ENGL 392c: History and Theory of Media

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http://www.english.uwaterloo.ca/~ahm/392c

Welcome to English 392c, History and Theory of Media!

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns or questions you have about the class, the readings, or the assignments. I will be in my office during the hours noted, and I’m always very happy to have students drop by during these times, or by appointment at other times. Beyond office hours, contact is probably best initiated via email. I will read your emails within one day, and will try to respond within two business days.

Course description:

According to the undergraduate calendar this course “explores the practical and theoretical issues raised by our everyday technologies of representation including written, spoken, and gestural language, print and visual media, photography and film, audio recordings, computer-mediated communications, and interactive digital media.” We will take a specifically Canadian perspective on the material, as at least one scholar has argued that Canada is a fundamentally technological nation.

Course meeting times

The course meets twice weekly, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00–11:30, in DWE (Engineering) 3519.

Required and Recommended texts

The following texts are required for this course. They are available at the University Bookstore in South Campus Hall now. Please buy them, and bring them to class as the assigned readings dictate.


We will also occasionally be reading pieces accessible online: be sure to print copies to bring to class, or take notes from which you can make clear reference to the text. Links to these texts are provided from the website listed in the contact information above.

Additionally, everybody needs a good dictionary at their elbow at all times. I always keep an online one and a print one handy. The Oxford English Dictionary online (accessible via the university library web site) is very thorough, and the Concise Oxford Dictionary or the Canadian Oxford English Dictionary are very good print texts, well-worth the purchase.

Style matters: habituate yourself to the rigors of academic writing—good writing and clear thinking proceed hand in hand. The MLA Handbook (6th ed.) should be your guide to research and writing. Several prominent style bibles (including Strunk and White’s Elements of Style) are available online for free at www.bartleby.com. If you see yourself spending a lot of time writing about new media, you might do well to invest in Constance Hale and Jessie Scanlon’s Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age.

Assignments and Mark Distribution

The following are the graded components of the course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation / Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>(ongoing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response papers (3)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20 Jan, 8 Feb, 17 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>(TBA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Workshop</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22 March</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Participation / Quizzes:** Your participation in this course will be measured by two factors: whether you come to class (attendance sheets) and whether you are prepared to participate (pop reading quizzes). You will lose one percentage point for each unexplained absence from class (you get one freebie—hey, I was a student once, too). Occasional, very short, surprise quizzes will test whether you’ve read the assigned materials for class.

**Response Papers (3):** You will be required to write three 400 word critical responses to the readings. Response paper assignments will ask you to use your critical judgment to assess the material and to compare and contrast theories. A good response paper does not simply summarize the readings: it shows that the writer has synthesized the ideas and grappled with them critically.

**Oral Presentation:** Speaking clearly, coherently, confidently and helpfully in front of an audience is a valuable skill. For this assignment, you will take charge of 10 minutes of the class in order to teach your classmates about the history of a
particular technology or to explicate a given theory. Your subject matter will be
determined by the topic under study on the date of your presentation. You will be
responsible to discuss your presentation with me the week before you are due to
present.

Final Paper: This 8-10 page formal essay will ask you to demonstrate your acquisition
of the knowledge and skills imparted by the course: your paper will examine
historical and theoretical elements of media. You may concentrate on a particular
medium, or view several media through the lens of a particular theory. Your final
paper will be polished, coherent, proofread, and show evidence of critical
thinking.

The research, drafting, and writing of a paper of this length is a substantial
undertaking, and so the following graded components acknowledge the
importance of the writing process and formalize your responsibility to devote the
appropriate time and care to your final paper.

Paper Proposal: This 250-word proposal lays out the topic of your final paper, offers a
potential thesis statement you expect to be able to argue, and sketches out the
likely path you might follow to achieve your goal. A carefully written proposal
helps to organize your research and writing, and can help you and I to determine
whether your topic is of the right scope for an 8-10 page paper.

Annotated Bibliography: Having established the proposed thesis and topic of your
paper, you will undertake to support your ideas or build your knowledge base
with research. The annotated bibliography will list the most important or
pertinent of your secondary sources, and indicate their use to your paper.

Draft Workshop: Good writing is rewriting—writing is a multi-stage process of
drafting, editing, incorporating research, revising words and ideas, and polishing.
Editing and revision are greatly helped by peer editing—professors and graduate
students very often share preliminary drafts to the great benefit of the final
product. Disabuse yourself of the illusory vision of the solitary genius in the
basement apartment, caffeine-crazed and full of inspiration at 3am the night
before the paper is due: all this will get you is a bad headache and a worse paper.
This workshop will ask you to share your writing with classmates, and to suggest
revisions and edits to their work as well.

Absence and Late Policy

Absence from class requires advance permission: I’m always happier to hear about an
absence or a conflict earlier rather than later. Absences should have compelling reasons:
“I’m really busy with assignments in all my other courses” is not a legitimate excuse, for
example. Medical absences must be documented by a doctor’s note.
Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date noted; unless prior arrangements are made late assignments will lose one letter grade per day late, counting weekends (10% percentage points). Assignments more than two days late will not be accepted.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every member of this class— instructors as well as students— has rights and responsibilities to ensure a pleasant and productive experience for all. We are all answerable to University policies governing ethical behaviour (Policy 33) and academic integrity (Policy 71), as well as to those outlining grievance or dispute procedures (Policy 70). Here are some more specific expectations for this course:

You will:

- know the university policies that govern your behaviour
- attend all scheduled classes
- arrive prepared: with assigned reading and writing completed, and with the textbook and/or coursepack in hand
- participate actively in your own learning, while respecting the rights of others to learn as well: this means active listening as well as active speaking
- give thoughtful consideration to instructor feedback on written and oral work

I will:

- adhere to the university policies that govern my behaviour
- attend all scheduled classes
- make myself available for consultation in person and over email
- return assignments of 1 page or less within one week, and all others within 2 weeks
- provide helpful and respectful feedback on student work

The Faculty of Arts, which administers this course and is responsible to ensure adherence to codes of academic conduct, requires that the following paragraphs appear in this syllabus:

"Note on avoidance of academic offences: All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offence, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infoecal/UW/policy_71.html)."
“If you need help in learning how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your TA or course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

“Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.html.”

Students seeking guidance on academic honesty are urged to discuss the issue with their instructor, or to consult the following page of the Arts Faculty Web site, "How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences: A Guide for Students and Instructors" (http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html)

**A final word**

Once more, welcome to the course! I hope you find as valuable as it will be challenging. I am looking forward to a productive and exciting semester, and to getting to know all of you.
English 392C: History and Theory of Media

January 4  Course policies and objectives; the Gutenberg Bible (www)

The Basics: Words, Pictures, Noises, Media?

January 6  Printing and the New Public Sphere
Jurgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere” (CP)
University of Toronto Press, “Publication” (www)

January 11  Photography
History of Photography (various) (www)
Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of …” (CP)

January 13  A new kind of theory?
Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message” (CP)
Dominic Strinati, “The Frankfurt School” (CP)

January 18  Creating Canada with Media
Michele Martin, “Development of the Telephone” (CHC)
Brian Osborne and Robert Pike, “Lowering ‘the Walls of Oblivion’” (CHC)
Laurence B. Mussio, “Prophets Without Honour” (CHC)

Media and nationhood: Print and Broadcast Mass Media

January 20  Harold Innis, from Empire and Communications (CHC)
Maurice Charland, “Technological Nationalism” (CHC)

January 25  Newspaper
Benedict Anderson, “Cultural Roots” (CP)
Jeffrey L. McNairn, “The Press and its Readers” (CHC)
Minko Sotiron, “Public Myth and Private Reality” (CHC)

January 27  Magazines
Peter Desbarats, “The Special Role of Magazines” (CHC)
Valerie J. Korinek, “Mrs Chatelaine vs Mrs Slob” (CHC)
Daniel J. Robinson, “Polling Consumers” (CHC)

February 1  Radio
Report of the Aird Commission (CHC)
Mary Vipond, “Who is to pay for broadcasting?” (CHC)
Robert W. McChesney, “Graham Spry and Public
Broadcasting” (CHC)
Marshall McLuhan, from Understanding Media (CHC)

February 3 Television
Douglas Kellner, “Network Television and American Society” (CP)

February 8 Television (cont.)
Harold Foster, “Television, Purveyor of Modern Myth” (CP)

Lights, Camera, Action! Film language, film policy

February 10 Film history and film clips

February 15 James Monaco, “The Language of Film” (CP)

February 17 Gary Evans, “John Grierson and the National Film Board” (CHC)
Ted Magder, “A Featureless Film Policy” (CHC)

Electronic Brains: Computers big and small

March 1 Big computers
History of computers (various) (www)
Harry Wulforst, “UNIVAC Becomes a Household Word” (CP)
Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery” (www)

March 3 “The computer does not impose ...”
George Grant, “Thinking About Technology” (CHC)
Marriage of Computers and Communication (CHC)

March 8 Small computers
Campbell-Kelly and Aspray, “The Shaping of the Personal Computer” (CP)
History of personal computers (various) (www)

New Media: Videogames and virtuals sevles

March 10 What is new media?
Lev Manovich, “What Is New Media?” (CP)
March 15  Videogames
Steven Poole, “Origin of Species” (CP)
Arthur Asa Berger, “Narratives in the Electronic Age” (CP)

March 17  Virtual? Or Reality?
Sherry Turkle, “Aspects of the Self” (CP)
Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations” (CP)

March 22  ESSAY WORKSHOP

I am the media: Chipping Away at the Mass

March 24  Download culture: who needs broadcast?
From Napster to iTunes (various) (www)
Copyright and copywrong (various) (www)

March 29  Blogging: DIY print and hypermedia
Meg Hourihan, “What we’re doing when we blog” (www)
Miller and Shepherd, “Blogging as Social Action” (www)
Into the Blogosphere, “Mass Communication” (www)

March 31  I am the media: cyborg interventions
Steve Mann, “Shooting Back” (CP)
Kevin Warwick, ‘Professor Cyborg’ (various) (www)