

Digital Media Off-the-Grid

LCST 2454, Spring 2021 (CRN 8800)

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Project 2: Collectively create an off-the-grid social network

For this project we will draw inspiration from the *Whole Earth Catalog*, in particular the way that its founder Stewart Brand has been described (Turner 2006) as a quintessential networker whose most important contribution was perhaps drawing together a vast and heterogeneous milieu of people, creating circulation and cross-pollination of a unique assemblage of ideas. Based on this, and other off-grid communication practices such as ham & CB radio, QSL cards, and mesh networks, we will create an off-the-grid, “low tech” social network to circulate ideas about off-the-grid media within the learning community of our class.

We will do this by producing zines and sharing them with each other through various means – probably primarily the international and US postal systems, but other methods would be welcome! (Safe and socially distanced in-person trading, courier, carrier pigeon, or any other means?!)

Components

- (1) *An off-the-grid experience.* Between now and when this project is due, arrange to have at least one off-the-grid experience, whatever that means to you. It could be: going into nature including urban nature or a park, getting off the electrical grid or other grids for some amount of time, meditation, or unplugging from social media or communication networks for some amount of time. Within the parameters of your off-grid exercise, find a way to document this experience. That could mean written observations, sketches, or something else that fits your parameters. Include these observations in your zine, as well reflections after the fact about what it means to get off-grid today: in 2021, during the spring semester, amid a global pandemic, in New York City or wherever you are as someone at least partly connected to New York City by way of your enrollment at The New School.
- (2) *Advice, reflections, and how-to for a DIY electronics project.* (Your Project 1.) For this component you should share reflections and observations from your project work, including notes about what your project did, why someone may want to do it, and tips that might help someone else who wants to implement this. Include several images, at minimum including a schematic or diagram, and two photos of its operation.
- (3) *Conceptual discussion of the analysis, theory, and critique of off-the-grid discourses and practices.* This is the section in which you will integrate engagement with the texts and discussions from this semester. This should be about 500-750 words. Refer back to your notes & reading responses, as well as to my presentation slides and Zoom recordings of our discussions.
- (4) *Other fun stuff!* Drawings, doodles, stamps, stickers, scraps, fragments, collages, or anything else that may contribute to this within the realm of “zine aesthetics.”

Scope / size

If you choose the “mini” zine format, your project should be about 3 mini zines. They can either be attached together or presented as separate parts of a whole. If you use an 8.5 x 11” page (or A4), you can use 3 sheets of paper folded in half yielding about 10 zine pages plus cover and back. Feel free to use any other paper size or format that you wish, and you can estimate approximate equivalences in terms of quantity.

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Format / production

The traditional format for zine production is a collection of paper materials, assembled by affixing them onto sheets of paper and photocopying. If you have access to a photocopier, I highly encourage you to pursue this production technique! Digital assembly techniques are also OK, but keep in mind the handmade, DIY aesthetic – not in a contrived way, but just to remember that zines are not a polished cultural form. I will also show some tips about how you can use Adobe InDesign in your production. Remember that you will need a few copies to circulate. So if digital, print a few. If assembled via photocopy, make sure to make several copies. If you wish to hand draw your zine that is great too, but what you circulate should be a duplicated copy – in other words, photocopy your drawn materials, rather than producing several copies by hand.

Evaluation

You will be evaluated based on completeness (whether your project fulfills the specifications outlined above), as well as coherence, meaning how well integrated are the themes and discussion of DIY electrical experiment, your off-grid experience, and the course concepts that you integrate. You may treat the textual content of your zine as a rough draft of sorts for your final paper (see below) but are not required to do so.

Dates

Assigned: Tuesday, April 6

Rough draft of all textual content due: Friday, April 23, 8pm

All zines must be mailed by: Monday, April 26

In-class presentation & discussion: Tuesday, May 4 and Thursday, May 6

Final paper due: Monday, May 10, 8pm

Textual content [Friday, April 23, 8pm]

Put together a 1-2 page rough draft of all your textual content. This can be in a Word or Google Doc and does not need to have any attention to layout or design. Instead it should draw together a rough draft of all the text that you plan to use.

In-class presentation & discussion [Tuesday, May 4 & Thursday, May 6]

We will have two days of in-class project share & discussion. Create a presentation so that you can share your screen and show the whole class clear images of your zine. Include some slides that share your process, and comments on what you were trying to do with this project. The people who have received hard copies of your zine will initiate the conversation with questions and discussion, and the rest of the class will participate by viewing the images on your screen.

Final paper

Write a 1500-2000 word paper that addresses the following question:

Do off-the-grid practices contribute to, or serve as a model for, a more just world?

Use 3-4 readings from the semester. Keep in mind perspectives of race, class, gender, indigeneity, or ecological concern. Please do not conduct any research outside of our course material. Unlike with the first paper, this does not need to explicitly reflect on the process of the zine project, but you can certainly incorporate evidence from that experience if it serves to bolster your claims.

Submit your work as a Microsoft Word or Google Doc, uploaded into your Google Drive folder. Name your file as "Final paper".