

Introduction to Media Theory and Technology Studies (Syllabus Sketch)

Instructor: David Rambo

This course introduces undergraduates to the study and theory of technologies as they pertain to human experience, social organization, cultural practice, epistemology, and political economy. After introducing some of the canonical texts, approaches, and definitions in media studies, the course presents a series of units that pair so-called “old” and “new” media forms under a common theme. The rationale for this organization is threefold. First, it provides a survey of media-theoretical methods for studying technology in the humanities. Second, it foregrounds the material specificity of different media apparatuses so as to highlight the distinctions they instantiate in history, economics, human experience, community formation, and reason. Third, the course concludes by considering whether these epoch-defining distinctions nonetheless present some common technological characteristics.

Readings will likely include selections from the following:

Media

W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, “Introduction,” *Critical Terms for Media Studies*.

Marshall McLuhan, Part 1 of *Understanding Media*.

Raymond Williams, “From Medium to Social Practice,” in *Marxism and Literature* (pp.158-164).

Friedrich Kittler, “Preface” and “Introduction,” *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, translated, with an introduction, by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Stanford UP 1999 (orig. 1986), pp.xxxix-xli, 1-19.

Henry Jenkins, “Introduction: ‘Worship at the Altar of Convergence’: A New Paradigm for Understanding Media Change,” in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, NYU Press 2006, pp.1-24.

Wolfgang Ernst, “Media Archaeography: Method and Machine Versus the History and Narrative of Media,” Ch.2 of *Digital Memory and the Archive*.

Communication

John Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept,” *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Winter 2010): 321-62.

Friedrich Kittler, “The History of Communication Media” (CTheory.net, 1996):
<https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14325/5101>.

Niklas Luhmann, “How Can the Mind Participate in Communication?” in *Theories of Distinction* (1994): 371-87.

Elena Esposito, “Artificial Communication? The Production of Contingency by Algorithms,” *Zeitschrift fur Soziologie* 2017, 46(4): 259-65.

Technology: Definitions and Development

Leo Marx, “Technology: Emergence of a Hazardous Concept,” *Technology and Culture*, Vol.51, No.3, July 2010, pp.561-577.

Thorstein Veblen, “The Place of Science in Modern Civilization,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.11, No.5 (1906), pp.585-609.

- Eric Schatzberg, "Technik Comes to America: Changing Meanings of Technology Before 1930," *Technology and Culture*, Vol.47, No.3 (2006), pp.486-512.
- Gilbert Simondon, selections from Parts 1 and 2 of *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1958).
- George Basalla, selections from *The Evolution of Technology* (1988).
- Wiebe E. Bijker, "The Social Construction of Bakelite: Toward a Theory of Invention," in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, edited by Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas Park Hughes, and Trevor Pinch, MIT Press 1987, pp.159-87.
- Luis Suarez-Villa, "Preface" and "The Intangible Wealth of Nations," in *Invention and the Rise of Technocapitalism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp.xi-xiv, 1-33.

Infrastructure: Telegraphy and the Internet

- James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Revised Edition, pp. 155–177.
- John Durham Peters, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph Revisited," in *Thinking with James Carey: essays on communication, transportation, history*, eds. Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson.
- Kate Maddalena and Jeremy Packer, "The Digital Body: Telegraphy as Discourse Network," *Theory, Culture & Society* (2014).
- Jane Abbate, "'The Most Neglected Element': Users Transform the ARPANET," Ch.3 of *Inventing the Internet* (2000).
- Tung-Hui Hu, "Introduction" and Ch.2: "Time-Sharing and Virtualization," *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (2015), pp.ix-xxix, 37-71.
- Jakobsson, Peter, and Fredrik Stiernstedt. "Time, Space and Clouds of Information: Data Centre Discourse and the Meaning of Durability." In *Cultural Technologies: The Shaping of Culture in Media and Society* (2012), edited by Göran Bolin, pp.103-17.
- Wendy Chun & Sarah Friedland, "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards," *differences* 26.2 (2015).
- Felix Stalder & Christine Mayer, "The Second Index: Search Engines, Personalization and Surveillance."
- Taina Bucher, Ch.3 "Neither Black Nor Box," in *If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (2018).

Sound: Phonograph, Film, Digital

- Friedrich Kittler, "Gramophone," in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*
- Michel Chion, "The Audiovisual Contract: Projections of Sound on Image" (1994).
- Steven Shaviro, "Splitting the Atom: Post-Cinematic Articulations of Sound and Vision"
- Karen Collins, "Gameplay, Genre, and the Functions of Game Audio," in *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (MIT Press 2008), pp.123-38.
- Wolfgang Ernst, "Toward a Media Archaeology of Sonic Articulations," Ch.9 of *Digital Memory and the Archive*.

Image: Photograph, Film, Digital

- Roland Barthes, from *Camera Lucida*

- Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*
- Friedrich Kittler, "Film," in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*
- Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic 'Presence'," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (University of California Press 2004), pp.135-62.
- Shane Denson, from "Frankenstein's Filmic Progenies: A Techno-Phenomenological Approach," in *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, film, and the anthropotechnical interface*, Transcript 2014, pp.51-75.
- Julia Leyda, "Demon Debt: Paranormal Activity as Recessionary Post-Cinematic Allegory" in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (Reframe 2016), edited by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda.
- Mark B. N. Hansen, "New Media," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*.
- James Elkins, from *The Domain of Technical Images*.

Cultural Technologies: Language, Print, and Design

- Terrence W. Deacon, "Prefrontal Cortex and Symbol Learning: Why a Brain Capable of Language Evolved Only Once," in *Communicating Meaning: The Evolution and Development of Language* (1996), edited by B. Velichkovsky and Duane M. Rumbaugh, pp.103-138.
- Elizabeth Eisenstein, from *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*
- Ian Bogost, "The Future of Writing Looks Like the Past," theatlantic.com, May 9, 2016: https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/05/freewrite/481566/?fbclid=IwAR3N2DBDmpJJiGJk38AIKQc518SQDI3qwLaqP9CuoPtinjzckP_7FQ1XYU
- Bernhard Siegert, "Cacography or Communication? Cultural Techniques of Signal-Signal Distinction," Ch.1 of *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Fordham University Press, 2015).
- , "(Not) In Place: The Grid, or, Cultural Techniques of Ruling Spaces, Ch.6 of *Cultural Techniques*.
- Trevor Pinch, "Giving Birth to New Users: How the Minimoog Was Sold to Rock and Roll," from *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technologies* (MIT, 2003), pp.247-270.
- Michel Callon, "The role of hybrid communities and socio-technical arrangements in the participatory design," *Journal Of The Center For Information Studies* 5.3 (2004), pp.3-10.

Epistemology: Experience and Reason

- Ian Hacking, "Do We See Through a Microscope?"
- Joseph Vogl, "Becoming-Media: Galileo's Telescope"
- Don Ihde, "Husserl's Galileo Needed a Telescope!," in *Husserl's Missing Technologies* (2016), pp.35-58.
- Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Gaston Bachelard: The Concept of 'Phenomenotechnique'," in *Epistemologies of the Concrete: Twentieth-Century Histories of Life* (2010), pp.25-36.
- Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "The Economy of the Scribble" in *Epistemologies of the Concrete: Twentieth-Century Histories of Life* (2010), pp.244-52.

Labor: Automation and Computing

Karl Marx, ch.7 and selections from ch.15, *Capital, Vol. 1*.

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp.360-63, 690-712.

Kirkpatrick Sale, on "Neo-Luddism" in *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution: Lessons for the Computer Age* (1995).

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

Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Robots and Capitalism," *New Left Review* (Sept. 1984), pp.109-24.

Jason E. Smith, "Nowhere to Go: Automation, Then and Now."

Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," in *Network Culture* (2004), pp.34-58.

Brian A. Brown, "Primitive Digital Accumulation: Privacy, Social Networks, and Biopolitical Exploitation," *Rethinking Marxism* 25.3 (2013), pp.385-403.

Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (2016).

N. Katherine Hayles, Ch.6 "Temporality and Cognitive Assemblages: Finance Capital, Derivatives, and High-Frequency Trading," *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (2017).

David Graeber, "Exchange," in *CTMS*.

Human-Machine Couplings: Cybernetics and Games

N. Katherine Hayles, "Cybernetics," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*.

Norbert Wiener, "Cybernetics in History," in *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (1954), pp.15-27.

Peter Gallison, "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision"

Hayles, from *How We Became Posthuman* (1999).

Wolfgang Ernst, Ch.1: "Time-Critical Media Processes," *Chronopoetics: The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*, translated by Anthony Enns, pp.3-13.

Claus Pias, "The Game Player's Duty: The User as Gestalt of the Ports," in *Media Archaeology*, eds. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, pp.164-83.

Johan Blomberg, "The Semiotics of the Game Controller," *Game Studies*, 18.2, September 2018.

Jon Peterson, from *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures from Chess to Role-Playing Games* (San Diego: Unreason Press, 2012), pp.64-72, 72-75, 303-320.

Conclusion

Ernst Cassirer, "Form and Technics" (1930), in *Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology*, edited by Aud Sissel Hoel and Ingvild Folkvord (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.15-53.

Gilbert Simondon, "Culture and Technics" (1965), translated by Olivia Lucca Fraser, revised by Giovanni Menegalle, *Radical Philosophy* 189, 2015, pp.17-23.

Friedrich Kittler, "Thinking Colours and/or Machines," translated with an introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol.23, No.7-8 (2006), pp.39-50.

Mark Hansen, "Media Theory," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol.23, No.2-3 (2006), pp.297-306.