

COM 257: Media History and Theory

Course Description:

Media History and Theory will offer approaches to examining contemporary and historical media. In this course, we will disrupt teleological narratives of media history, approaching our historical work, instead, through an archaeological lens that puts the present media landscape in relation to multiple vectors of the past. We will ask questions, such as: how do we variously define and approach the study of media? how is human agency defined in relation to technological media? how do media structure our perception? how are power relations articulated through media?

Of course, these questions are only starting points. This course invites the inquiries and interests of students. With that said, students are expected to read deeply and participate actively throughout the semester. Media Theory and History is an intellectually challenging course. Students will need to engage the course materials with tenacity and attend class regularly to pass.

Catalog Description:

Historical development and social implications of telecommunications, print, photography, film, broadcasting, and computer-mediated communication. Theoretical and methodological approaches to the field of communication media: media history; media economics and policy; media effects and power; media as producers of meaning; media audiences; media technologies; and roles of the media in social, cultural, and political change.

Course Objectives

- Explain the concept of *media* and the field of *media studies* as spanning across historical moments, technologies, modes, and forms
- Explain an approach to history that is *archeological*; analyze present-day media technologies as selective *accumulations* of past media, networks, genres, practices, and political-economic arrangements.
- Describe media as components of human-technical *assemblages* composed of particular *articulations* and relations that presume and produce specific *historical forms of the human*, specific *historical relations of power and community*, and specific organizations of *space and time*.
- Analyze several key *historical conjunctures* as technological/cultural *assemblages* with particular economic, technical, political, ecological and cultural *problematics*.
- Demonstrate the principles of academic integrity in all assignments, exams, and course work.

Required Texts

You are responsible for reading all texts throughout the course of the semester. The readings will likely be difficult at times. Students should therefore set aside adequate time to *slowly* move through the readings. We will discuss strategies for reading theory, but it is important that students recognize that the assigned texts are not skimmable.

- Various articles and chapters will be linked via Moodle.

Participation and Exercises: 15%

Student participation will be evaluated throughout the semester. Participation entails attending the class, coming prepared having done all the readings, having made an honest attempt at understanding each author's argument, and bringing reading notes and questions you'd like to ask. It also includes participating (and submitting) in-class exercises and quizzes, when asked to do so. In order to get the maximum amount of points for participation, students are expected to:

- Be present and on time to class;
- Contribute to the class with your ideas, comments, and questions;
- Actively participate in the course, answering the instructor's questions and engaging in class discussions.
- Use media and technologies to engage in the class (as opposed to using them to disengage)
- Complete, present, and submit exercises, when asked to do so

The final participation grade will be given according to the following criteria:

- A+ (10) Outstanding participation. Student is well prepared, attentive, and always responds when called upon. Student helps to generate lively class discussion. Student volunteers often with pertinent and thought-provoking answers or questions.
- A (95) Student is prepared, attentive, and responds when called upon. Student volunteers often with pertinent answers or questions. Student almost always completes, presents, and submits exercises when asked to do so.
- B (8.5) Student is usually prepared, responds when called on and volunteers on occasion. Student occasionally does not submit exercises or submits incomplete exercises. Student rarely disengages from the lecture.
- C (7.5) Student shows evidence of being unprepared on occasion, has trouble when called on and does not volunteer often. Student is habitually late to class. Student rarely submits exercises or consistently submits incomplete exercises. Student habitually disengages from the lecture.
- D (6.5) Student is unprepared, inattentive, never volunteers, and/or habitually comes to class late. Student does not
- F (0) Student exhibits a lack of concern for the class, sleeps in class, or disturbs the class (by, for example, using a laptop or phone for purposes other than taking notes in class).

Discussion Leading: 15%

Students will work in groups of three to lead class discussion once during the semester. Students will sign-up to lead discussion during the second week of classes. To serve as discussion leader, the pair or small group must (a) provide a brief summary of the material including quoted material and citations, (b) create at least 3 open-ended discussion questions that *deliberately* engage their classmates (and instructor!) in discussion of the readings for the week, and at least 1 of these discussion questions should include a media artifact (historical media artifacts encouraged, but not required) which helps their classmates to draw connections between the readings and a real-world application of the concepts presented in the readings.

Discussion Leaders are expected to:

1. collectively email their questions and presentation slides (with examples) to the instructor, no later than one week before they are scheduled to lead discussions, ensuring to CC all participants;

2. review instructor feedback (if any is given) and revise questions based on the instructor feedback; AND
3. actively engage the class in conversation. This involves asking the discussion questions, *but also* responding to classmates, offering clarifications of the questions, and providing examples to illustrate the question with the purpose of driving the conversation forward. For instance, if students do not respond, the discussion leaders are expected to jump-in to offer examples or clarification.

Grading Rubric: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BQwU3KyBqsnvQgcdm3-8hz1yLHFX633dPgz55rBn0zk/edit?usp=sharing>

Reading Responses: 15%

For most weeks, students will complete a reading response, demonstrating that they have completed the readings before coming to class. These reading responses serve two purposes. They ensure that students: (1) are ready to participate in class discussion by having completed the readings, and (2) have actively worked to learn the material throughout the semester.

Students are encouraged to make the reading responses of the best quality possible not only because the reading responses are 10% of the student's final grade, but also because the reading responses are the only notes that the student will have available to them on the midterm and final exams.

For each of the reading responses, students are expected to do the following:

- Write a detailed, accurate, and objective summary of the assigned texts for the week, making reference to all texts.
- Properly cite, in-text, any paraphrased or quoted material, using APA format (7th edition)
- Write no more than two pages, using full sentences (~300-600 words).
- Format in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced.
- Include a reference page, formatted using APA format with APA citations (7th edition) – not included in word count.

Reading Responses will be graded as follows:

- (100): Student met all expectations and clearly understood the readings/media
- (50): Student did not meet all expectations or did not clearly understand the readings
- (0): Student did not meet the expectation, did not submit an assignment, submitted the assignment late, or plagiarized

Materializing Media Group Project and Presentation: 20%

Media often hide their mediation, appearing intangible and immaterial. Such properties obfuscate the politics of media, making it difficult to know what effects they have in our lives and in society, more generally.

In this class, students will work in groups of 3-4 to render the materiality of media legible. Students will create media art projects that showcase the materiality of media, and they will present these projects in the final week of class. This project will be developed over the course of the semester, and each

component of the project will receive feedback to inform the final project and presentation. Students will sign-up for groups in Week 3.

Midterm: 15%

The midterm will consist of multiple choice and short-answer questions about the assigned readings and addressed concepts from the weeks 1-8 of the semester. Students will be allowed to use their reading responses as notes. Students will have one class period to complete the exam.

Final: 20%

The final will consist of multiple choice and short-answer questions about the assigned readings and addressed concepts from the full semester. Students will be allowed to use their reading responses as notes. Students will have one class period to complete the exam.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction, Defining Media and Materiality

Day	In-Class	Due
January 6:	Introduction to course syllabus, expectations Lecture/Discussion	Hints on how to read theory: http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~mmurphy/NEW262/how%20to%20read.htm McLuhan, M. (1964/1996). The medium is the message. In: <i>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</i> . Mcgraw-Hill, pp. 1-18. Kittler, F. (1999). Introduction. In: <i>Gramophone, Film, Typewriter</i> . Stanford University Press, pp. 1-20. Reading Response #1 (for McLuhan and Kittler only).
January 8	Lecture/Discussion	

Week 2: Approaches to Media History

Day	In-Class	Due
January 13	Sign up for discussion leaders: Sign-up for groups:	White, H. (1966). The burden of history. In: <i>History and Theory</i> , 5(2), pp. 111-134

	Lecture / Discussion	Gitelman, L. (2006). Media as Historical Subjects. In: Always, Already New. MIT Press, pp. 1-24. Reading Response #2
January 15	Lecture / Discussion	

Week 3: Media Archaeology

Day	In-Class	Due
January 20	no class, university closed	
January 22	Lecture / Discussion	Huhtamo, E. and Parikka, J. (2011). Introduction: An archaeology of media archaeology. In: E. Huhtamo and J. Parikka (Eds.), <i>Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications</i> , University of California Press Farman, J. (2018). Invisible and instantaneous: Geographies of infrastructure. <i>Media Theory</i> , 2(1), pp. 1-22. Reading Response #3

Week 4: Actors and Agency

Day	In-Class	Due
January 27	Lecture / Discussion	Slack, J. and Wise, M. (2014). Agency. In: <i>Culture and Technology: A Primer, 2nd Edition</i> . Peter Lang, pp. 137-148. Teurlings, J. (2013). Unblackboxing production: What media studies can learn from actor network theory. In M. de Valck, & J. Teurlings (Eds.), <i>Television Theory Today</i> . Amsterdam University Press, pp. 101-112 Winner, L. (1998). Do artifacts have politics? <i>The Whale and the Reactor</i> . University of Chicago Press.

		Reading Response #4
January 29	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders:	

Week 5: Assemblages

Day	In-Class	Due
February 3	Lecture / Discussion	Slack, J. and Wise, M. (2014). Articulation and assemblage. In: <i>Culture and Technology: A Primer, 2nd Edition</i> . Peter Lang, pp. 149-164. Hess, A. (2015). The selfie assemblage. <i>International Journal of Communication</i> , 9, pp. 1629-1646. Reading Response #5
February 5	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders:	

Week 6: Surveillance and Control

Day	In-Class	Due
February 10	Lecture / Discussion	Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscripts on Society of Control. <i>October</i> , 59, pp. 3-7. Haggerty, K. and Ericson, R. (2000). The surveillant assemblage. <i>British Journal of Sociology</i> , 51(4), pp. 605–622. Reading Response #6
February 12	Discuss the midterm exam Discussion Leaders: Mapping the surveillant assemblages at NCSU activity	

Week 7: The Public Sphere

Day	In-Class	Due
February 17	Lecture / Discussion	Fuchs, C. (2014). Twitter and democracy: A new public sphere? In: <i>Social Media: A Critical Introduction</i> . Sage Press, pp. 179-209. Gitelman, L. (2006). New media publics. In: <i>Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture</i> . MIT Press. Reading Response #7
February 19	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders:	

Week 8: Counter-publics and Resistance

Day	In-Class	Due
February 24	Lecture / Discussion Tactical Media Art	Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere. <i>Social Text</i> , 25/26, pp. 56-80. Raley, R. (2009). Introduction. In: <i>Tactical Media</i> . University of Minnesota Press, pp. 1-30. Reading Response #8
February 26	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders:	

Week 9: Midterm

Day	In-Class	Due
March 2:	Midterm Preparation	
March 4:	Midterm Exam	

Week 10: Spring Break

Day	In-Class	Due
March 9	no class, enjoy your holiday	
March 11	no class, enjoy your holiday	

Week 11: Bodies Extended

Day	In-Class	Due
March 16	Lecture / Discussion Examining historical media instruments activity	Lupton, D. (1995). The embodied computer user. <i>Body & Society</i> , 1(3-4), pp. 97-112. Crary, J. (1990). Techniques of the observer. In: <i>Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century</i> (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), pp. 97-136. Reading Response #9
March 18	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders:	

Week 12: Affect

Day	In-Class	Due
March 23	Lecture / Discussion	Stewart, K. (2007). <i>Ordinary Affects</i> . Duke University Press (pp. 1-7) And Selections: The politics of the ordinary (p. 15). Learning Affect (p. 40). Mainstream (pp. 51-52). The affective subject (p. 59). Flash mob (p. 67). Bollmer, G. (2018). The question of affect. In: <i>Theorizing Digital Cultures</i> . Sage Press, pp. 170-172. Benjamin, Walter (2008) <i>The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media</i> , ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), pp. 19-55. Reading Response #10
March 25	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders:	

	Writing our own “ordinary affects” experiments	
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Week 13: Media as Infrastructure

Day	In-Class	Due
March 30	Lecture / Discussion	<p>Peters, J. D. Durham Peters, J. (2015). Infrastructuralism: Media as traffic between nature and culture. In: <i>Traffic: Media as Infrastructures and Cultural Practice</i></p> <p>Mattern, S. (2015). Deep time of media infrastructure. In: L. Parks and N. Starosielski (Eds), <i>Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures</i> (pp. 94-112). University of Illinois Press.</p> <p>Reading Response #11</p>
April 1	<p>Discuss final exam</p> <p>Discussion Leaders:</p> <p>Mapping the internet connections activity: How many hops does it take?</p>	

Week 14: Space and Time

Day	In-Class	Due
April 6	Lecture / Discussion	<p>Sharma, S. (2012). It changes space and time: Introducing power-chronography. In: J. Packer and S. Wiley (Eds), <i>Communication Matters: Materialities, Infrastructure, and Flows</i>. Routledge</p> <p>Bollmer, G. (2019). Spaces and times. In: <i>Materialist Media Theory</i>. Bloomsbury Press, pp. 79-118.</p> <p>Reading Response #12</p>
April 8	Lecture / Discussion	

	Discussion Leaders:	
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Week 15: Media Economies and Ecologies

Day	In-Class	Due
April 13	Lecture / Discussion Screening: The Electronic Wasteland. 60 minutes (CBS). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuGSSuGs9jM	Parks, L. (2007). Falling apart: Electronics salvaging and the global media economy. In: C. Acland (Ed), <i>Residual Media</i> , Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 32-47. Maxwell, R. & Miller, T. (2012). Workers and Bureaucrats. In: <i>Greening the Media</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 86-133. Reading Response #13
April 15	Lecture / Discussion Discussion Leaders: Class Evaluation: https://classeval.ncsu.edu	

Week 16: Materializing Media Group Presentations

Day	In-Class	Due
April 20	Group Presentations	
April 22	Group Presentations	

Week 17: Final Exam

Day	In-Class	Due
	Final Exam	N/A