

Historiography of Communication: Historiography of/and New Media

COMS 637—Winter 2013

Wednesdays 14:30-17:30, W5 Arts

“There are ~~in fact~~ no ~~masses~~ methods. There are only ways of seeing ~~people~~ studies as ~~masses~~ methods.”

—Raymond Williams, “Culture is Ordinary,” edited

“The advice I like to give young artists, or really anybody who’ll listen to me, is not to wait around for inspiration. [...] All the best ideas come out of the process; they come out of the work itself. Things occur to you.”

—attributed to Chuck Close

Professor Jonathan Sterne

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Prospectus

In 2013, the so-called *new media* are in many cases as old as radio was during its widely hailed golden age, the 1930s—yet we haven’t quite gotten down to calling them just *media*. They have their own histories, and the drive to make sense of them has challenged us to rethink the histories we offer of other, presumably no-longer-new media. To call some media *new media* implies particular temporalities and sets of historical questions that are more often posed than answered. New historiographic approaches have challenged prevailing definitions of media and media studies from several angles.

This course will acquaint students with the problems and practices of writing media history, mixing old and “new” media as objects of and resources for study. We will engage assigned historical texts through a practice of *hermeneutic reverse-engineering*. The course will consider some of the major schools of and approaches to the writing of media history from the inside out, engaging the larger fields of historiography and media and cultural theory from which they draw and to which they contribute. Along the way, we will work through concepts like “new,” “media,” and “history,” as well as relatives such as “genealogy,” “archaeology,” and “archive.”

“Historiography” refers to the writing of history, the history of history, and the philosophy of history. This seminar will wind up somewhere between a 19th century seminar table and a 21st century exercise in the digital humanities. We will engage the history and philosophy of history by thinking through how others write it, by imitating them, and in our imperfect imitations, try out a wide variety of styles, adaptations, and methods. This is a class in practice, more in the musician’s sense of “go home and practice” than the activist’s sense of “moving from theory to praxis.” Class time will feature discussion of assigned texts and those generated by students, lectures, and occasional creative, collaborative, or experimental projects.

Required Readings

Required books will be available at THE WORD bookstore, 469 Milton St. 514-845-5640, <http://www.wordbookstore.ca/>.

Required and recommended books will also be available on 3-hour loan from McLennan-Redpath reserves.

In addition, all required and recommended articles will be made available to students.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. (library also has e-book)

Hilderbrand, Lucas. *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Canales, Jimena. *A Tenth of a Second: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. (library also has e-book)

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka, eds. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006 (library also has e-book)

Piekut, Benjamin. *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Friedberg, Anne. *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. (library also has e-book)

Sterne, Jonathan. *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Recommended Books

Boice, Robert. *Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing*. Stillwater: New Forums Press, 1990.

Williams, Joseph. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Sword, Helen. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Class Schedule

Bring printed copies of readings to class

(changes will be announced in class; see requirements below)

9 Jan: **Apologia—What's History Good For?**
(no writing due this week)

White, Hayden. "The Burden of History." *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 111-34.

Scott, Joan. "Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis." *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-1075

Love, Heather K. "Emotional Rescue: The Demands of Queer History." *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, 31-52. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Recommended:

Steedman, Carolyn. "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida and Dust." *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1159-80 (in the lecture, I will discuss 1176-1180).

16 Jan: **4 Essays, 4 objects**
(commitment due this week)

Spigel, Lynn. "Television in the Family Circle." *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 36-72. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Menke, Richard. "Media in America, 1881: Garfield, Guiteau, Bell, Whitman." *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 3 (2005): 638-64.

Mullaney, Thomas. "The Moveable Typewriter: How Chinese Typists Developed Predictive Text During the Height of Maoism." *Technology and Culture* 53, no. 4 (2012): 777-814.

Derrida, Jacques. "Declarations of Independence." *New Political Science* 7, no. 1 (1986): 7-15.

Recommended:

LaCapra, Dominick. 1985. "Rhetoric and History" in *History and Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 15-44. (in the lecture, I will discuss 36-44)

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loic J.D. Wacquant. "Part III: The Practice of Reflexive Sociology (The Paris Seminar)." *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 217-60. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. (COMS students had this text in prosem)

23 Jan: **Radical Contextualism (Cultural Studies I)**
(weekly papers begin this week)

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Recommended:

Hall, Stuart. "Marx's Notes on Method: A 'Reading' of the '1857 Introduction'." *Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2003): 113-49.

30 Jan: **Old Media, New Media**

Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

Special guest star: Lisa Gitelman

6 Feb: **Mixed Materialities (Cultural Studies II)**

Hilderbrand, Lucas. *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

13 Feb: **History of Science and Technology**

Canales, Jimena. *A Tenth of a Second: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Recommended:

Bowker, Geoffrey and Susan Leigh Star. "Some Tricks of the Trade in Analyzing Classification." *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, 33-50. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.

20 Feb: **Genealogy**

Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism." *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 195-228. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

_____. "Scientia Sexualis." *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, 51-73. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

_____. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 139-64. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.

_____. "Questions of Method." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, 73-86. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Recommended:

Deleuze, Gilles. "A New Cartographer." *Foucault*, 23-44. Translated by Sean Hand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Foucault, Michel. 1998. "Foucault" in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 2*, pp. 459-464 (ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others). New York: The New Press, 1998.

27 Feb: **Media Archaeology (note: I would like to try and reschedule this meeting for the 25th)**

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka, eds. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Recommended:

Siegert, Bernhard. "The Map Is the Territory." *Radical Philosophy* 169 (September/October 2011): 13-16.

6 March: no class, spring break!

13 March: **Politics and Policy**

Newman, Kathy M. "The Consumer Revolt of 'Mr. Average Man': Boake Carter and the CIO Boycott of Philco Radio." *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947*, 81-108. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Larkin, Brian. "Infrastructure, the Colonial Sublime and Indirect Rule," *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, 16-47. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

John, Richard. "Antimonopoly." *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications*, 65-113. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Gates, Kelly A. "Police Power and the Smart CCTV Experiment" *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance*, 63-96. New

York: New York University Press, 2011.

Recommended:

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "The Roads Not Taken: Alternative Social and Technical Approaches to Housework." *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, 102-150. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

20 March: **Cultural History (Networks I)**

Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Special guest star: Fred Turner

27 March: **Historical Ethnography (Networks II)**

Piekut, Benjamin. *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

3 April: **Long-Term History (+ Digital Publication I)**

Friedberg, Anne. *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

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<http://www.vectorsjournal.org/issues/4/virtualwindow/>

10 April: **Playing the Single for an Encore (+ Digital Publication II)**

Sterne, Jonathan. *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

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online version of *MP3* (in progress)

Course Requirements

Etiquette:

1. Full and complete attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading (of required texts). I expect the very best you can give.
2. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstances. There will be a strict limit on seek-and-destroy hermeneutics. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

Product (and % of semester grade):

I. Participation in Class Discussions (20%)

I expect everyone to participate regularly in class discussion. You should come every week ready to discuss the readings. I notice (and appreciate it) when students make good contributions to the course online or in other ways besides speaking up in class. Please note that I distinguish between quantity and quality. I also notice when students are routinely late and/or absent.

Requirements for class discussion are as follows: good faith, attention to the readings, and relevance to the course. We want to avoid “seek and destroy” sessions. If you have something critical to say, be ready to explain how the piece could be improved. If you disagree with the premise of the piece, then read for what motivates the argument.

If necessary, I will keep a speakers list and call on people.

II. Semester Project (80%)

1. 15 January: The commitment.

By 5pm on 15 January, you must submit a proposed topic to me for your final paper. The 1-2 page document will offer a 1-paragraph description of what you intend to research, and a list of potential places to go looking for primary source materials that matches well with the kinds of materials discussed in the 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.

Note: This commitment is not provisional; once I approve it (and I may ask you to modify), you are committed to it for the entire term, though you can take it anywhere you like.

Your topic should be broad enough to keep you interested for 12 weeks, narrow enough to actually yield something like a conference talk or a journal article.

Importantly, your topic does not have to be completely original. You can research something that's already been researched. There is no burden of originality at all in object choice. In fact, I recommend avoiding the impulse to be too clever at this stage.

I strongly recommend avoiding your dissertation or thesis topic. Choose something similar, allied, orthogonal or completely different to it, so long as you're comfortable with the topic and it's interesting to you. This will allow you greater room to experiment and also, free you of a certain amount of ego-investment in the topic.

2. Weekly (except as noted): the dossier.

Each week (by Tuesday, 5pm), you will acquire at least one artifact or document for your semester project in that has some relation to the week's reading assignment. Some weeks I will give more direct guidance than others. If your object is not digital, you will find a way to document it digitally, and post your document to a folder on the MyCourses site for this class.

You are, of course, welcome to collect more, but this is meant to be a process of weekly accumulation. Even if you collect a lot of documents in a single week, you are expected to keep at it week after week.

3. Weekly (except as noted): papers.

Each week (by Tuesday, 5pm), you will upload to MyCourses a short paper of approximately 500-800 words (2-3 pages double-spaced in a standard font, excluding citations). The paper will make use of the document or artifact you acquired for the week (if you acquired more than one, focus on one, though others may be mentioned if necessary; you may also refer to material from previous weeks).

The paper must be written in the style of the author we have read for the week. Choose an aspect of the week's assigned reading to imitate and try your best to imitate it. Your job is to try and occupy the same discursive headspace as the reading, except with your own material. The relevant aspects of "style" here are up to your interpretation. Is it something about the author's prose style that is relevant? Her analytical approach or theoretical commitments? The types of source materials he uses?

Bring your paper to class (and your artifact if it's good for show-and-tell) and be prepared to discuss your choices.

4. Weekly (except as noted): in-class readings.

Each week, we will have one or more students read from their papers, which will lead us into a discussion of the assigned text for the week. I may revise or modify this practice as seems fitting for class discussion.

5. 17 April, 5pm: The “Not-Really-Final” paper (posted in the appropriate place on the course website). By the time you reach this stage, you will have produced over 20 pages of text, in many different styles. For this project, you will revise them into a single paper, with a coherent argumentative arc and style. This is strictly an exercise in writing and revision. No new research is expected; indeed new research will interfere with the main purposes of this assignment, which is to focus on writing.

For the purpose of this assignment, you may choose to produce either:

- a) a paper of no less than 1800 and no more than 2000 words excluding footnotes and bibliography, suitable for conference presentation. The word limit is strict because at most conferences you would have a strict time limit between 12 and 20 minutes. I’m giving you somewhere between 15-20 minutes as if you were to read 2000 words aloud at a reasonable pace. (I don’t endorse the practice of just reading papers aloud at conferences, but it’s a guide for what you could cover.)
- b) a paper of at least 7000 but no more than 9000 words including notes and bibliography in the format of something that could be submitted to a journal. Again, the upper limit is strict because it would be strict with a journal.

Other Policies

French: You have the right to submit your written work in French and most years at least a couple students in my seminars choose to do so. If you plan to write in French, please get in touch with me during add-drop so we can talk about how to handle it, as I am not particularly good at French. Normally it’s not a problem but since there is a writing-intensive component to the class, we should at least discuss it since I won’t be able to give you comments on style.

Class discussions are in English, but you are encouraged to resort to French if you can’t find the right word in English and we’ll figure it out together. You are also welcome to read course materials in French (where they are available in French).

Accommodation: If you require special accommodations or classroom modifications of any kind, please notify both the professor and Office for Students with Disabilities by the end of the first week in which you are enrolled in the course. They are located in suite 3100 Brown Student Services Bldg., 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TDD), [<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>].

Nondiscrimination: If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know. I value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. In

accordance with University policy, I will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, personal difference or the use of assistive technology in negotiating that difference. Among other things, this means that you do not have to agree with your teacher, the assigned readings, or the majority of your classmates in order to do well in this course. You are, however, obligated to demonstrate an understanding of the course material *whether or not you agree with it*.

Auditors: I would like auditors to participate in the weekly writing exercises for the weeks they will attend, so that everyone in the room is on equal footing. If I grant you permission to audit, you are bound by the same etiquette rules as the enrolled students.

How to Interpret McGill's Inflated Graduate-Level Grades:

- A: Good work
- A-: Satisfactory
- B+: There is a problem with what you submitted
- B: There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
- B-: Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
- C+ or lower: Officially considered a "fail" by the Graduate Studies Office.

In rare cases, if your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, I may ask you to do it again.

You must complete all the major assignments to pass the course.

Late term papers may not receive written comments and will earn a reduced grade (one increment of letter grade for the first two days, then an increment per day, including weekends). Late weekly papers will not be useful for class and will receive a diminished grade immediately.

Activities for which you must be present cannot be made up.

It is your responsibility to make sure I receive any assignment you turn in.

It is also your responsibility to properly back up your work: keep more than one digital copy and always have a paper copy of anything you submit (files get corrupted, equipment gets stolen, etc). I recommend syncing your important documents to a cloud storage service.

The K contract: At McGill, grades of incomplete are called "K" grades and they are only supposed to be assigned after the student and professor have agreed upon a contract. I do not give incompletes ("K" grades) except in truly extraordinary personal circumstances that can be documented. K grades revert to "F" grades at the end of the next term unless a

contract extension is signed by both professor and student. Extensions also will not be granted except in truly extraordinary circumstances.

The Passive-Aggressive K: Should a student fail to turn in a final paper and fail to contact me well before my deadline for submission of grades, I will issue a K grade without a contract. Graduate studies, however, still expects a contract to be filed and it will be the student's responsibility to make sure one is submitted. In these circumstances, should the paper be completed at a later date, it will receive a mark. However, students who receive a "K" in this fashion will not be eligible to receive an "A" or "A-" for the course. I will not sign an extension for a K grade that was granted without a contract, and no late paper will be graded without a K contract being in place beforehand. I also cannot promise comments on a paper submitted after a passive-aggressive K.

Required Academic Integrity Statement: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

The Earliest Known Lolcat and Loldog

