

German Media Theory (Spring 2022)

GERMAN 144/344, FILMEDIA 270/470: German Media Theory

Seminar:

Mon/Wed 1:30pm–3:00pm

Room: McMurtry 350

Prof. Shane Denson

Office: McMurtry 318

Office Hours: TBD

shane.denson@stanford.edu

Course Description:

In this seminar, we will interrogate major currents in media-theoretical work from the German-speaking world from the 1980s to today. Starting from the surprisingly controversial term "German media theory" itself—which has been described as "neither a theory nor really centered on media, [while] its Germanness is a contested issue"—we will consider the characteristics that nevertheless make this a recognizable, if internally heterogeneous, category for thinking about media, mediation, and culture. We will pay special attention to the foundational work of Friedrich Kittler, which ranges across literature, film, philosophy, and computers, before turning to the current differentiation into a technology-focused "media archaeology" (Wolfgang Ernst) and the differently inflected formation of "cultural techniques" (Bernhard Siegert), as well as recent articulations of "media philosophy" and other developments in contemporary theory. We will also examine the often absent and/or fraught role of gender, race, and class in this field, as well as attempts to address these issues by such theorists as Ute Holl, Cornelia Vissman, Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, Annette Bitsch, and Sybille Krämer.

Readings will be in English translation. Knowledge of German is therefore not required, but readers of German will find plenty of research opportunities among the many as yet untranslated texts that make up the field of German media theory.

Please make sure you are registered for the class on Canvas. Handouts and additional course material will be posted there.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular attendance and preparation for class. Irregular attendance will negatively affect your final grade. Active participation will help improve your final grade. Readings are to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.
2. Selection of, and exploratory commentary on, passages of interest in the readings. For each class session, identify a particular passage that you deem worthy of discussing, unpacking, or exploring—perhaps because of its central importance to the text, or because of its ambiguity, a question about its translation, or because it opens up fruitful avenues and connections with other texts, objects, or discourses. Commentaries can be explicative, interrogative, or comparative in nature. Passages and short (ca. 100–200 words) should be uploaded prior to class, and we will draw on them in our discussions.
3. Final written project (details below).

Grading:

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

15% Class participation and preparation

45% Exploratory commentaries on the readings

40% Final Paper

Final Assignment:

Term papers (8–10 pages for 3 credits, 10–12 pages for 4 credits, 12–15 pages for 5 credits) are to be submitted by **Tuesday, June 7, 2022 (no later than 3:15pm)**. As a prerequisite for the final paper, a 1–2 page proposal will be due in class on **April 25, 2022**. In your proposal, you should outline the focus or object of your analysis, explain the specific method(s) of analysis, state your reasons for choosing this approach to the topic, and formulate a tentative thesis statement. The final paper should be written in a scholarly format, with a complete bibliography, and should consist of the following:

1. A brief introduction outlining your topic and stating – as clearly and precisely as possible – the thesis of your paper. This section should usually be no more than one paragraph long.
2. A short description of the theoretical positions to be controverted and/or artworks, films, media, and other object(s) of your analysis. Here you should provide any essential background that might be needed for the reader to understand your analysis. You should assume an educated reader, who is familiar with theoretical humanities scholarship but perhaps has not read the books or engaged with the media being discussed in your paper. Make sure that the reader has enough context to understand the more detailed analysis and argumentation that follows, but without getting bogged down in unnecessary detail. Overall, in this section you must find the right balance, which you can do by considering whether each detail is truly relevant and informative with respect to your argument. Anthropologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson defined information as "a difference which makes a difference," and you can use this formula as a test for determining which details truly belong in this section. If, for example, providing a plot summary for a film or details about production costs and box-office revenues will make a difference with respect to your thesis (i.e. if a reader needs to know these things in order to process your argument), then this is clearly relevant and belongs in this section; on the other hand, if it doesn't make a difference to your argument, then it probably doesn't belong here. This section should usually be no more than 2–3 paragraphs long.
3. An in-depth engagement with the texts and media objects under consideration. Your analysis should be interpretive and argumentative in nature. For example, in analyzing a film it is not enough simply to describe what you see on screen; you need also to persuade the reader that this is important, and that it has certain implications that may not be obvious at first glance. (If something is overly obvious, then it's probably not very informative and certainly not worth arguing.) You are not just describing things but providing a "reading" of them. Keep in mind that the analysis you provide in this section constitutes the main support for your thesis statement. Your analysis is the argumentation that you offer to back up your thesis, while the thesis statement should be seen as the logical conclusion of your argument/analysis. In other words, while you have already told the reader what your thesis statement is (in the introduction), it is through your analysis that you must now prove that your thesis is correct or plausible. Ideally, after reading the analysis in this section, the reader should see your thesis statement as the logical outcome. Keeping this in mind as the test of success, you again need to ensure that your analysis is relevant and informative with respect to your thesis statement (if it doesn't make a difference with regard to your thesis, then it can hardly prove it). In addition, you need to make sure that your analysis/argument proves your thesis *sufficiently*. This is a question of the scope of your thesis, and of your ability to prove it through your interpretive analysis. Have you claimed too much in your thesis? Not enough? Ideally, there should be a perfect match between what you claim in your thesis and what your analysis actually demonstrates. When writing this section, you may find that you have to adjust your thesis (and re-write your introduction accordingly) or look for stronger arguments to support it. This should be the longest section of your paper.
4. A brief conclusion. Try not to be too mechanical in summarizing and repeating what you've written, but do make sure that the conclusion demonstrates the paper's overall relevance and coherence. For example, you might return to a detail mentioned in the introduction and use it to highlight the significance of your argument: maybe the detail seemed rather unimportant before but has a very different meaning in the light of your analysis or interpretation. Foregrounding the transformative effect of your argument (i.e. the fact that it

German Media Theory (Spring 2022)

makes us see things differently) is a good way to demonstrate the overall importance of your paper, and the device of returning in the end to something mentioned at the beginning is an effective way of giving your paper closure. Obviously, though, it is not the only way to approach the conclusion. You might also demonstrate the relevance of your argument by opening up the scope even farther and considering the questions that your thesis raises for other areas of inquiry. Does your analysis suggest alternative readings for other theoretical texts and/or other media objects? Does it suggest the need to re-think various assumptions about media, about a given medium, or about some other aspect of media inquiry? However you decide to approach it, the point of the conclusion, generally speaking, is to take a step back from arguing for your thesis (you are supposed to be finished doing that by now) and to reflect, on a quasi meta-level, about the overall significance of your argument/thesis. This section should normally be only one or two paragraphs in length.

5. A full list of works cited, according to MLA or other established style.

Students with Documented Disabilities:

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://oae.stanford.edu>).

Course Schedule:

Week 1

03.28. Introduction(s)

03.30. What is "German Media Theory"?

Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "The Kittler Effect."

Claus Pias, "What's German about German Media Theory?"

Eva Horn, "There Are No Media."

Week 2

04.04. German Media Theory before "German Media Theory" I

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility."

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."

04.06. German Media Theory before "German Media Theory" II

Martin Heidegger, "The Worldhood of the World" (from *Being and Time*).

Martin Heidegger, "The Thing."

Week 3

04.11. Epistemes and A Prioris

Michel Foucault, "Discursive Formations" and "The Historical A Priori and the Archive" (in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*).

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

German Media Theory (Spring 2022)

Friedrich Kittler, "Introduction" to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.

04.13. Gramophone

Friedrich Kittler, "Gramophone" (in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*).

Week 4

04.18. Film

Friedrich Kittler, "Film" (in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*).

04.20. Typewriter

Friedrich Kittler, "Typewriter" (in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*).

Week 5

04.25. Kittler and the Computer (Proposals Due!)

Friedrich Kittler, "Protected Mode" (in *The Truth of the Technological World*).

Friedrich Kittler, "There Is No Software" (in *The Truth of the Technological World*).

04.27. Kittler in the New Millennium

Friedrich Kittler, "In the Wake of the Odyssey" (in *The Truth of the Technological World*).

Friedrich Kittler, "Heidegger, Media, and the Gods" (in *The Truth of the Technological World*).

Claudia Breger, "Kittler's Philhellenic Fantasies."

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Mythographer of Paradoxes: How Friedrich Kittler's Legacy Matters."

Friedrich Kittler, "Farewell to Sophienstraße."

Week 6

05.02. Cultural Techniques I

Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "After Kittler: On the Cultural Techniques of Recent German Media Theory."

Bernhard Siegert, Selections from *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*.

05.04. Cultural Techniques II

Cornelia Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty."

Cornelia Vismann, "Out of File, Out of Mind."

Mark B. N. Hansen, "The Ontology of Media Operations, or, Where is the Technics in Cultural Techniques?"

Week 7

05.09. Time-Critical Media Archaeology

Wolfgang Ernst, Selections from *Chronopoetics: The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*.

05.11. Cinema, Trance, and Cybernetics I

Ute Holl, *Cinema, Trance, and Cybernetics*, Parts I and II (pp. 19-157).

German Media Theory (Spring 2022)

Week 8

05.16. Cinema, Trance, and Cybernetics II

Ute Holl, *Cinema, Trance, and Cybernetics*, Parts III-V (pp. 161-284).

05.18. Towards Media Philosophy: Sybille Krämer I

Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy* (pp. 19-86).

Week 9

05.23. Towards Media Philosophy: Sybille Krämer II

Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy* (pp. 87-164).

05.25. Towards Media Philosophy: Sybille Krämer III

Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy* (pp. 165-220).

Week 10

05.30. Memorial Day/No Class!

06.01. Media-Philosophical Horizons

Eva Horn, "Air as Medium."

Lorenz Engell, "Apollo TV: The Copernican Turn of the Gaze."

Shane Denson, "On the Originary Mediality of the Flesh."

* * * * *

06.07. Final Papers Due! (by 3:15pm)