

Media Technology Theory  
Communication 384/Art History 465  
Film & Media Studies 465A  
Spring, 2020  
Wednesdays, 3:00-5:50  
McClatchy Hall 314

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**Goals:**

This course aims to introduce and compare key theories of media and media technology. 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 film, communication, and the arts? The course is a reading seminar, 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 (April 8) 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 sources you can consult, ideally other scholars in your field or a related field, who have written about your topic. Good topics tend to have a strong empirical base (e.g., works of art or film, events, objects, archives) and to have had at least a little scholarly attention already.

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. Bi-weekly Imitation Papers

You'll notice that the course covers four discrete bodies of literature, in two-week blocks. You'll need to write one brief (500-800 word) paper for each block. The paper will focus on some element of or object related to the topic you chose in Week 2.

*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: April 22, May 6, May 20, June 3.

## 3. 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 should aim to produce a paper of 1800-2000 words excluding footnotes and bibliography, suitable for presentation at a conference.

The paper will be due Friday, June 10.

### Grading:

4 short papers = 60% (15% each)

Final synthesis = 20%

Class participation, including proposal = 20%

### **Readings:**

Articles will be available as PDFs on Canvas.

***Please buy the following books online or better yet, through your local bookstore. Please be careful to get these editions; otherwise, it will be difficult to point to the same pages during class.***

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.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.

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

Ihde, Don. *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990.

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

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— April 1: Introduction: What are “media”? And what do they have to do with “technology”?**

### **Readings:**

Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*

Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." *Socialist Review*.80 (1985): 65-107.

Hansen, Mark B. N. "Media Theory." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23.2-3 (May 2006): 297-306.

**Week 2 – April 8:** Media Technologies and their Politics: Frankfurt School Part 1

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

**Week 3 – April 15:** Frankfurt School Part 2

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 4 – April 22:** Media Archaeology – Foucault, Kittler, etc. – Part 1

**DUE: Imitation Paper 1**

Foucault, Michel. "Discursive formations" and "The historical *a priori* and the archive," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books, 2010 [1972].

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.

**Week 5 – April 29:** Media Archaeology, Part 2

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

Enns, Anthony. "Media History versus Media Archeology: German Media Theory and Wolfgang Ernst's *Chronopoetics*." Foreword to Wolfgang Ernst, *Chronopoetics: The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*. London & New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

Ernst, Wolfgang. "A Close Reading of the Electronic 'Time Image.'" In: *Chronopoetics: The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*. London & New York:

Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 123-171.

**Week 6 – May 6:** Media Philosophy: Phenomenology, Part 1

**DUE: Imitation Paper 2**

Ihde, Don. *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990.

Heidegger, Martin. "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, Martin. "The Thing." In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.

**Week 7 – May 13:** Media Philosophy: Phenomenology, Part 2

Sobchack, Vivian. "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic 'Presence,'" in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Film*, eds. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda. Falmer, UK: REFRAME Books, 2016.

Sobchack, Vivian. "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving-Image Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Stiegler, Bernard. "Introduction," "Cinematic Time," and "Cinematic Consciousness," in *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

**Week 8 – May 20:** Approaches from STS: Actor Network Theory

**DUE: Imitation Paper 3**

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.

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

**Week 9 – May 27:** Approaches from STS: Media as Infrastructure

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.

**Week 10 – June 3:** Some Future Directions: Ecocriticism and New Materialism

**DUE: Imitation Paper 4**

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

Peters, John Durham. *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015 (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.

**Final synthesis paper due by noon, Friday, June 10.**