LMC 6316  
HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO DIGITAL MEDIA  
SPRING 2014

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TSRB 318B (office hours by appt)

Description

Examines digital media in the context of earlier media, such as handwriting and printing as well as photography, radio, film, and television.

This seminar will focus on the historical and philosophical aspects of media and technology. In addition to the traditional historical approach to several media forms, we will focus specifically on a number of methods of the material history and analysis of media forms, the evolution of those media forms, and the ways conditions of material accident and influence affect future media.

The course will focus first on several abstract theories of the material history of media and then dive into specific historical media with those perspectives in mind. As such, the course will be very theory-intensive at first, and then settle into more concrete work about specific technologies. Our focus on digital media will be interwoven with earlier "traditional" media, in order to encourage a perspective of material context rather than a historical progress.

By the end of the course, students will be able to discuss and use several influential theories of media, and to put them to use in the historical, cultural, and material analysis of media—not to mention as inspiration and influence for media design no matter the material.

Learning Outcomes

MS in Digital Media
1. Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate existing digital media artifacts, services, and environments using formal knowledge, and to explain and defend one's critical evaluation.
2. Analysis: Can analyze digital media as cultural objects
3. Evaluation: Can summarize their work orally and in written form using formal terminology

PhD in Digital Media
1. Students have knowledge, comprehension and ability to apply historical, cultural, and theoretical concepts to the study of digital media.
2. Knowledge: Identify the historical and cultural roots of digital media
3. Knowledge: Identify the major theoretical traditions contributing to scholarly discourse about digital media
4. Comprehension: Discuss and distinguish among historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts for digital media
5. Application: Apply theoretical concepts to specific digital media works

Requirements
This is a seminar course. That means students will be expected to thoroughly read a lot (seriously, a lot) of material each week, to discuss that material in class, and to prepare responses to this material that will extend their individual goals.

In addition to attendance, reading, and discussion, students will be required to write and present weekly material, including but not limited to short and longer formal essays, formal and informal presentations elaborating on specific media forms or objects, drawing from the approaches covered in the readings. Each student will be expected to complete two high quality written assignments that service their own research agenda while engaging with the theories in the readings. The nature of these materials may vary from student to student as needed to allow the assignment to dovetail with student research goals, however, the default assumption is that they will take the form of short-to-medium length critical essays (2-3k words).

Students may choose topics that suit their own interests, and they may choose very related subjects forming a cohesive whole, or totally different ones for variety, or even takes on different aspects of a single medium. To encourage early and frequent work on these essays, and to help students refine them into writing that is good, not just complete, students will be required to begin writing immediately and to share, critique, and review that work on a weekly basis. While we won’t end up pursuing critique every week, we will devote a portion of most week’s meetings to conducing this process, and a portion of the first week to determining those goals and sharing them.

50% of the final grade: attendance and participation
50% of the final grade: written assignments

Required Texts
These books are available at the Engineers Bookstore or via your favorite bookseller. Please note that the Maher book will be published later this spring and thus will not be available immediately.

1. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford)
2. Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media* (Polity)
5. Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford)
6. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Gingko, or others)
11. Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology* (Polity)
Schedule

(The following schedule is tentative and subject to change)

Week 1 - January 7/9
*Introductions - Goals - Etc.*

Week 2 - January 14/16
*Media Ecology I*
McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

Week 3 - January 21/23
*German Media Theory*
Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*

Week 4 - January 28/30
(No class meeting January 28)
*Media Ecology II*
McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*

Week 5 - February 4/6
(No class meeting Feb 6)
*Science Studies*
Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*

Week 6 - February 11/13
*Media Archaeology*
Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology*

Week 7 - February 18/20
*Beyond Science Studies*
Latour, *Enquiry into Modes of Existence*

Week 8 - February 25/27
*Beyond Science Studies*
Latour, *Enquiry into Modes of Existence*

Week 9 - March 4/6
*No class meeting*

Week 10 - March 11/13
*Systems Theory*
Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*

Week 11 - March 18/20
*Spring Break*
Week 12 - March 25/27  
*Videogames*  
Montfort and Bogost, *Racing the Beam*

Week 13 - April 1/3  
*NOTE: This week’s class may be rescheduled*  
*The Book*  
Mak, *How the Page Matters*  
Manguel, “Shape of the Book” from *The History of Reading* (handout)

Week 14 - April 8/10  
*Film and Animation*  
Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*

Week 15 - April 15/17  
*Visual Media*  
Kittler, *Optical Media*

Week 16 - April 22/24  
*The Microcomputer*  
Maher, *The Future Was Here*  
Kittler, "There is No Software" from *Literature, Media, Information Systems* (handout)

**ADAPTS Information**

Notify the instructor in the beginning of the course if you have any disabilities that might need special assistance or consideration. Georgia Tech offers accommodations to students with genuine and documented disabilities. If you need such accommodations, please make an appointment with the ADAPTS office. Verification of a disability may be obtained by contacting the ADAPTS-Disability Services Program, 404-894-2563.  
[http://www.adapts.gatech.edu](http://www.adapts.gatech.edu)

**Honor Code:**

Any material in a paper not composed by the author, or borrowed without attribution, will be considered plagiarized. Plagiarism is a serious offence and will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code. When in doubt, use quotation marks and cite sources. Sanctions for plagiarism can include receiving a failing grade in the course or, in serious cases, expulsion from the university.

Use of any previous semester course materials, such as tests, quizzes, homework, projects, and any other coursework, is prohibited in this course.

For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult [www.honor.gatech.edu](http://www.honor.gatech.edu).