

FIMS 9330B GW20

Culture, Technology, Information

Winter 2020

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Wednesdays: 1:30-4:20 pm, FNB 4130

Office Hours: By appointment

Culture, technology, and information are intertwined. To understand today's politics, globalized industries, or habits of the heart, one needs to look at both the capacities and restraints of technological systems and the inherited patterns of thought and action, the "whole ways of life," that condition interpretation, meaning creation, and social power. To understand the role of data, information, media, and social life, one needs to understand how meaning, gadgetry, and social power interrelate.

But that's easier said than done. This course explores a variety of scholarly traditions that address that difficult intertwining, from cultural studies to book history to post-structuralism. Students will be given the opportunity to apply some of the theories and methods of those traditions to research projects on topics relevant to the student's primary areas of interest, whether in journalism, media, or library and information studies. Scholarship by James Carey, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, John Peters, Friedrich Kittler, Cornelia Vismann, and more will be discussed.

Part I: The first section of the course will provide an introduction to cultural studies, i.e., to a materialist approach to cultures. Readings for this section will include classics by Raymond Williams, James Carey, Mike Davis, Dallas Smythe, and the famous British cultural studies case study, *The Story of the Sony Walkman*.

Part II: The second section looks specifically at cultural readings of technology, involving both some classics like Langdon Winner's "Do Artifacts have Politics?" to more recent works by John Peters, Jennifer Light, and more. Specific attention will be given to questions of gender, with a close look at feminist and intersectional interventions into scholarship on information technologies.

Part III: The third section turns specifically to writing and information, exploring the "new materialities" of media, culture, and information technologies that have emerged from poststructuralism, as well as some of their antecedents in book history, and parallel scholarship in library and information studies.

Assignments: This class is a seminar; there will be few lectures. Students will have equal responsibility to generate and sustain discussion. Assignments will include short written response papers, seminar discussion leading, a scholarly book review, and a research paper with multiple components. I am interested in working with students to develop research trajectories appropriate to their career goals and interests.

It may help to know that as a scholar, I believe the carefully considered written word is a legitimate mode of inquiry, a research method. I also believe that scholarship always occurs in a historical context, and that knowing some of that context is important to understanding the present; a history of the

mimeograph may tell us as much about current predicaments as a study of the latest trend to hit the headlines.

Overview of Assignments

(Additional information about assignments will be provided in class; some changes to assignments might be necessary early in the semester to accommodate varying students' needs and interests.)

- Written response papers. 500 words. You are required to write short reading response papers for the readings assigned for 8 of the weeks of the course, due before the start of class in pdf form (delivered to the OWL dropbox). These response papers should address a majority of the texts assigned for the week. They can be synthetic overviews of what ties the readings together, comparison/contrasts between a few of the readings, or reflections on some particular issues or dilemmas that the readings raise. The responses need not be letter-perfect essays, but should do their best to engage and/or summarize what the authors are trying to do. 8 @3% =24%.
- Seminar Presentation. You are required to prepare a presentation based on course readings for a particular week and lead a seminar discussion about it in class. 15%
- Extended Book Review. 1250 words. You must write a formal book review on one of the recommended texts. 20%
- Final Research Paper. You are required to produce a final research paper that draws, in some way, from the course material while also relating to your particular professional field of interest. There will be two parts: a rough draft due no later than March 13th (20%), and a final draft (21%), due on April 19th. The research paper will need to be clear about its theoretical frame and methodology and, of course, have a clear and compelling research question. It should be clearly written and have a keen sense of the stakes of the research question being asked – why should the reader care about your topic? What does it contribute to understandings of the relations between culture, technologies, and information?

Schedule of Readings

Section One: Cultural Studies

1) Jan. 8, 2020, Overview

2) Jan. 15

- Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," in Gray and McGuigan (eds.), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1993), pp. 5-14 [originally published in 1958]
- James W. Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication," from *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 13-36. [originally in *Communication*, Volume 2, No. 2, published by Gordon and Breach Ltd. (1975)]
- Richard Johnson, "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" *Social Text*, Winter 1986/87, pp. 38-80

- Roland Barthes, Preface, pp. 11-12, and "The World of Wrestling," pp. 15-25, from *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [originally published in French in 1957].
- Thomas Streeter, "How to Study Managerial Argot in the Media Industries: the cases of 'business model' and 'monetization'" [draft ms.]

[Recommended: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond_Williams]

3) Jan. 22

- Raymond Williams, "Culture" from *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 11-20.
- Mike Davis, "The View from Futures Past," in Gray and McGuigan (eds.), pp. 217-224; originally from Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, 1990. [City of Quartz is notable, among other reasons, for predicting some of the tensions that would lead into the 1992 Los Angeles riots.]
- Dallas Smythe, "After Bicycles, What?" from *Counterclockwise: Perspectives on Communication*, edited by Thomas Guback (1994 [1973]), pp. 227-234.
- Frow, John. "Reading with Guns: Institutions of Interpretation and District of Columbia v. Heller." *New Literary History* 47, no. 1 (July 25, 2016): 83–107. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2016.0008>

4) Jan 29

-- Du Gay, Paul, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Anders Koed Madsen, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. Second edition. Sage, 2013. (Intro to the 2nd edition here.)

Section 2: Culture/Technology

5) Feb. 5

- Walter Ong, "Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media," (excerpts from *Orality and literacy : the technologizing of the word*, Methuen, 1982) chapter 9 from *Communication in history: technology, culture, society*, Boston, MA Allyn & Bacon 2003
- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," from *Illuminations*, NY: Schocken, 1969, pp. 217-251. (Recommended: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Benjamin)
- E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, No. 38, 1967, pp. 56-97.
- Raymond Williams, "The technology and the society," from *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press ; Hanover, NH : University Press of New England, [1992] (Originally published: [London] : Fontana, [1974].) pp. 9-19. ISBN: 0819562599
- Darrin Barney, "The Culture of Technology in Canada". *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens*. Winter 2007. 28-31 http://darinbarneyresearch.mcgill.ca/Work/Culture_of_Technology.PDF

6) Feb. 12

- [recommended] James Carey, "Culture, Technology and Communications: Bibliography and Suggestions for Reading and Writing," 1980 (a course syllabus that's also an exceptional literature review).
- Thomas Streeter, "Internet," in *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*, Ben Peters (ed.). Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 184-196.
- James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 201-230.
- Lezaun, Javier. "Actor-Network Theory (Social Theory Now)." In Benzecry, Claudio E., Monika Krause, and Isaac Ariail Reed, eds. *Social Theory Now*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2017, pp. 305-336. https://www.academia.edu/34100806/Actor-Network_Theory_Social_Theory_Now
- MacKenzie, Donald, and Judy Wajcman. "Introductory Essay," *The Social Shaping of Technology*. Edited by Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1999. <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28638/1/Introductory%20essay%20%28LSERO%29.pdf>

7) Feb. 26

- Ullman, Ellen. "Come in, CQ: The Body and the Wire." In *Wired Women. Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, edited by Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise, 3–23. Seal Press, 1996.
- Jennifer Light, "When Computers were Women," *Technology and Culture* - Volume 40, Number 3, July 1999, pp. 455-483.
- Faulkner, Wendy. "The Technology Question in Feminism: A View from Feminist Technology Studies." *Women's Studies International Forum* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 79–95. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(00\)00166-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(00)00166-7).
- Pfaffenberger, Bryan. "The Social Meaning of the Personal Computer: Or, Why the Personal Computer Revolution Was No Revolution." *Anthropological Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (January 1988): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317870>
- [recommended] Jonathan Sterne, "The mp3 as cultural artifact," *New Media & Society*, 2006; 8; 825.

Section 3: Culture, Writing, and Information

8) March 4

- Peters, John Durham. "The Quest for Authentic Connection, or Bridging the Chasm," Chapter 5 of *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. University Of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Chapter One from Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, pp. 6-26.
- Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" and "Change the Object Itself," from Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. Macmillan, 1978.

- David E. Wellbury, "Foreward," from Kittler, Friedrich A. *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*. Translated by Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens. Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. vii-xxxiii.
- 9) March 11
- Kittler, Friedrich A. "Gramophone," from *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. First edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 21-115.
 - Introduction and Chapter 4 from Davies, Margery. *Woman's Place Is At The Typewriter*. Temple University Press, 1984, pp. 3-8, 51-78.
 - Brown, John Seely, and Paul Duguid. "The Social Life of Documents; Introduction by Esther Dyson." *First Monday* 1, no. 1 (May 6, 1996). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v1i1.466>.
 - Michael Buckland (1997), "What is a Document?" *Jnl of the American Society for Information Science* 48 (9): 804-809
- 10) March 18
- Wolfe, Heather, and Peter Stallybrass. "The Material Culture of Record-Keeping in Early Modern England," from Peters, Kate, Alexandra Walsham, and Liesbeth Corens, eds. *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://www.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.5871/bacad/9780197266250.001.0001/upso-9780197266250-chapter-008>
 - Suchman, Lucy. "Making a Case: 'Knowledge' and 'Routine' Work in Document Production." In *Recovering Work Practice and Informing System Design*, 29–45. https://www.academia.edu/37033388/Making_a_Case_Knowledge_and_Routine_Work_in_Document_Production.
 - Gitelman, Lisa. "Near Print and Beyond Paper: Knowing by *.pdf", Chapter 4 of *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*. Duke University Press Books, 2014, pp. 111-135.
- 11) March 25
- Berring, Robert C. "Legal Research and Legal Concepts: Where Form Molds Substance." *California Law Review* 75, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3480571>.
 - Tiersma, Peter M. "A Message in a Bottle: Text, Autonomy, and Statutory Interpretation." *Tulane Law Review* 76 (2002 2001): 431–82.
 - Vismann, Cornelia. "In Judicio Stare: The Cultural Technology of the Law." *Law and Literature* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 309-323,472.
 - Vismann, Cornelia. "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (November 1, 2013): 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413496851>
- 12) April 1
- Peters, John Durham. "Google Wants to Be God's Mind: The Secret Theology of 'I'm Feeling Lucky.'" Excerpted from *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*. 1 edition. Chicago London: University of Chicago Press, 2016. In Salon, 2015.

- https://www.salon.com/2015/07/19/google_wants_to_be_gods_mind_the_secret_theology_of_im_feeling_lucky/
- Darrin Barney, "Be Careful What You Wish For: Dilemmas of Democracy and Technology". *Canadian Journal of Communication*. 30:4. 2006. 655-664.
http://darinbarneyresearch.mcgill.ca/Work/Be_Careful.pdf

13) April 8 Paper presentations

Western University Senate Required Statements

Please note the Web sites for Registrarial Services (<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>), and Student Support Services (including the services provided by the USC listed here: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>).

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Statement on Academic Offences: “Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf