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I felt there was a real pedagogical need to be filled, one that centered around issues of contextualization. And there were big gaps of knowledge. It was as if all the pieces were there, but they needed someone to help put them together in the right place and in the right order, a situation that called for a conceptual reorientation of what already came naturally to them.

— Kenneth Goldsmith

The current generation of media students enter college with a new kind of literacy. These skills include the fundamental principles of media literacy (an ability to question content as consumers of media) and a basic understanding of digital production (online publishing, digital imaging, video/audio editing). The acquisition of these skills reflects a self-motivated engagement with a variety of sources and methods more readily available because of digital technologies. These self-taught skills need to be encouraged and honed at the university level and accompanied with a deeper level of historical and critical inquiry. Teaching as a new-media artist means encouraging a critical relationship to and engagement with our digital ecology through a diverse set of theoretical and historical contexts and the perpetual development of digital literacies.

// digital literacies

Technologies change and specific fluencies become exponentially and unpredictably more or less relevant with time. For this reason, while I teach my students a variety of tools and programming languages/frameworks, I encourage independence from specific tools and languages, instead emphasizing the development of a new set of digital literacies that can adapt quickly. While gaining fluency in digital production is always beneficial to students, more important still is learning how to effectively remix and participate within an ecology of flux.

The term remix has many different connotations for students. My use of the term refers to an ability to effectively appropriate from a vast set of tools, libraries and cultural repositories available on/offline. Networking (the ability to search for, synthesize and distribute information online), distributed cognition (the ability to interact meaningfully with tools and resources that expand our individual capacities), transmedia navigation (the ability to follow a flow of information across different devices, media and contexts) and collective intelligence (on/off-line collaboration in the open-source sense) are the key literacies every media student must become familiar with and master.

Participation is concept I help students to identify in their on/off-line lives, include into their own practice and that I incorporate into the classroom. First, as digital natives participation means understanding the different social expectations of a diverse set of online communities (reddit,

tumblr, wikipedia, stack overflow, etc). Second, as digital cultural producers, participation is a key dynamic in the interactive systems we design. I encourage students to think more about patterns of desired outcomes and behaviours they hope to achieve, rather than simply moving a user/audience through a single flow in an experience. Finally, in the classroom, I borrow from the participatory models of the open-source community to create frameworks for courses where students are given the opportunity to exercise the agency they have grown familiar with online. This includes forkable projects/assignments, opportunities to merge their own readings, lead conversations and open checkpoints throughout the semester to assess the direction of the course itself.

// historical && theoretical context[s]

I teach historie[s] in place of History. While canons have their place in the classroom, it is important to provide students with a diverse set of historical narratives and theoretical frameworks within which to place their own practices. This means taking a wider view of digital arts and new-media by placing it against the backdrop of art history, media studies, software studies, computer science and ensuring racial diversity, gender balance and including fringe/folk historie[s]. Additionally, it is important for students to have real-world references within which they can localize the ideas and motivations that compel them to make work by presenting tangible scenarios through virtual/IRL visiting artists and through transparently sharing my own practice and experiences.

// critical artware

I want students to understand that technology is not neutral. It is a symptom of our worldview, our norms and our values. Marshall McLuhan said, "we shape our tools, thereafter, our tools shape us." As technology expands beyond the status of tool and into the realm of our environment, it becomes an ecological 'shaping.' I challenge students to question the assumptions embedded within digital ecology and consider how it informs their own preconceptions of identity, innovation, culture, community and democracy. Meaningful art helps us to navigate and comprehend the wider world and to identify what is important in our lives. Through this lens I ask students to analyze the 'messages' within their medium[s], realize their place in this ecology and discover their own meaningful and critical objectives. I do not expect complete resolution, but I do expect sincerity and commitment in their research/practice, as well as a willingness to take risks and a desire to experiment.

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It is important that students of digital arts and media realize that as our analog lives become increasingly digitized, it is our responsibility as cultural producers to ensure it does so in a way that reinforces our shared values and ideals. It is my belief and experience that every student is capable of sharing the passion I feel for digital culture by becoming collaborators in the

experimentation and exploration of critical theory, research and practice. As my own new-media art practice, my teaching, and curatorial/organizational efforts grow increasingly inseparable, I aim to participate in the kinds of collaborative developmental environments that will grow my knowledge-base, complicate my perspectives and challenge my politics and methods in such a way as to keep me attentive to shifts in digital culture and open to progressive developments in education. Ultimately, my goal as an artist/educator is to contribute to the development of innovative, confident and critically minded artists/designers that will embrace the newly empowered subset of creative digital thinkers and actively participate in the development of our digital ecology.