Stealth Journalism

Course Description

How do you commit an act of journalism for people who aren’t expecting one? What happens when news is shared beyond traditional formats?

This class will focus on the history and practice of information sharing in unconventional spaces, through media such as video games, graffiti, Snapchat, and performance. Students will also learn about how formats dictate content, public versus private space, and ways to spot untapped opportunities for digital and real-world journalism distribution.

Students will be expected to research and create their own public project that will surprise, delight, and inform specific groups of people. This is journalism at its most unexpected.

Desired Learning outcomes

By the successful completion of this class, students will be able to

1. demonstrate an understanding of journalism principles.
2. demonstrate basic understanding of design thinking methodologies.
3. demonstrate a basic understanding of how to read the architecture of, and behaviors within, online and physical spaces.
4. plan and prototype an unexpected journalistic experience within a public space.

Total students: 18.
Week One

*Originally planned to discuss journalism, news, and to begin a class definition of journalism. The class was missed due to a blizzard, so I set the class an extra reading and modified the rest of the course.*

Reading for missed week:
- *Elements of Journalism, Third Edition.*
  Introduction and pp15–20, 33–37

Week Two

*Introductions:* name, preferred pronoun, where you get your news

*Class discussion:* What is journalism? What is news? What is the difference between the two? Discussion of brief historical context.

Group exercise: The creation of a class definition of journalism, based on the readings and discussion. We will return to this definition throughout the class, and it can be revised via discussion at any time.

Discussion of the aims of the class.

For next week

Reading assignment:

Writing assignment:
- Apply the principles of aordance, mapping, constraints, feedback in the reading to the design of any app or website of your choice (it doesn’t have to be a journalistic app/website.)
- Write a short list under each heading of the Aordances, Mapping, Constraints and Feedback you see in its design. Share your lists in the Canvas online system, be prepared to discuss in class.
Week Three

Discussion of assignment.

Presentation and discussion of examples in which people and news outlets have found unexpected opportunities for content creation through the design affordances/constraints/mapping/feedback of online spaces, eg. BBC WhatsApp Ebola service, use of images in Twitter, development of the hashtag, selfies, Instagram.

Exercise: Students are given eight Post-It Notes each and told to stand, and identify two each of Affordances, Constraints, Mapping and Feedback to be found within the room. They need to write their choices on the Post-Its, and stick them on what they have identified. Class shares their choices, confirming they have understood the concepts.

Guest speaker. Stacy-Marie Ishmael, head of mobile apps, Buzzfeed, to discuss the design of mobile apps, and adapting content to a user's behavior.

Short lm. Show a clip of Street by James Nares of slowed-down public space in New York. Have students identify where people have adapted public space to their own purposes within the video.
For next week

Reading assignment:
Read the About section, and at least 3 previous projects from the Laundromat Project website, http://laundromatproject.org. Prepare at least one question about their work to ask next week’s guest.

Writing assignment:
Observation exercise. Go to a space where people spend time and move around—it could be a park, a coffee shop, a bus station, etc—and observe people’s behavior.

Write and submit notes on the following topics: Where is the space? Who is there? What is there in the space that encourages one kind of behavior over another? Are they following intended affordances or have they discovered some of their own? How could the design of the space be improved in response to how people seem to want to use it? Plus any other observations about the design of the space and how people move within it.

If you feel comfortable doing so, take photos of the space to share in class.

VERY IMPORTANT RULE: DON’T BE CREEPY.

Week Four

Discussion of assignment. How are spaces designed for people to act in certain ways? What kind of communities exist within a space? What kind of design encourages community interaction?

Guest speaker: Petrushka Bazin Larsen, head of programming, The Laundromat Project, to discuss the interaction between artists and communities, and how to respectfully tell stories with communities.

Discussion. Return to class definition of journalism. Discuss role of communities as part of journalistic mission.

Presentation. Introduction of service journeys—mostly used by brands/advertising. Describe the process, discuss relevance to news.

For next week

Reading assignment:
Chapters from **Design for Social Change**: Vendor Power and Es Tiempo.

**Writing assignment:**
Visit [http://www.spontaneousinterventions.org/interventions](http://www.spontaneousinterventions.org/interventions)
Choose three artistic interventions from the site. Write a short text that describes each piece, outlining in bullet points the service journeys that people will have taken to engage with it, and state why it is or is not a journalistic creation, referring specifically to elements in the class definition.

**Week Five**

*Guest Speaker:* Sam Ewen, founder of guerilla marketing experts Interference Inc., to discuss the methodology of guerilla advertising—how do they come up with their ideas, how do they test them, what are the important steps to take to get a strong response in public spaces, how do you document your work.

**Discussion of the assignment.**

*Class exercise:* conceptualize storytelling in the context of locations within The New School. What information do they think will be relevant to students? How might they present them?

**For next week**

*Reading assignment:*
**Notes of a Public Artist** by Doug Ashford
Chapter from *Living as Form*, edited by Nato Thompson: Microutopias: Public Practice in the Public Sphere by Carol Becker

*Writing assignment:*
Interview someone at the New School who isn’t in the class. Find out what kinds of information they engage with, where and how.

**Week Six**

*Design Thinking Bootcamp* based on the d.school methodology.

*Discussion* of empathy interviews and prototypes
For next week

Reading assignment:
What if Journalism was built for Community Participation? - The Local Lab.

Week Seven

Site visit: Meet in classroom, divide into pairs. Outline observation assignment for project venue. Reminder of Affordances, Constraints, Mapping and Feedback principles.

Field trip to project venue (Union Square Subway Station).

Return to classroom.

Discussion of venue—what did people see?

For next week

Reading assignment:
How journalists can become better interviewers
How journalists can overcome shyness
How to do empathy interviews
Empathy Maps

Assignment:
Do at least three empathy interviews inside the Union Square subway station. Take notes on who they are, and what you find out about how, when and where people engage with information and news. Ask if they are willing to give you a way to contact them, if they would be interested to see the final group project.

Week Eight

Discussion: Share interview notes.

Group exercise: Divide into four groups, discuss the interviewees and their interests. Then narrow down audience interviews to four representative audience members for the class—one per group. Students choose one of these audience members as the “user” for their final group project.

Discussion: Questions of trust and authenticity—how do you get these audiences to trust what you’re showing? Share and discuss lists taken from Reuters Institute research into trust and digital journalism (PDF).
Video: The Museum of Westminster Street. Discussion about Westminster Stories, how it was created, the community response.

Discussion: how the end of class project will be judged. Share criteria.

For next week
Assignment:
Do more in-depth research on your audience—in person, via existing studies, spending time in places where the audience is, etc.. Come up with three possible pieces of information each that will engage your user. Be prepared to explain your choice.

Spring Break

Week Nine
(bring laptops)

Recap of class so far.

Discussion: Groups share audience research—students to listen for how other audience members differ from their chosen audience.

Group work: 15 minutes of individual research online into topics relevant for your user. Then share topics within groups. Select a single topic for the focus of your project.

Discussion: Return to notes/photographs of the subway station. How and where could you share that information in the space? Brainstorm within groups.

Discussion: Show and discuss team roles for final presentation.

For next week
Reading assignment:
Four types of audio that people share

Assignment:
Go back to the subway station, on your own or with your team. Identify specific locations that you think would be good spaces to engage your user. Come up with three methods per person, or six methods per team,
to engage your audience with your chosen topic in a way that properly utilizes the location. Email those to the professor by Sunday.

Do more audience research related to your topic. What will you have to consider regarding the amount of information you will aim to share, and how you will display it? If you are using images, what kind of images will you use? If it involves performance, what kinds of performance might engage that audience? Share your notes with the class.

**Week Ten**

*(bring laptops)*

*Group work:* Go over assignment. Groups work together to finalize a location and a storytelling method. Team does research to find information related specifically to that chosen method.

*Discussion of prototypes.* Brainstorm prototype methods, choose one.

*Mini presentations:* Each group does 1–2 minute presentations to the class. Feedback presented with I like / I wish methodology.

**For next week**

*Assignment:* Finish your projects!

**Week Eleven**

*(bring laptops)*

*Practice time:* 15 minutes to practice/tighten your presentations.

*Presentations for our guest speaker:* Starlee Kine, journalist/producer of This American Life. She will give her feedback after each presentation, and also discuss journalism and experimentation, and her fiction story that was presented in a subway station.

*Class debrief.*