

**Introduction to the History of Media  
HIST 200 / Fall 2019  
Tuesday / Thursday 2:30-3:45**

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**Office Hours By Appointment  
Regular hours TBD  
Room 304, University Club**

How have technologies and communication techniques shaped intellectual traditions, social interactions, political structures, and the most foundational senses of self? We will approach this from a historical perspective, looking at how media have developed and inflected the social world over the past centuries. But this is also a question that demands readings in philosophy, political science, and anthropology, as well as exploring our own experiences in the world around us, through self-reflection, play, and an artistic practice. We will bring this fundamentally interdisciplinary perspective to bear on four specific topics: language, text, and the book; sound, acoustics, and the record; image, painting, and the photograph; networks, the digital, and computers.

**Readings:** The readings are listed on the day that we will discuss them. All are available via PDF, which I will supply, or digitally through the UW Madison library portal. There are two books from which we will read substantial amounts, and I recommend you purchase them. They are:

Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*  
Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*

I have tried to make Thursday readings slightly shorter and/or less complicated, but sometimes it hasn't been possible, so please look ahead, consider your schedule, and plan accordingly. This class will be largely discussion based, and the more thought and effort you put into it, the more exciting it will be for everyone.

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As you read, it is important to make notes and highlight important passages. On one reading before each class, I would like you to write down three to four quotes as well as formulate one question. These are: **1)** a short passage (no more than three sentences), that in your opinion conveys the thesis, or main idea(s), of the text; **2)** a passage that complicates the main passage, adds nuance to it, expands it, or qualifies it; **3)** a passage that intrigued you, and made your mind shoot in an unlikely direction; **4)** a passage that you found unclear, confusing, or took you a while to figure out its meaning (some texts will be clear throughout, and in that case, you only need write down three passages; generally, however, you will find no dearth of difficult moments in the texts); and **5)** a question about the text that you would like to discuss further in class. I will send you a personal online document with the template; these notes will be due before noon on the day of class. Of the 24 class meetings, I ask you to post on a reading from at least 16.

**Participation:** I expect you all to attend class regularly, to come having read the material rigorously, and be prepared to discuss it in depth. If you receive more than one unexcused absence, your participation grade will be lowered.

## Assignments:

**Wikipedia Collaboration:** For this assignment, you will work in small groups, collaborating on faux Wikipedia pages (pages that only our class will have access to) revolving around topics discussed in the first unit of the course, "Language, Text, Books". Working in groups, you will be assigned one of three roles: webpage creator, who will author the initial page; critic, who will make edits offering a different perspective; or moderator, who will seek to create balance between the two conflicting opinions. Each group (webpage creators, critics and moderators) will communicate and debate with other groups via the discussion board of the Wiki, seeking to navigate the complexity of collaborating across differing opinions. More details on the assignment, as well as group assignments, will take place on September 24<sup>th</sup>; the assignment is due October 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Deep Listening and Recording:** For this assignment, you will pick a public place and listen. What do you hear? How does the space affect what you hear, and how do the sounds represent and shape the social situation around you? What do these sounds mean in this space? And how do the sounds change over the course of the day? I would like you to visit this space regularly, varying the times when you go, and observe how the sounds shift. With each visit, you will keep a journal, reflecting on the changes and subtleties you observe. Along with the journal, you will hand in an unedited 3-5 minute sound recording (made either with your phone, or with a sound recording device available at the Media Center on the second floor of the College Library), and two page statement explaining why you chose this particular time and style of recording. We will discuss in detail this assignment on October 8, and it will be due October 24.

**Aerial Investigation:** For this assignment, you will use GoogleMaps (or similar satellite imaging provider), to find a collection of aerial photographs that reveals new insights into industry, agriculture, social organization, the environment, or aspects of all these. We will look at various art works that have used these tools to capture expanses that often evade our intellectual comprehension. You will write an accompanying essay, between 3 and 5 pages, explaining the reasons for your decisions, and the meaning you hope will be conveyed by the images. Assignment will be discussed November 7 and will be due December 10.

## Grading:

Your final grade will comprise the following:

- Participation and Attendance: 20%
- Reading Posts: 20%
- Assignment 1: 20%
- Assignment 2: 20%
- Assignment 3: 20%

## Course Learning Outcomes

Students will...

- learn the way media emerges and shapes society
- understand the basic historiographic models for studying media
- develop critical media practices to engage with media both intellectually and artistically

### **Workload**

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), dedicated online time, reading, writing, field trips, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

### **Academic Integrity**

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Thursday, September 5 – Welcome and Introduction

### Language, Text, and the Book

#### On Language

Tuesday, September 10

Minae Mizumura, *The Fall of Language in the Age of English*, 47-102

Thursday, September 12

Jorge Luis Borges, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”: 1-4  
<https://ccrma.stanford.edu/courses/155/assignment/ex1/Borges.pdf>

Eduard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*: xi-xx, 120-129; and *Poetics of Relation*: 103-109

[https://monoskop.org/images/a/a5/Glissant\\_Eduard\\_Caribbean\\_Discourse.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/a/a5/Glissant_Eduard_Caribbean_Discourse.pdf)

<http://sideroom.org/o/wp-content/uploads/edouard-glissant-poetics-of-relation-1.pdf>

Tuesday, September 17

John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air*: 33-62

NOTE: The reading for this Tuesday is relatively short, and this Thursday is unusually long. Please use your extra time over the weekend to begin the Thursday reading early.

#### On the Printed Word and Print Cultures

Thursday, September 19

Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*: 3-101

Tuesday, September 24

Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book*: Pages 1-48

#### **Discussion of Assignment 1.**

Thursday, September 26

Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*: 1-68

Tuesday, October 1

Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*: 69-97; 125-163

### Sound, Acoustics, Record

#### On Acoustics, Space, and Listening:

Thursday, October 3

Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, “Ancient Acoustic Spaces,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*: 186-196

Michel Chion, “Three Listening Modes”, in *The Sound Studies Reader*: 48-53

Two Articles on Bioacoustics:

Erica Gies, “What a Healthy Jungle Sounds Like,” (Scientific American)

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-a-healthy-jungle-sounds-like/>  
Adam Wernick, "Listening to Forests Could Aid Conservation Efforts Around the World," (PRI)  
<https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-03-15/listening-forests-could-aid-conservation-efforts-around-world>

## **ASSIGNMENT 1 COMPLETED BY END OF SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6**

Tuesday, October 8  
Emily Thompson, *Soundscape and Modernity* (excerpt, TBD)  
Listen in class: "I Am Sitting in a Room," by Alvin Lucier.  
**Discussion of Assignment 2.**

On sound communities  
Thursday, October 11  
Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New*: 25-86

Tuesday, October 15  
Charles Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (1-13; 33-35; 37-40; 69-74; 80-95)

On digital recording  
Thursday, October 17  
Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*: 7-17; 131-137; 148-183  
"The MP3 Is Officially Dead" (NPR)  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2017/05/11/527829909/the-mp3-is-officially-dead-according-to-its-creators>

## **Image, Painting, Photograph**

On the Stuff of Images  
Tuesday, October 22  
Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*: 1-27

Thursday, October 24  
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"  
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (excerpt TBD)

## **ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE FRIDAY OCTOBER 25**

On the Truth of Images  
Tuesday, October 29  
Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*: (excerpt TBD)

Thursday, October 31  
Daston and Galison, *Objectivity* (excerpt TBD)  
Claire Lehman "Color Goes Electric," in Canopy Canopy Canopy  
<https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/color-goes-electric/#title-page>

On the Power of Images

Tuesday, November 5

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*: 11-52

Discussion and viewing in class of Mishka Henner's Beef and Oil

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/jmv4ng/beef-and-oil-0003456-v19n12](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/jmv4ng/beef-and-oil-0003456-v19n12)

Thursday, November 7

Derek Gregory, "Drones and Death in the Borderland," in *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*: 25-58

Brandon Bryan, "Letter from a Sensor Operator," *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*: 315-323

**Discussion of Assignment 3.**

**Networks, Computing, Digital**

On Networks and Connections

Tuesday, November 12

James W. Carey, "Telegraph and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," 1-21.

Thursday, November 14

Tong Hui-Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (Excerpt)

On Two Theses Concerning the Origins of Computer Networks

Tuesday, November 19

Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World*: 1-74

Thursday, November 21

Fred Turner, "Machine Politics" (Harpers, January 2019)

On the Material and Labor of the Digital

Tuesday, November 26

Lisa Nakamura, "Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture," in *American Quarterly* (2014): 919-941

**Thanksgiving Break ☺**

Tuesday, December 3

Jenifer Gabry, *Digital Waste*: 1-17; 74-101

Thursday, December 5

Makeup Class

Tuesday, December 10

Makeup Class

**Assignment 3 due.**