

LMC 6316 • Historical Approaches to Digital Media • Fall 2017

Class Meetings: T/Th 12:00-1:15pm Skiles 002

Professor Gregory Zinman: gzinman3@gatech.edu

Office Hours: Skiles 324, T/Th, 1:30-2:30pm and by appointment

Class blog: <http://blogs.iac.gatech.edu/histdm2017/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do we understand, and write about, our media past? What are the differences between a history of technology, and a technology of history? This course examines historical connections between digital media and earlier media through the historical examination of the moving image. The course will therefore explore the historical and material relationships between various forms of the moving image, including cinema, television, video art, the moving image online, videogames, and virtual reality. Students will consider concepts such as the relationship between analog and digital moving image technologies, the putative “death of cinema,” Bazin’s “Myth of Total Cinema,” and the shifting sites of production, distribution, and reception of the moving image. By establishing a comparative approach to the moving image’s past and present, students will learn to consider the historical, social, and institutional forces that have engendered myriad forms of the moving image, discover the roots of our contemporary mediascape, and gain a greater understanding of the moving image’s place in culture and society. These relationships will be further addressed through the combination of close readings of media forms and artifacts with conceptual rubrics such as failure, obsolescence, mediatic death, glitch, intermedia, multimedia, remediation, medium specificity, and technological determinism. By the end of the course, students will be able to discuss and use several historiographic modes and 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 histories, artifacts, and environments using formal knowledge, and to explain and defend one’s critical evaluation.
2. Analysis: Can analyze digital media as historical and 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 concepts to the study of digital media.
2. Knowledge: Identify the historical and cultural roots of digital media through the study of the moving image.
3. Knowledge: Identify the major historical concepts contributing to scholarly discourse about the moving image and digital media.
4. Comprehension: Discuss and distinguish among historical contexts for the moving image and digital media.

READING

Required course texts are available from the [GaTech Barnes & Noble](#) and via your favorite online book seller.

Steve F. Anderson, *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricities of the Past* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2011).

Ian Bogost, *How to Talk About Videogames* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

Noam Elkott, *Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (The MIT Press, 2013).

Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wurtz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Zabet Patterson, *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art* (The MIT Press, 2015).

J.P. Telotte, *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* (Illinois, 2008).

Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

All other readings will be available as .pdf files or web links on the SYLLABUS page of the class blog.

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance

You are allowed three absences. Beginning with the fourth absence, your overall course grade will be lowered by a full letter grade (e.g. A to B) for each unexcused absence. This means that if you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course.

Please be respectful to your fellow students and arrive on time. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, you will be considered absent for that class. If you absolutely must miss a class meeting, please contact me at least 24 hours in advance in order to make alternate arrangements.

All written work must be handed in/posted on time except in the case of serious illness, medical emergency, or some other compelling mitigating circumstance. Should you submit an assignment after the due date, your grade for that assignment will decrease by a full letter grade for each day that it is late. Should you fail to submit an assignment entirely, you will receive an F on that assignment and, consequently, you will receive a lower grade for the course.

Participation

This course is designed as a seminar in which active participation from all students is necessary; the benefits of this class come from talking as much as listening. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in depth, and to devote engaged attention to classmates' contributions. "Participation" means: thoughtful contributions to the discussions in the classroom. You do not have to talk all of the time in class (nor should you), but you absolutely must speak up on a regular basis in order to receive an excellent participation grade. This goes for your participation online as well. Be a good colleague and engage with your fellow students—the idea is to learn from one another.

A large portion of your grade will be determined by your in-class participation and I encourage you to bring questions to class about the readings and screenings. Bring the week's readings to class with you. These will be discussed with respect and consideration by all members of the class. I want to be sure that this class is a space where everyone is comfortable when articulating concerns, struggles, and opinions without feeling bashful or under threat.

Reading Responses

- This is a seminar course. That means students will be expected to thoroughly read a lot of material each week. Every week, you will write a reading response of 500-750 words that you will post to the class blog by 5pm on Monday. Each entry must: (1) demonstrate having done the reading, (2) note particular topics and questions that you would like to discuss in class.

- **SIGN YOUR NAME AT THE END OF YOUR POST**
(you do not have to sign your name when commenting—it will be done automatically)

- REMEMBER TO **TAG AND CATEGORIZE** (Week) YOUR POSTS.

- Cite authors/page numbers where appropriate.

Questions to ask yourself as you are preparing your weekly written response:

1. What are some running themes or recurring concerns in these pieces?
2. What is the central argument?
3. How is that argument constructed? What is the methodology/approach to history employed?
4. Who/what is cited frequently—books, people, presses, and journals?
5. What historical or theoretical models do these authors find useful? What are the gaps in your own historical or theoretical training that you need to fill in order to read this work better?
6. What patterns, if any, do you notice? Where might you make an intervention?
7. Which authors and texts seem to be most central to a media studies canon?

8. What kinds of rhetorical *moves* do you notice these authors making? Do these moves change over time?
 9. Are there particular passages that stand out to you? Can you offer a reading of one or more of these passages?
 10. Can you articulate questions for further class discussion?
 11. Can you offer an application of the reading to current Digital Media projects/objects, whether they're yours or someone else's? (Provide links if/when applicable).
- Remember the **“three yeses,”** an approach to reading that comes from literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak. The idea is that a proper critique consists in saying yes to the text three times. The first yes is to reading the text carefully and in full; the second yes is to reconstructing the argument on its own terms (without criticizing it for what you think it doesn't do, or what it silences, or what you think it is wrong about); the third yes is the hardest, and it is to taking the argument, on its own terms, as far as you can go with it, considering what it can do and what you can do with it (again, before and without attacking it for what it can't do). Spivak says that only after you have said yes to the text these three times, can you say a properly critical no to it, which is to say only then can you fully and rigorously elaborate the text's limits.
 - In addition, **you must post one comment of 150-300 words** on a fellow student's post by 5pm on Wednesday.

Presentations

Over the course of the semester, each student will be responsible for two presentations of the weekly readings. A signup sheet will circulate the first week of the course to determine the schedule of student presentations. Guidelines for presentations can be found on the PRESENTATIONS page of the class blog.

Final Writing Projects

You will complete a high-quality written assignment (approximately 2-4k words) that both incorporates the ideas of the class and extends your individual goals. Ideally, this assignment will result in a publishable work—a book review relevant to your research, a critical essay for a academic journal, a piece for a popular print or online outlet (e.g. *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, *The New Yorker*, etc.), or a statement to accompany a project.

We will devote time in class to developing, critiquing, and revising these works. The idea is to produce a smart and highly-polished piece of writing that can aid in your professional development. Expect to articulate your goals for this project by the third week of class, and to begin outlining/researching/developing the project shortly thereafter.

Grading

Your grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

- Participation: 20%
- Weekly reading responses: 30%
- Presentations: 20%
- Final essay/project: 30%

A note on technology

Please silence your phone. Please do not text, IM, tweet, read the internet or play games during the seminar.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Violations of academic integrity will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty is not allowed in any form. Plagiarism (quoting, presenting, or paraphrasing someone else's ideas as if they were your own without appropriate footnote and bibliographic citation) is a serious academic offense and will result in a grade of F. Do not submit material found on websites or from online sources as your own – you *will* receive an F. Discussing and sharing your ideas with your classmates, peers, friends, etc. (live or online) is highly recommended; the work you turn in, however, must be of your own creation. If you do not know how to properly cite sources in an academic paper, speak with your professor and/or a college librarian. In addition, any identified case of academic dishonesty will immediately be reported to the University.

For more information, please refer to the definition of “academic misconduct” included in the Georgia Tech honor code, available online at:
<http://www.honor.gatech.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities should self-report to the Office of Disability Services:

355 Ferst Dr.

Phone: 404-894-2563

Email: adapts@vpss.gatech.edu

SYLLABUS

Week 1 (August 22+24): Introduction

Andre Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," *What is Cinema*, 2 Volumes, trans/ed. Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 23-27.

Kevin Kelly, "The Untold Story of Magic Leap, the World's Most Secretive Startup," *WIRED*, April 2016.

Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940).

Charles Musser, "Toward a History of Screen Practice," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* Vol. 9, Iss. 1 (1984): 59-69.

Week 2 (August 29+31): The Digital's Ever-Present Past

Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

Week 3 (September 5+7): Media Archaeology

Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

Week 4 (September 12+14): Technologies of History

Steve F. Anderson, *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricities of the Past* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2011).

Week 5 (September 19+21): Light and Dark

Noam Elkott, *Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle*, Vol. 8, nos. 3 & 4 (Fall 1986).

Week 6 (September 26+28): The Moving Image and Data

Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wurtz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Week 7 (October 3+5): The Moving Image and Style

David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

Week 8 (October 12): Animation

NO CLASS MEETING ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10—FALL BREAK

J.P. Telotte, *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* (Champaign, IL; University of Illinois Press, 2008).

Week 9 (October 17+19): Expanded Cinema and Media Environments

Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1970).

Week 10 (October 24+26): The Moving Image and Computers

Lev Manovich, “What is Cinema?” in *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 244-276.

Zabet Patterson, *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015). [Chapters 4 + 5]

Lisa Nakamura, “Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (December 2014): 919-941.

Week 11 (October 31+November 2): Videogames as Moving Images

Ian Bogost, *How to Talk About Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Week 12 (November 7+9): Moving Image Networks

Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Week 13 (November 14+16): Cyberculture

Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Week 14 (November 21):

NO CLASS THIS WEEK—THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15 (November 28+30): The Moving Image Online

Rosa Menkman, “Glitch Studies Manifesto” in *Vortex Video Reader II: Moving Images Beyond YouTube*, ed. Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011).

Gregory Zinman, “ICYMI: The Moving Image Online” in *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, ed. Jentery Sayers (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter, *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015). [excerpts]

Week 16 (December 5): Final paper/project workshop

The final paper is due on **Tuesday, December 12**, by noon, via email to Professor Zinman.