HH – HSCI 3493

HSCI 3493: The History of Media

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HSCI 3493: The History of Media

Course Description:

If knowledge is power, then communication is change. New communications technologies have enabled us to change our lives, altering how we work, how we play, and even how we think. This course will explore the history of these new media from the printing press to the present. We will strive to understand the development and use of these new media in context, paying particular attention to the ways that they mediate human interactions.

All media share this vital characteristic: they intervene between the author and the audience of a message, translating that message from its original form into one that allows it to be stored, processed, or transmitted to audiences in other times and places. While it is too much to say that “the medium is the message,” the medium does affect the message and so affects both the author and the audience as well.

As we explore the creation and development of our highly mediated world, we will pay particular attention to three recurring themes: 1) first, we will see that technologies are interfaces between the natural and the artificial, meaning that they must conform to both natural laws and human desires; 2) second, we will see that technologies never exist alone, meaning that they are always parts of extended social and technical networks; and 3) we will see that adopting new media not only means adopting new technologies but also learning new skills, thinking in new ways, and embracing new social arrangements. In short, technological change and cultural change are intimately intertwined, so much so that powerful technologies are always invented twice: the first invention is a technical solution to an recognized problem, while the second invention is the social re-invention of the purposes, uses, and meanings of the technology. Sometimes these two happen at the same time; often they are separated by a generation or more.

Course Mechanics:

You are expected to attend every class unless you have a family emergency, are ill, or have some other legitimate reason for having to miss class. If you know that you will have to miss a class, you should let me or Petar know as soon as possible. Like most professors, I am much more sympathetic to excuses presented before rather than after the fact. If you have a question or concern, please talk to me. Your job in this class is to learn, and my job is to help you do it. Asking questions helps both of us do our jobs better, and I only rarely bite off students’ heads.

Typically, on Mondays I will present a lecture intended to provide an overview of the main topic for the week. I will post my lecture slides (but not the complete notes) by midnight the night before class on the course D2L site. In general, on Fridays we will break into groups to discuss a set of questions on the readings. Wednesdays will be a mix of lecture and discussion exercises based on the lecture material. Each week, you will take a short quiz online that covers material from the lectures and the readings.
Each Friday, your group will turn in its answers to the week’s discussion questions at the end of class. Your individual discussion grade will depend upon both how well your group answers the questions and how much of a contribution you made individually to the discussion.

There will be one midterm and a final exam. The midterm and the final both will require you to draw on material from the lectures and the readings.

As this course is a Presidential Dream Course, there will be several outside speakers coming to campus and visiting our class this fall. Each of these speakers will give a public lecture/presentation outside of regular class time. Attendance at these public lectures is required; if you anticipate a problem in attending one of these presentations, let me know as soon as possible so that we can figure out a way to work around the problem. Having these speakers come is an extraordinary opportunity, so let’s make the most of it!

Your major semester-long assignment is to create a media journal. Your media journal is a collection of short exemplars of messages presented via different media, along with your own critical commentary on the ways that that message was related to its medium. For example, one media journal entry will be on print news and public affairs; for that journal assignment you will collect a sample of print news from the early days of newspapers that seems to you to be exemplary of the use of that medium at that time. You will submit a short (400 word minimum) commentary with each sample. Good commentaries typically consist of three or more paragraphs—one giving a general description of the sample and noting from where and when it came, a second discussing why that sample seems to you to exemplify communication in that medium at that time, and a third analyzing how the message conveyed by that clipping is related to its medium. That’s a minimum for a good commentary; if you have more to say, great! At the end of the semester you will assemble all seven entries and then write a 5-7 page overview of the journal. This final, complete media journal is due the last week of class.

Grade Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Work</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Discussion Grades</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Journal (total)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Books to buy (all are available in paperback at online retailers or as ebooks):

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Course Introduction/The World Before Print
August 22: Opening Day. What are media? Why study their history?
August 24: Lecture—The World of the Scribe.
August 26: Group discussion of readings—The Written Word
Readings:
1) Umberto Eco, excerpts from The Name of the Rose, pp. 32-37, 78-93. On D2L.
2) Anne Trubek, “Handwriting is History.” On D2L.

Week 2: The Revolution of the Word
August 29: Group exercises—The Materiality of Print (Class meets in HSCI Collections!)
August 31: Lecture—The Printing Press and the Vernacular Bible.
September 2: Group discussion of readings—The Printed Word
Readings:

Week 3: A Public Sphere
September 5: NO CLASS. LABOR DAY
September 7: Lecture—The Creation of the Public (Turn in MJ 1: script)
September 9: Group discussion of readings—The Public Sphere
Readings:
1) Paul Starr, The Creation of the Media, Chapters 2-4, pp. 47-150.

Week 4: Consumption, Exchange, and Identity
September 12: Lecture—Money, Money, Money!
September 14: Lecture—The Public Sphere and the Private Self.
September 16: Group discussions of readings—The Audience for Print
Readings:
1) Richard John, Spreading the News, pp. 25-63. On D2L.
Week 5: Communication and Empire

September 19: Lecture—Lines of Power. (Turn in MJ 2: print)
September 21: Lecture and discussion—Information and Industry
September 23: Group discussion of readings—Electric Communication and Culture

Readings:

Week 6: Beyond Text: New Media, 1850-1950

September 26: Lecture—Recording sights and sounds
September 28: Lecture—The Mass Media Revolution.

September 30: Class Discussion With Dream Course Speaker—Paul Starr

Public Lecture By Professor Starr at Noon!

Readings:
1) Alex Ross, “The Record Effect,” The New Yorker, June 6, 2005, pp. 94-100. On D2L.

Week 7: The New Mass Media, Continued

October 3: Group Discussion of reading and midterm review. (Turn in MJ 3: 19th-C. New Media)


October 5: MIDTERM EXAM!

October 7: No Class, Texas Friday.

Week 8: The Birth of Computing

October 10: Class Discussion with Dream Course Speaker—Susan Douglas.

Public Lecture by Professor Douglas at 7 pm.

Reading:
1) Susan Douglas, Listening In, Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 4, pp. 3-40, 83-99.

October 12: Lecture—Computing Before Computers

October 14: Lecture—The Birth of Computing: From Tubes to Transistors.

Reading:

Week 9: The Computer Revolution

October 17: Lecture—Digital Machines, Codes, and Programs. (Turn in MJ 4: early film/radio)

October 19: Lecture—Big Computers for Big Business and Big Government.
October 21: Group discussion of readings

Readings:
2) Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” pp. 101-108. On D2L.

Week 10: The PC Revolution

October 24: Lecture—A New Vision: Interactive Computing
October 26: Lecture—A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Military-Industrial Complex
October 28: Group discussion of readings—Interactive Computing and the PC.

Reading:
1) Steven Levy, Insanely Great, pp. 31-74. On D2L.
3) Licklider and Taylor, “Human-Computer Symbiosis,” and “The Computer as a Communications Device.” On D2L.

Week 11: The Vast Wasteland?

October 31: Lecture—Mass Media from Minow to Murdoch. (Turn in MJ 5: Interactive Multimedia)
November 2: Lecture and discussion—TV Culture, “The Media” and Their Critics
November 4: Group discussion of readings—Television and the Public Interest

Reading:
1) Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451. (Whole book. It’s not long.)

Week 12: Spinning the Web

November 7: Lecture—From ARPANET to the World Wide Web.
November 9: Lecture and discussion—Digital Convergence

November 10: Public Lecture by Marc Rotenberg.

November 11: Group discussion with guest speaker.

Readings:
1) Marc Rotenberg and Daniel Solove, selections from Privacy, Information, and Technology. On D2L.
2) Fred Turner, “The WELL and the Origins of Virtual Community.” On D2L.
Week 13: Digital Culture

November 14: Lecture—The Computer in Film/Popular Culture, part I. (Turn in MJ 6: The Web/Convergence)

November 16: Lecture—The Computer in Film/Popular Culture, part II.

November 18: Group Discussion of Readings.

Readings:
1) William Gibson, Neuromancer (first half)
2) Watch a digital/computing-related film outside class.

Week 14: Are We Post-Human Yet?

November 21: Group discussion of reading.

Reading:
1) William Gibson, Neuromancer. (Finish the novel).

November 23: No Class. Thanksgiving Holiday.

November 25: No Class. Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 15: Life on Screen

November 28: Lecture—Screens, Screens, Everywhere There's Screens. (Turn in MJ 7: Screens)

November 30: Lecture/discussion—Social Media?

December 2: Group discussion of readings—Media and Identity

Readings:
1) Movie: The Social Network. (Seen outside class.)

Week 16: Anytime, Anywhere

December 5: Lecture—Mobile Media

December 7: Lecture—Global Media

December 9: Course Review. (TURN IN COMPLETE MEDIA JOURNAL!)

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 14, 8:00—10:00 am.