

CulAnth 20S-03  
Media and Anthropology  
Writing Intensive, First Year Seminar  
Fall, 2014

## Final Assignment

### Network(ed) Knowledge: Synthesis and Expansion

**Overview:** Final projects always demand more than they can ever be. The terminus of our encounter as a class through the education machine is arbitrary—a mechanism for regulation and statistical production, namely, a grade. It attempts to impose an order on knowledge we already know is chaotic and unruly, exceeding the capacity of any grade to capture it.

With that said, I propose the “final” we arrive at should become a moment/event/space for us to discover new paths, new networks—this is how we survive and grow. One basic and critical way to do this is for us to re-imagine the *form* through which we express our knowledge, complete with doubts and confusions.

To help us with question of *form* this project will be electronically published using the non-linear design possibilities of Scalar. This will require you to think about how writing itself works as a form of media. Read more about Scalar here: <http://scalar.usc.edu/scalar/>

All of you have struggled intensively with complex ideas this semester. The goal has never been mastery of knowledge (often an illusion), but to create new possibilities for you to think and act upon, both in yourself as a fleshy, social being and in the worlds you inhabit and build with others.

For this last project, I want you to continue to develop lines of thought you’ve been tracing in your previous 2 conventionally structured essays. Rather than confining these essays to the crypt of your hard-drive, I want you to animate them in new ways—allow them to change shape, to become heterogeneous as they make contact with sister ideas manifested in the work of your classmates.

Your task is to summarize, organize and integrate your knowledge and that of your classmates/fellow thinkers while expanding on these ideas through new examples and more complex analyses.

Each of you will have total autonomy over your own path within the class Scalar project. Within that, I imagine you might devote a page or several to some foundational concepts regarding the machine, media, the social/tech interface, society and change, time/space, labor, or haunting. You may also explore more deeply some sites/examples in which these concepts are evident, such as Second Life. You may decide to research a “new”

theorist (Baudrillard! Deleuze!) or dig more deeply into a familiar one (Marx, that rascal! Or Guattari!). Maybe you will do a combination of these things.

After you've decided on a thematic focus for your project, we will collectively organize the entire class into 4 or 5 nodes, each with a shared thematic focus. This means groups of 3 to 4 students will work together.

Because the project is NOT linear, your ideas can be more mobile, more provocative, and more generous in their reach. *This does not mean they are not focused.* Make this project about one or several related topics (surveillance, the virtual, war-making and simulation, online romance, changing parameters of friendship among adolescents under the intensified time/space of Facebook, bullying, virtual currencies, the role of social media in the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, etc). This will allow your work to cohere and also give you a direction when you go off rambling into the internet woods to see what you can find in terms of stories, videos, etc. However, I encourage you to be experimental, to try out new things, to go into new spaces while also testing out your skill with some of the concepts you've learned over the semester. I value poetry, the extreme and unexpected movement, the ambush. But these are not wanton gestures that seek to disguise a lack of thought or attention. The trick is to guide the grace of intellect into conversation with the bountiful chaos of exploration.

**Goal:**

- 1) Develop a multi-page, non-linear essay using Scalar's unique abilities to configure the flow and paths of information. This project will incorporate concepts from your previous essays, reconstructed and *summarized* for this new media platform.
- 2) It will include new ideas and examples harvested from the vast digital field (online articles, websites, videos, audio).
- 3) The project will cross-reference with your classmate's projects to enhance, expand and re-route your own ideas.

**Method:**

- 1) create an account on Scalar
- 2) get added to the class "book" project
- 3) create your own "path"
- 4) write out your paper in Word, then copy and paste it into Text Edit or a similar Rich Text format.
- 5) begin uploading/pasting content to the 5 or more pages you will create in your "path"
- 6) meet with the members of your thematically organized node to discuss intersections, gaps, and confluences
- 7) sketch out a node "map" that links all projects together
- 8) rewrite sections as needed to transition between pages and paths
- 9) consider co-writing with other members of the node to produce overviews, summaries, definition pages, etc.
- 10) decide on key tags and tag pages appropriately
- 11) explore the entire project
- 12) link your path with others across the class

The project must consist of:

**5 distinct pages and approximately 1500 words of written content total.**

**3 links to classmates' projects. Of these links, you must analyze and discuss at least one, incorporating it further into your own work.**

**3 links to outside academic or journalistic sources—either print, audio, or video.**

You may include as many outside links as you choose beyond this limit, but be circumspect, balancing content w/ analysis. I expect you to both use old content (reading notes, essays) and to generate new content. The old work will need to be summarized/rewritten to fit the new media, and you will need to write new sections that elaborate on ideas or analyze content you are introducing.

**Citations:**

For your citations, which you MUST include, you can provide a conventional citation at the bottom of the relevant page, just like you would do for a paper. I recommend including these wherever necessary to be on the safe side. But you can/should also include hotlinks to the Google book version if available. Some journal articles are behind digital gates unless you go through Duke Library, which all readers won't have (out in the real world), so you MUST include a written citation there, like for some of Larkin's pieces, for example. Books should be easier to create hotlinks for, like *Games of Empire* or Guattari's *Chaosmosis*.

**Tagging:**

This is a very simple but highly useful organizing and search function. For each page/post you have the option to put in tags. Type in key words separated by a comma. You can always go back and add more tags. Then, when you are looking through everyone's uploads, you can search for terms you may be interested in—"Guattari," for example, or "Blair Witch Project" or "drone". Be sure to tag—this will ensure your content becomes more visible to others and in turn you'll be able to find relevant information among your classmates. In the end all the blogs will be digitally stitched together through a series of tags and links.

**Grading:**

I will be looking first of all to see if you complete the various requirements of the assignment as detailed below. Second, I want to see how you introduce new examples and material and *analyze that material critically using the theories and arguments we've studied*. Third, I will be evaluating how well you incorporate your classmates' work into your own. Finally, I'll be looking at the structure of your project—how do the different parts link together and produce a coherent but provocative assemblage of ideas organized around a focused argument.

**Recommendations:**

I like to sketch a little map with all my content visible and then draw lines connecting the different bits of info. For example, a theory page might outline key concepts. It should have some outside links, maybe a video illustrating, say, Guattari or Deleuze's idea of the rhizome. Then figure out how the other pages might incorporate links, references, and or tags that lead a reader back to the relevant sections in that page. Sometimes a video might get linked on several pages. Integrate links into the body of the text using the hyperlink function.

As usual, consult w/ me if you need help thinking through the organization of your material.

In reference to how much of your previous writing you can use, here's what I wrote to a student in a previous class in response to this question:

Partially the purpose of this project is for you to "give" or share your ideas w/ others, esp your classmates, so they can build and connect to your thinking. So I want you to use as much of your previous writing as makes sense. You can copy entire passages/paragraphs or pages. Just remember you will likely need to edit or rewrite some sections to make sense. But think of Lev Manovich's ideas about modularity and remixability. Remix yourself! You're not stealing, you're re-using! Instead of your previous writing being "dead" or without a future, it suddenly finds new life in a different form. This is a kind of radical practice that teaches us something about our lives, not just about academic work.

Ok, that does it for now. Send me more questions as you think of them. I know this project is asking a lot of you--technically and academically--so hit me up for clarifications. I'll also continue to scan your work in progress as you put it up and if something doesn't look right, I'll let you know. I also suggest you get friends to use your site, or other classmates. User feedback is CRITICAL, and srsly, working out kinks and bugs in your blog will help me evaluate you better. OK?

**Timeline:**

**The project will be produced over the course of 9 days.**

- 1) Choose your focus. Pick an object of analysis--it can be exploring theory, like Guattari, or it can be a site or machine like drones, Facebook, NSA internet surveillance, or Turkish Anonymous hackers.
- 2) **On Day 1 upload a rough outline to your Sakai Dropbox.** You should map out 5 separate, stand-alone pages that relate to one another thematically. You may use portions of previous writing, either essays or reading notes or both. You will probably need to revise and certainly you will write more around/incorporating this text. Basically, think of this as a loosely structured 5+ page essay with each page as a section covering a specific area of thinking/analysis that connects or unfolds to the next section.
- 3) **Begin writing over the break!** The more you have done, the easier it is to edit and for your classmates and myself to help you organize and refine your work.

- 4) In class on **Day 2**, I'll map out the thematic clusters from your different foci. We will collectively organize into nodes--working groups of 3-4 students. You will coordinate with your classmates to meet and work together to map out the connections between your individual projects.
- 5) By **Day 6** you should have a good portion of your writing done.
- 6) Continue to meet with your node members on **Day 6/7**
- 7) **On Day 8:** we'll meet to have a pizza party and look at the final projects as they near completion. We'll discuss links between nodes and the experience you all had working on the project.
- 8) **By midnight of Day 9** your individual and node projects must be totally written, edited, and linked to your classmates' across our class' Scalar network.

**Remember:**

This experiment has several goals: an opportunity to think actively with your classmates and remix/resurrect your previous writing, a way to enact, formally, living knowledge in a collectively produced and critiqued digital landscape, and a problem in building coherent ideas into related sets or strata of knowledge while discovering shared facets or connections.

This project should not be a stressful, confusing thing. I want you to take risks while building upon your previous work. You will be able to embed media like videos and audio clips and then analyze them. You will be able to **support your arguments using your classmates' writing!** This is huge: if you need help explaining an idea, you don't have to just do it alone--you can draw on the smart, expert work of your peers to assist you.

We will be using Scalar to do all this. Necessarily, this will require some technical training, but it's pretty straightforward. I will be available to meet with nodes throughout the week to help organize, edit, and create links.

**All readings are suspended for the rest of the semester. I want you to exclusively focus on this project.**

Lastly, do not fear the grade. Assume you are getting an A on this project as long as you push yourself and your peers. I expect you to be equally invested in your own project, writing, and analysis and in the node aspect of building connections and relationships. Pay attention to the timeline--we don't have much time to do this. I'm here to support you and you can also turn to your peers for help. I want this to be as fun as possible while also intellectually invigorating.

So do lots of writing over break, even if it's not so refined or great. Just get ideas out there. Mess around on the internet to find some things to think or write about. Build on your strengths and interests.

Have a good break and I'll see you on Tuesday morning!