The Changing Nature of “Media”  
(June 2010, Xiamen, People’s Republic of China, Nathaniel I. Cordova)

Primary Points

Class Introductions (main task: to set up following meetings, set core issues for discussion).

- Introduce sustainability as nothing new -- we already have sustainable goals and values -- but which are they?)
- Expectations (class, outcomes)
- Work & Project
- Equipment?
- Teaching Modalit(ies)
  - Cultural Differences (Teaching vs Learning)
  - Small Group
  - Participation
  - Shared Learning

Changing Nature of Media

Rapid pace of technological change (time, space, globalizing changes, increased pluralism and concomitant changes associated with plurality of values)  
Information Communication Technologies (and changes) driving other activity (economics, politics, social, cultural, etc.). Examples (instructor and class)  
We will complexify our thinking and understanding.

One big dilemma: our group is quite varied and culturally diverse -- we will perforce be making some rather general observations at times. Bear in mind that some of those might be needed in order to get some points -- to allow us to share a bit of common ground -- knowing that our common ground is perhaps that we have great diversity in experience, cultural values, etc.

Why Media & Technology in a program that deals with Sustainability?

- Easy answer: advocacy for sustainability, be efficient, be persuasive, and savvy about getting messages out. Pragmatic, use of tools for suasive effect.
- More complexity: media and new technologies facilitate expression, and provide new ways by and through which we can externalize, materialize, and concretize our imagination and vision of sustainable futures.
- We can start this process with personal expression -- by using vm, media and technology to share stories- to participate in the culture (change in context: we are more cultural producers now)

Points for Discussion

1. Sustainability not new: discourse of sustainability has existed -- core values, privileging of particular values is shifting
a. We've valued sustaining other things (consumption based models)

2. Technology: we are not talking about just tools or the sophisticated computational equipment. We need to think of technology in its social capacity as facilitator, as helping us materialize and concretize cultural imagination and vision.
   a. Technology often seen as either destroying (dystopic) or sustaining (utopic) natural resources. Need to add complexity to our understanding, and to the relationship of media to culture and to social relations.

3. Media & Mediums: Media often considered as broadcast media, or seen from the perspective of mass dissemination of content. We have to “complexify” our understanding of media to extend it to Media Culture, or Media Ecologies.

Media spaces, are cultural spaces: Culture is the space in our society where we tell stories about ourselves (how does a society tell stories about itself, in cultural spaces). If so, then media landscapes dominate the telling of those stories -- of those imaginings and visions. Furthermore, those stories are mediated through something we call "interfaces."

New media and technology shape perceptual regimes and foster the concretizing of particular visions regarding sustainability. Add to this that sustainability is a very human concern. We need to sustain ourselves (not just the Earth). The environment, the earth, etc., are not separate from ourselves. Hence, cultural sustainability is a goal that new media and technology helps us realize. Example: BP and the Gulf: Not just examples of the natural environment but of the cultural dilemmas it highlights. (Note: ethics of technology).

Exercise 2: Connect these terms -- tell me a way in which these connect:

- Media/Medium, Technology, Culture, Sustainability, Environment

Exercise 3: How do ICTs drive other social activities?

- Changes experienced (open question)
- Definitions & Conceptual: Media as more than broadcast systems
- Mediums & the cultural protocols that grow around them
- One to Many vs New Mediation (massification, power, voice, expression)
- More cultural producers now rather than just consumers
- Extensions and Amputations (Examples Elicited)
- Media plays a cultural role (open question, participation)
- Mobility: on the go, access, info. fragmented...

Close: Review, notice how everything today has been about creating linkages, connections

Later Sessions
Media Culture & Sustainability
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Primary Point: In a mediated globe and consumption-driven media culture, how do we inject a counter-cultural value/message that can cut through the clutter of messages, and that can shape attitudes, belief, and behavior toward greater ecological/environmental consciousness?

Media Culture emerges as reliance and dependence on systems of mediation, where primarily most of the information we receive is mediated over and over (remediated). We receive messages that are fragmented, converged, and massaged through interfaces. That media culture is ubiquitous -- and shapes particular perceptual regimes (ways to see and understand what we see). Some of that is done through visual conventions (media culture is pre-eminently visual). It behooves us to understand those perceptual regimes, the interfaces, and the visual conventions of media systems. It is important for us to understand how media systems frame and spectacularize events for us.

Conventions

We are creatures of habit -- which is why conventions work. Cinematic examples: dark man, dark suit, "ponderous" or eerie music, low illumination, character aimless (in Horror movies, the dark-house search for sound)

Ex. 1: Cinematic Conventions?

Ex. 2: What visual conventions are important given culture and goals of sustainability?

Ex. 3: How might we facilitate the visualizing of sustainability (cultural, economic, natural, etc?)

Small Group Work

Gather descriptions and reflect visually: biodiversity, sustainability, environment: green, trees, flowers, animals, nature (mountains, lakes, water, etc.). Sustainability rhetoric is primarily shaped and organized by an ethos of recovery, reclamation, preservation, recovery, and protection, and an overarching frame and/or metaphor of loss -- followed by one more implicit at times of battle (this is a battle we are waging -- time pressure involved). This is primarily also driven at times through an ideology of the goodness of nature, that nature is as it ought to be ("the whole system can be in peril").

Reflection and Discussion on Sustainability Messages

Think about the images you saw when discussing biodiversity (also in Prof. Pike’s presentation). What did you see? Trees. Why trees alone? What primary color? Green. We also saw dinosaurs, fish, mussels, kudzu, corn, and potatoes. Aren't humans biological organisms? Why not show biodiversity with humans instead of trees? What primary images of human activity, if any, do you see?
How do we visualize the opposition? Toxic fumes, pollution, animals suffering, dead, or otherwise driven to extinction. Forests damaged, humans living in polluted or contaminated conditions. The primary metaphor or frame is that of contamination: contamination suffuses us, it is always a possibility. **Frame:** we are agents of the dissolution of our natural resources, and if thinking of the nation, we end up being agents of the dissolution of the nation, or of the culture (we tend to have an implicit view of ourselves as somehow separate, not in interconnection – some rhetorics of sustainability seek to change that mindset)

We are dealing with sustainability messages that redound on human relations and survivability: “We are doing this because it is essential to our survival and to the survival of all living organisms and the Earth itself.”

We've tended to construct these messages as "problem driven" (we have a problem, bad things are going to happen). Fear appeals do work, but people do not like to live afraid all the time. (Ex. Loss of biodiversity, loss of culture, loss of natural resources, loss of economic power)

**Ex.: What does BP do when it wants to change its negative image or frame? It makes its logo green, shows lots of pictures of trees, mountains, rivers, plants. What else?**

We know fear scares people, it scares them enough to motivate them to action, but we also know that at some point: 1) people don't want to be afraid anymore, 2) they can get paralyzed by fear, 3) fear appeals can fail if seen as ludicrous -- because we always think we are not bad (we do not like to make sustained negative self-evaluations).

**Discussion:** So, we need to attenuate the feelings of fear with other appeals. What other appeals do we use for such attenuation?

- Survival is good, but it also is balanced in some places with quality of life appeals.
- We have started changing messages to "quality of life" -- this is a more consumer oriented perspective -- we can continue to consume, and we can continue with progress, in harmony with cherished values of ease, comfort, progress, and not too much work on our part.

**How do we visualize "quality of life?"**

A concern is that we transform sustainability values into something we can consume (product or culture). Thus we can consume our culture, by making it part of a mythic story to tell all, perhaps something to highlight through cultural tourism.

Much of the battle is to craft multiple modalities of messages to keep chipping away at dominant narratives.

Sustainability has been around for a long time: but we've valued and privileged different notions about the environment, our place in it. We can re-mediate those “values.”
Metaphor Work: Media Ecology (media eco-systems, where mediums thrive, grow, and/or follow the ecological norms of the system in some fashion -- operating in some interdependent fashion). Biodiversity (species diversity, etc. Diversity being broad in terms of definitions)

Consider Media not just as filter for information, but as tied to culture. Media includes the cultural norms, values, protocols that “grow” around particular mediums.
Primary Points

- We live in a society inundated with mediated information.
- We've learned that mediums (different mediums) have cultural values, norms, and protocols associated with them (iPhone, email, texting...) and thus that media is more than huge broadcast systems. Media are both mediums, systems that use such mediums to convey information, and the values associated with the mediums.
- We learned that culture is a space where a society tells stories about itself. We have multiple such cultural spaces.
- Those stories we tell are mediated -- they take place through media systems, and networks, and reflect particular values and cultural norms associated with the mediums used (those are not necessarily dominant, but they do influence messages).
- Since we live inundated with information and messages, a primary concern for us is how to cut through the clutter we encounter. Our messages, then, must take into consideration various elements.
- New Media (or new mediation) allows us to tell particular stories in ways that will capture attention, shape new perceptual regimes, have powerful emotive appeal. They constitute another way for us to exercise our voice in public -- our public voice.
- New Information Communication Technologies (multimedia, etc.) are the primary drivers and engines behind the majority of changes in society in multiple areas (Discuss)

Exercise 1: Identify some changes in society, and how particular new media or technological changes are the drivers behind such change.

Some things to consider when thinking about mediated messages in a world inundated with mediation, with messages, but one where new media and technology is the primary driver of major changes in all fields.

Exercise 2:

Come up with a short list of what you think are some changes in the nature of mediation and technology, of communication, that shape and inflect how we communicate nowadays, how we might craft messages (not what has happened in development, but what is the nature of messages now?)

Nacho’s Model

1. Fragmentation: Messages come at us fragmented (bits and pieces, kibbles and bits, but fast and furious, many at a time. We are constantly sorting, filtering, and evaluating message fragments)
2. Articulation: We are called upon more and more to pull together those fragments -- audiences are called upon to put together such fragments (competing fragments), and those we are given keys and codes to organize. There are ways in which we are
encouraged to form particular associations and identifications (some values rule). Those might be cultural codes, norms, protocols.

3. Circulation/Dissemination: Messages increasingly prepared with an eye toward how they will circulate and how they become more effective through particular channels of circulation (this is critical to media because media circuits are important for not just maximizing circulation, but also articulation of the message -- and the values that are embedded)

4. Convergence: Messages, mediated, are not just univocal -- they blend, mix and match with other messages, we participate in the process by crafting, creating, expanding... messages converge with multiple sources of meaning-making. They will use needed cultural resources to make meaning.

5. Interface: We receive information increasingly mediated yet again by interfaces with whom we now interact (tactile, voice), that are always with us (mobile), and we need to pay attention to what are the interfaces through which particular audiences will encounter messages.

Exercise 3: You need to construct a message, you want to use a mediated form, and you need to take into consideration many elements for an effective message:

- Identify the message you want to convey? -- Simple? Straightforward? Convoluted? What does the audience need to know to act? How do you encourage translation from knowledge to action? What are the barriers to action?
- Who are audience(s)
- What mediation do you expect will work best?
- Through what interfaces?
- How circulated and/or disseminated?
- How might the message get expanded, inflected by convergence with other messages and/or technologies?

Finally, how do we handle information overload? How might we cut through the clutter in an ethical way -- Especially when dealing with a complex concept like sustainability?