THOUGHTRAVE: Dubsteps to a Digital Ecology of Mind, Body, and Soul

“Buckle up tightly and spit on me later.”
—Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Libidinal Economy

Professors:

• Robert Craig Baum, PhD
• Lady Gaga, Head Mistress at Mother Monster (Multiverse)

Course Description:
THOUGHTRAVE offers student an intense exploration of the digital mind/body problem by way of a series of reading, listening, and conversational modules that include studies in pop culture, communication, quantum and multiverse theory, and mass media. Like a “rave,” improvisation and free-expression will form an ethic of (un)learning that encourages an intense reordering of weekly expectations and outcomes. Unlike “appreciation” or “theory” courses, students will also gain a working knowledge of past and current electronic music, sound design, and synthetic communication. Students will be encouraged to apply critical theory practices to the music that defines their lives as a way to create “affinity” connections to other people’s styles, art, insights, and worldview.

Furthermore, THOUGHTRAVE relies on a laboratory ethic where students create as well as contemplate the course’s major themes, using electronic and acoustic devises to create modalities of thinking and languages of intelligibility that encourage “other-worldly” expression. As students grow more confident expressing themselves through sound, music, and aphasic/fragmented/aphoristic texts, they will begin to identify and discuss a prevalent postmodern condition that Lady Gaga describes as “digitalis”: a damaging spiritual, psychological, and cosmological pathology caused by living in a binary culture as quantum beings relegated to receive and transmit advanced signals using primitive digital technology. (Yes, even the most advanced iPhone is about as advanced as a Commodore 64 when constructed within a multiverse totality.)

By the conclusion of this course, students will have gained a deeper understanding of how they participate (healthy or otherwise) in a digital ecology of mind, body, and soul; they will also be encouraged to create their own “thoughtraves” by way of digital communication, live or recorded, which will form part of their final projects. Key thinkers studied in this course include Alain Badiou, Gregory Bateson, Jean Baudrillard, Maurice Blanchot, Deleuze & Guattari, Brian Greene, N. Katherine Hales, Stephen Hawking, Martin Heidegger, Michio Kaku, Jean-Luc Nancy, Avital Ronell, Wolfgang Schirmacher, Paul Virilio, and Slavoj Žižek.

1 Hangout/Skype event will be announced second week of class; in the off chance we need to postpone, students will receive “VIP” registration information (no additional charge) and access codes as soon as they are made available.
Preshow Checklist

Required:

Michel Gaillot, Multiple Meaning Techno (Interviews w/ Jean-Luc Nancy)

Review the Lady Gaga Studies archive and THOUGHTRAVE (private distribution)

Terry Bison, Meat

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland and the Disney 1951 feature

Multimedia:

Create and personalize your own blog (e.g., Wordpress, Blogger, SquareSpace)

Laptop Moog/Theramin (fun to play with; essential for thoughtrave communication)

DJ Mixer (one of many programs to help you create your own mixes)

Thoughtrave YouTube Channel (a collection LG+RCB started in January 2014)

Suggested:

Hawking and Mlodinow, The Grand Design

Daniel Levitin, This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession

Peter Price, Resonance

Peter Price and Tyler Burber, On Becoming-Music
WEEK ONE

Mission: To define the digital multiverse by way of a sonorous encounter with Lady Gaga’s pop music deconstructions, mainstream music performance take downs, and synthetic outreach to a binary people sending and receiving audio distress signals, an “Emergency On Planet Earth.”

Research Agenda:

➢ **Thoughttrave** (exclusive text for this course): Sections 1-15
➢ Bateson, selections from *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Introduction, Part I all; Part II “Experiments in Thinking”; Part III “Cybernetics of Self”; Part IV, “Role of Somatic Change in Evolution”; Part V all; Part VI all), and “Multiple Versions of the World”
➢ Michel de Certeau, *Mysticism*
➢ Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra”
➢ N. Katherine Hayles, *Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers*
➢ Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* and the Disney 1951 feature
➢ *The Elegant Universe* (in three parts)

Suggested:

➢ Hawking and Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (Ch. 1 and 2)

Musicology:

➢ **Thoughttrave** YouTube Channel (especially Delta Heavy and Zomboy)

WEEK 2

Mission: To connect mediated life worlds through auratic/sonorous representational practices (especially trance, dubstep, and other synthetic musical expression) as a way to better define our relationship to the transceiving power of music and to better understand humanity’s role in the larger multiverse.

Research Agenda:

➢ **Thoughttrave** (exclusive text for this course): Sections 16-30
➢ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Multiple Meaning Techno* (pp. 15-47)
➢ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”
➢ Schirmacher, “Media as Lifeworld” and “Eco-Sophia – The Artist of Life”
➢ *What the Bleep Do We Know?!?

Suggested:

➢ Hawking and Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (Ch. 3 and 4)

Musicology:

➢ *Rdio Lady Gaga Channel* (especially “Born This Way” Zedd Remix and “Judas”)
➢ **Thoughttrave** YouTube Channel (especially RCB selections and first 90mins of “Brutal Dubstep Drops”)

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WEEK 3
Mission: To deepen our conversation about digital ecology, mass media, music, and multiverse, we will engage in a conversation focused on Lyotard’s postmodern condition, and differend. This week we also bring together story, performance, event, and multiverse.

Research Agenda:
➢ Thoughtrave (exclusive text for this course): Sections 31-45
➢ Zelinski, Deep Time Media
➢ Shohat and Stam, Narrativising Popular Culture
➢ Ausslander, Liveness essay and Interview with Performance Paradigm

Suggested:
➢ Hawking and Mlodinow, The Grand Design, Ch. 5 to end

Musicology:
➢ G.U.Y. music video (March 22, 2014 release)
➢ Thoughtrave YouTube Channel

WEEK 4

“I will break my own fucking rules; this is our world”
—LG , SXSW 2014

Mission: To set the tone and tempo for maximum student participation in a digital “rave” which will take place 24/7 across the final week of this course: how does a single tune or groove or hook or style of music (trance, techno, dubstep, and other genres, of course) activate and circulate the frequencies we oftentimes suppress in order to live our day to day lives? “What is called listening?” (building on Heidegger’s “What is Called Thinking”) will help us break through the digitalis (especially in a culture that denigrates second life as mere entertainment and a frivolous waste of time)? What are the pataphysical qualities of multiverse sonorous/auratic becoming? In other words, maybe our digital obsessions, especially with music, speak to a much deeper frequency/superstring need that can be isolated, developed, and shared in a way that increases our understanding of our multiple lives in and out of accepted notions of time/space?

Research Agenda:
➢ Thoughtrave (exclusive text for this course): Sections 46-60
➢ Lady Gaga, Pop Culture Is My Bitch and Swine (at SXSW 2014) ** note: LG introduced “Swine” as a rape protest song; this information has been quashed from the internet
➢ Student led review of materials, with emphasis on Jean-Luc Nancy, Gregory Bateson, Wolfgang Schirmacher, and Siegfried Zelinski.
➢ What the Bleep Do We Know?!? and The Elegant Universe

Musicology:
➢ Thoughtrave YouTube Channel (especially Roksonix “Ride with Me” for LG and Grooveshark “Sky” for RCB)
Learning Outcomes:
Students who successfully complete this course will be able to demonstrate a working understanding of the following ideas in Critical Theory, Media Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Philosophy:

- the (il)limits of philosophy and radical critical theory
- mediated life worlds / life techne / eco-sophia (Schirmacher)
- representational practices / postmodern condition / difference (Lyotard)
- deep time media (Zelinski)
- dubstep and electronic music as a way to treat “digitalis”
- digital ecology of mind (Baum’s remix of Gregory Bateson’s work)
- power/knowledge and philosophy as a creative act (Foucault)
- listening (Nancy)
- digitalis
- history of trance/techno (as an embrace/critique of Multiple Meaning Techno)
- global mass media

Assessment:

1. Weekly blog (750-1,000 word minimum per week; a series of creative and critical reflection entries that show a student’s journey from encounter to struggle to synthesis across four weeks)

2. Submission of question or talking point for all meetings with RCB (to be submitted with 12hrs advance notice); Professor Baum will collate and forward these questions to LG.

3. Students will demonstrate an in-depth understanding of an area of study in digital ecology discussed within this course; this knowing/unknowing will be assessed by way of a final project (proposed by student) with a reflection exercise called “Seven Theses on Digitalis” (multiple thesis driven exercise like Benjamin’s Theses on History)

4. A rubric for assessing blogs, questions/talking points, and final project will be provided during the first week of class. Since these expectations will change with different learning needs and goals tied to current media news, developments, and research, it is essential that we remain open to new ways of learning and assessing. More importantly, we need to practice what we preach whenever we claim a “student-centered” approach.
Requirements:

1. Students will attend course meetings and participate via Google+ Hangout, chat on Facebook.
2. Students must have Google accounts, Facebook accounts, and Skype.
3. Students will submit their weekly questions for Lady Gaga within 24hrs of receiving notice of the scheduled "Hang Out".
4. Students will keep a blog with 750-1,000 word weekly entries.
5. Students will complete a multimedia final project with a “7 Theses on Digitalis” written component.