to the digital one. Students will receive an introduction to three Providence libraries. Students will perform three one-day exercises that follow a contemporary design methodology of seeing, mapping and proposing.

You, Digital Media and the Next Economy

August 3, 2007, 10 am to 4 pm

Convened and Facilitated by Robert Leaver of New Commons

The next economy will be built as three disciplines converge: business, learning and the public interest. The aim of the workshop is to inspire you to improve your community by using, back home, what you learn in Fusion. You will spend the day in structured conversation and learning with local digital media professionals and each other. We will hear from three professionals about their use of digital media in a business, a learning environment and furthering the public interest. We will examine digital media from two sides -- the creative and experimental as well as the practical skills required. You will engage the professionals and each other in facilitated conversation.

We begin the workshop with an overview of your questions and interests in digital media that have surfaced from the program evaluation to date. We are then in conversation with the three professionals on their individual work as well as the convergence of their collective work to create the next economy. Your questions will guide the morning conversation among them at first and then with all of you. Lunch will be an opportunity to personally reflect on what you have learned and what you want to do with what you have learned. In the afternoon we will be in conversation shaped by two thematic questions as well as what we extract from the professional reflections in the morning. 1. What are you taking from your Providence experience? 2. What do you want to do with digital media back home?