

Media Technology Theory
Communication 384/Art History 465
Winter, 2013
Wednesdays, 2:15-5:05
Building 120, Room 314

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Goals:

This course aims to introduce and compare key theories of media and media technology that have emerged in the fields of communication and the history of art. We hope to help you develop your own answers to such questions as, What should we study when we study media? And, How should we think about technology when we're thinking about art and communication? The course is a reading course, and in that sense will demand that you develop a rich fluency in the literatures we take up. In particular, you will develop an appreciation for the differences between humanistic and social scientific approaches to media, and for the distinctions between theory, analysis and description in otherwise empirical scholarship. Finally, we hope to help you imagine applying a variety of new theoretical lenses to your own empirical research questions.

Assignments & Grading:

The assignments in this course aim to get you to do two things simultaneously: think hard about the readings we're doing and practice applying their approaches to areas of your own concern. Thus, you will have several sorts of writing assignments.

Individual Assignment: Imitation and Synthesis:

1. Proposal

At the start of class in Week 2 (January 15) you will need to submit a proposed topic for research in this class in a 1-2 page paper. The paper will feature a one-paragraph description of what you intend to research, and a list of places you might look for primary source materials that match the kinds of materials we'll be thinking about in our course readings. Please also list 5 secondary source you can consult, ideally other scholars in your field or a related field, who have written about your topic.

Note: This is **not** a provisional commitment. Once we've approved your topic (and we may ask you to modify it), you are committed to it for the entire quarter, though you can take it anywhere you like.

Your topic should be broad enough to keep you interested for 10 weeks and narrow enough to actually yield something like a conference paper or journal article.

Your topic **does not have to be completely original**. You can definitely research something that's already been researched. Don't worry about trying to be too original at this point.

Your topic **may not be your dissertation topic**. Choose something similar, related, allied, or completely different, so long as you're comfortable with the topic and it interests you. This will let you experiment more with your writing and free you from a certain amount of ego-investment in the topic.

2. Dossier

Each week by 5 PM on Tuesday, you will acquire at least one artifact or document related to your research topic AND related somehow to that week's reading assignment. If your object isn't digital, you'll need to find a way to represent it digitally and post it to our Coursework site (more on that in class).

You're welcome to gather more than one thing, but you need to keep at it weekly. If you gather a lot in one week, we'll still expect another new thing the next.

3. Bi-weekly Imitation Papers

You'll notice that the course covers four discreet bodies of literature, in two-week blocks. You'll need to write one brief (500-800 word) paper for each block. The paper will make use of one document or artifact you acquired during the two-week period. You may also refer to material from previous weeks, but your discussion must focus on a single artifact from the two-week block in question.

The paper must be written in the style of one of the authors and texts we have read for that block. Choose a single aspect of a single work and do your best to imitate it. Your job is to try to occupy the same analytical or stylistic space as the article or book, but with your own material. What you choose to mean by "style" is up to you. Is there something about the author's prose style that is relevant? Their analytical approach or theoretical commitments? The types of source materials they use?

Papers are due in class on the following dates: January 29, February 12, February 26, March 12.

4. Final Synthesis

By this point, you will have produced 12-15 pages of text, in a variety of styles. For this project, you will revise and synthesize those pieces and turn them into a single paper, with a coherent argumentative arc and style. *This is strictly an exercise in writing and revision. Please do no new research.*

You may produce one of the two following formats:

- a) a paper of 1800-2000 words excluding footnotes and bibliography, suitable for presentation at a conference;
- b) a paper of 7000-9000 words including endnotes and bibliography in a format that could be submitted to a journal.

The paper will be due Friday, March 21.

Grading:

4 short papers = 60% (15% each)

Final synthesis = 20%

Class participation, including proposal = 20%

Required Books & Other Materials:

Materials:

You will need a box, ideally something like a portable plastic file box, in which to keep and submit the materials you gather for your dossier.

Please buy the following online or better yet, through your local bookstore:

Adorno, Theodor, *The Culture Industry*, London: Routledge Press, 1991

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Parikka, Jussi. *What Is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012.

Sterne, Jonathan. *Mp3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.

Kahn, Douglas. *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013.

Course Schedule:

Week 1— January 8: Introduction: What are “media”? And what do they have to do with “technology”?

Readings:

Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*

Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," and "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Ed. William Levitt (New York: Harper Torch Books): 1977

Heidegger, "The Thing" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Collins): 2001

Week 2 – January 15: The Medium, Part 1: Art media as communication and sensorium

Readings:

G.E. Lessing, from *Laocoon: an Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*

Michael Fried, from *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Chicago, 1988 (chapters tbd)

David Wellbery, from *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (chapters tbd)

Week 3 – January 22: The Medium, Part 2: Towards the post-medium condition

Required:

Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon" in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*; "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" in *Art and Culture: "Modernist Painting," in The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4* (ed. O'Brien), 1993 (all available online as pdfs)

Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia" (1966, available pdf, Something Else Press)

Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," *October*, V. 25, Winter 2001

Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004)

Week 4 – January 29: Media Technologies and their Politics: Frankfurt School Part 1

DUE: Imitation Paper 1

Required:

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, Second Version," (1936) in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, 1935-38. Ed. Eiland and Jennings

Theodor Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," (1928) trans. T. Levin, OCTOBER 55, Winter 1990

Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," (1938) in Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (Routledge: London, 1991): 1-29

Recommended:

Benjamin, "The Author's Producer," (1934) in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol 2: Part 2, 1931-34* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press):

Week 5 – February 5: Frankfurt School Part 2

Readings:

Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Concept of Enlightenment," and "The Culture Industry: Or Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007)

Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," and "How to Look at Television," in *The Culture Industry* (Routledge: London, 1991):

Week 6 – February 12: Media Archaeology, Part 1

DUE: Imitation Paper 2

Required:

Parikka, Jussi. *What Is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012.

Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006, pp. 1-87 (e.g., Intro., Ch. 1, Ch. 2).

Recommended:

Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Writing Science. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Zielinski, Siegfried. *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006.

Week 7 – February 19: Media Archaeology, Part 2

Required:

Sterne, Jonathan. *Mp3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Mullaney, Thomas. "The Moveable Typewriter: How Chinese Typists Developed Predictive Text During the Height of Maoism." *Technology and Culture* 53, no. 4 (2012): 777-814.

Recommended:

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

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011.

Week 8 – February 26: Approaches from STS: Actor Network Theory

DUE: Imitation Paper 3

Required:

Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Callon, Michel (1986) "Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay." In Biagioli, Mario. *The Science Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 67-83.

Latour, Bruno (1983) "Give Me a Laboratory and I Will Raise the World." In Biagioli, Mario. *The Science Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 258-275.

Recommended:

Latour, Bruno. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Suchman, Lucille Alice. *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Bijker, Wiebe E. *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change*. Inside Technology. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995.

Bijker, Wiebe E., Thomas Parke Hughes, and T. J. Pinch. *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987.

Week 9 – March 5: Approaches from STS: Media as Infrastructure

Required:

Star, Susan Leigh. "Introduction: The Sociology of Science and Technology." *Social Problems* 35, no. 3 (1988): 197-205.

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.

Knorr Cetina, Karen. "From Pipes to Scopes: The Flow Architecture of Financial Markets." *Distinktion*, no. 7 (2003): 7-23.

Recommended:

Bowker, Geoffrey C. *Memory Practices in the Sciences*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005.

Colomina, Beatriz, Annmarie Brennan, and Jeannie Kim. *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.

Turner, Fred. *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Week 10 – March 12: Some Future Directions: Ecocriticism, Platform Studies, Art as Interactivity

DUE: Imitation Paper 4

Required:

Kahn, Douglas. *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013 (chapters TBD).

Steven J. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society*, eds. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski and Kirsten Foot. MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 2013.

Nicolas Bourriaud, from *Relational Aesthetics*. La Press du Reel: Paris, 1998

Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *OCTOBER* Fall 2004, No 110: 51-79

Recommended:

D. Fox Harrell, *Phantasmal Media: An Approach to Imagination, Computation, and Expression* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013.

Gillespie, Tarleton. "The 'Politics' of Platforms," *New Media and Society* 12 (2010), 347-64.

Maxwell, Richard, and Toby Miller. *Greening the Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Matt Ratto, "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life." *The Information Society* 27, no. 4 (2011): 252-60.

Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski and Kirsten Foot, eds. *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013.

Final synthesis paper due by noon, Friday, March 21.