Television and New Media (Spring 2024)

CIMS 1030|ARTH 1070 | COML 1031 | ENGL 1950
Instructor: Zane Griffin Talley Cooper
zane.cooper@asc.upenn.edu
Office hours by appointment (on Zoom)

Course Description

Media Technologies never quite remain fixed, they always co-emerge in their interactions with human actors, and debates erupt about whether their transformations are brought by technical innovations or shifts in socio-cultural usage patterns. We begin the course with some of these debates including arguments about the limitations of describing a particular technology as "new" or "digital." Is "new media" same as "digital media"? How and when do media become digital? What does digitization afford and what is lost as worlds become digitized? As lots of things around us turn digital, have we started telling stories, sharing experiences, and replaying memories differently? Does digitization transform television, earlier construed as a broadcast medium, into a network or a post- network medium? What role do algorithms and interfaces play in the success of Netflix?

Should we approach "television" as an industry and content provider or as a technology and set of audience relations? We discuss the history of television and how issues of race and gender have been entangled with televisual representations? Does digitization transform television, earlier construed as a broadcast medium, into a network or a post- network medium? What role do algorithms and interfaces play in the success of Netflix? While digital distribution platforms like Hulu and Amazon promise interactive and participatory forms of spectatorship, have they fundamentally changed televisual watching experience?

This is an introductory survey course and we discuss a wide variety of media technologies and phenomena that include: cloud computing, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, social media, distribution platforms, net neutrality and optical fiber cables. We will also explore possible media futures like virtual reality and ai-generated media.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown:

Participation in Class Discussions	15%
Posting Questions and Comments	10%
Comparative Thought Piece	30%
Mid-Term Exam	15%
Final Take Home Exam	30%

The Comparative Thought Piece involves a short essay (800-1000 words) you will write comparing two of your favorite/academic/insightful shows (one contemporary and another broadcast in 60s or 70s or 80s or early 90s). You will be comparing them for their genre, aesthetics (style), narrative, and also form/platform of TV consumption (analog/digital interfaces). This will be written in a semi-academic format, which will involve you assembling together personal anecdotes/experiences of watching the shows along with academic readings about these shows. You will be meeting with me at least once (over Zoom) to discuss your plan for the essay.

We will have a mid-term exam in the first half of the class. It will consist of 4-5 short answer questions (50-80 words each).

And finally, there will be a take home final exam, where you will be asked long-answer type answers to questions and given about a week to respond. Each question will have to be answered in about 400-600 words and you will have to answer 3 out of 5 such questions.

More specific instructions about these assignments shall follow.

NO REQUIRED BOOKS. ALL COURSE READINGS WILL BE ON CANVAS.

Course Protocol

Course assignments like leading discussion and posting discussion questions will start from Week 3 and not before. You will sign up for them in the first two weeks of class.

Discussion boards can sometimes feel awkward and forced, so in this class we will use Slack instead of Canvas for online discussions. For each week, some students (based on signup sheet) will be assigned to post questions in our class Slack group. Responses to these questions can be uploaded by students and instructor through written comments. Slack comments are especially encouraged for those students who for some reason have not been able to attend the class session for that week.

On ChatGPT, Generative AI, and the like: OK, AI is out there. I know. As this is a Media Studies course, I am not against you exploring generative AI as a way to help you generate ideas. And we will talk about AI in this class, and learn a bit about how to critically engage with these technologies. However, you cannot, under any circumstances, use AI-generated text in any of your final writing unless you directly analyze the AI-generated text you produce. AI is cool and a new frontier in media and all that, but using it to cheat or because you're lazy doesn't help you, and also I WILL KNOW. Instead, let's dive into what AI is, how we can better understand it as a media technology, and how we can use it for new and awesome things.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 24)
Syllabus Discussion and WTF is "Media" anyway?
Read BEFORE class:
- Lisa Parks, "Field Mapping: What is the "Media" of Media Studies," *Television and New Media*

Week 2 (Jan. 31)
Understanding Media
- Marshall McLuhan, Excerpts from *Understanding Media*
- Raymond Williams, Excerpts from *Television*
- New York Times, "McLuhan Disciples Crowding the Web" https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/cyber/techcol/060997techcol.html

Week 3 (Feb. 7)
New Media is Old Media is New Media
- Wendy Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or The Future is a Memory," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, Implications*
- Doron Galili, Excerpts from *Seeing By Electricity: The Emergence of Television, 1878-1939*
- (skim): Donald F. McLean, "Before "true television": investigating john logie baird's 1925 original television apparatus"
- Suggested: Mara Mills, "The Audiovisual Telephone: A Brief History

Screening: A selection of early television broadcasts

Week 4 (Feb. 14)
TV: Situation Comedy, Gender, and the Fantasy of the American Family
- Grace Lavery, Excerpts from *Closures: Heterosexuality and the American Sitcom*
- Kimberly Walsh et al. "Beauty and the Patriarchal Beast: Gender Role Portrayals in Sitcoms Featuring Mismatched Couples," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*
- Bonnie Dow, "Hegemony, Feminist Criticism, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*

Screening: Clips from *Father Knows Best* (CBS/NBC, 1954-1963), *Honeymooners* (CBS, 1955-56), *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989-present), and *Kevin Can F**k Himself* (AMC, 2021-2023)
- THOUGHT-PIECE RUBRIC DISCUSSION

Week 5 (Feb. 21)
TV: Race and Intersectionality on American Televison
- Herman Gray, "Television, Black Americans, and the American Dream"
- Maureen Ryan, "*Lost* Illusions: The Untold Story of the Hit Show's Poisonous Culture," *Vanity Fair*
- Sarah Moon Cassinelli, " "If we are Asian then we are funny?" Margaret Cho's All-American Girl as the First (and Last?) All Asian-American Sitcom"

Screening: CBS January 1985 special report *The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America*, clips from *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), *Beef* (2023), *Abbott Elementary* (ABC, 2021-present)

Week 6 (Feb. 28)
TV: Transnational Television from K-dramas to Nordic Noir
- Anna Christina Pertierra and Graeme Turner, "Television and the Nation"
- Dal Yong Jin & Tae-Jin Yoon, "The Korean Wave: Retrospect and Prospect," *International Journal of Communication*
- Delphine Letort, "Adapting Nordic Noir: From *Forbrydelsen* to *The Killing*," in *Noir in the North: Genre, Politics, and Place*

Screening: *Squid Game* (S. Korea) / *Squid Game: The Challenge* (US), *Forbrydelsen* (Denmark) / *The Killing* (US)

Week 7 (Mar. 6)
SPRING BREAK! YAY!

Week 8: (Mar. 13)
TV → New Media: Infrastructures and Geographies of Distribution
- Excerpts from Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual*
- Daniel Chamberlain, "Scripted Spaces: Television Interfaces and the Non-places of

Asynchronous Entertainment," in *Television as Digital Media*
- Excerpts from Ramon Lobato, *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*

Screening: Clips from *Our World* (BBC, 1967)

- TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM POSTED (DUE THE FOLLOWING WEEK)

Week 9 (Mar. 20)
- Make individual zoom appointments during class time to discuss **Thought Piece Assignment**
- TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM DUE

Week 10 (Mar. 27)
Where/What is New Media
- Excerpts from Xiaowei Wang, *Blockchain Chicken Farm*
- Shannon Mattern, "Cloud and Field," *Places Journal*
- (skim) Excerpts from Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*

Screening: Clips from Rithy Panh, *The Land of Wandering Souls*

Week 11 (Apr. 3)
Social Networks, Ad-tech, and the Rise of the Surveillance Economy
- Selections from Tim Hwang, *Subprime Attention Crisis: Advertising and the Time Bomb at the Heart of the Internet*
- Mark Andrejevic and Mark Burdon, "Defining the Sensor Society"
- Lisa Parks, "Cover Your webcam: Unencrypting Laura Poitras' Citizenfour," *Film Quarterly*

Screening: *Citizenfour* (Laura Poitras, 2014)

Week 12 (Apr 10)
Platforms, Algorithms, Infrastructures
- Plantain et al. "Infrastructure studies meet Platform Studies in the age of Google and Facebook," *New Media & Society*
- Erin Greer, "Wages for Face-Work: *Black Mirror*'s "Nosedive" and Digital Reproductive Labor," *Camera Obscura*
- Cory Doctorow, "The Enshittification of Tik-Tok," *Wired*

Screening: Clips from "Nosedive," *Black Mirror*, Season 3, Episode 1

Week 13 (Apr. 17)
Death of/and Social Media
- Excerpts from Tamara Kneese, *Death Glitch: How Techno-Solutionism Fails Us in This Life and Beyond*
- Ian Bogost, "The Age of Social Media is Ending: It Should Never Have Begun," *The Atlantic*
- Eyal Weizman, "Becoming Digital," *eFlux*

Guest Speaker: Tamara Kneese

Week 14 (Apr. 24)
Artificial Intelligence, Labor, and the Automation of Creativity
- David Gray Widder & Dawn Nafus, "Dislocated accountabilities in the "AI supply chain": Modularity and developers' notions of responsibility," *Big Data & Society*

- Brian Merchant, "The writers' strike was the first workplace battle between humans and AI. The humans won," *Los Angeles Times*
- Eryk Sylvaggio, "How to Read an AI Image."

<u>Screening:</u> "Sarah Palin Forever" (dir. Eryk Sylvaggio), selection of AI-generated media
<u>Possible Guest Speaker</u>: Eryk Sylvaggio or Dawn Nafus (depending on availability)
- THOUGHT PIECE ASSIGNMENT DUE

Week 15 (May 1)
Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, "Spatial Computing," and Other Possible Screen Futures
- Excerpts from Lisa Messeri, *In the Land of the Unreal: Virtual and Other Realities in Los Angeles*
- Paul Murray, "Who is still inside the metaverse? Searching for friends in Mark Zuckerberg's deserted fantasyland"

<u>In Class</u>: Lecture and VR demonstrations from the Annenberg Virtual Reality Collective
- TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM POSTED (DUE THE FOLLOWING WEEK)

Week 16 (May 8)

FINAL EXAM SUBMISSION

——END OF CLASS——

(SAD!)