Instructor Information

Instructor: Caetlin Benson-Allott  
Office Location: 322 New North  
E-mail: cb529@georgetown.edu  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00 – 4:00pm and by appointment

Course Information

Screening Location: New South Film Screening Classroom  
Screening Times: Mondays 8:00 – 10:00pm as noted  
Seminar Location: New South Film Screening Classroom  
Seminar Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30 – 10:45am  
Prerequisites: none

Course Description/Overview

This course explores the impact of communications technology on US cultural politics, focusing on the period between electronic industrialization through Web 2.0. This is not a class in the history of technological development, however; rather it is a historiography, a study of how we obtain and transmit historical knowledge. Thus we will interrogate how different groups produce, assimilate, and historicize media forms. We will study how media history gets written, by whom, and in the service of what intellectual traditions or commercial interests. In order to destabilize assumptions of progress—the cult of the “new and improved”—we will explore the design and reception of media technologies in reverse chronological order and through five thematic matrices: interactivity, screen and visual culture, distance, copyright and control, and material embodiment. I selected these themes to reflect some of the most dynamic debates in new media studies today, but they are not the only stories scholars could or do tell about media history. For that reason, this class will culminate with each student producing her or his own “Alternative History,” a new approach to understanding the cultural history of a media technology. We will study a wide range of media inventions in this course, from the telegraph to the television, the cyborg to the telephone operator, and continuously challenge our historical interpretations of them as we question the role communications technologies play in shaping our perceptions of ourselves and our world.
Course Goals

“Histories of New Media” is designed to introduce you to the field of new media studies—and also to make you question what we mean by new media. It will also help you develop the following faculties:

1. Understand media technologies in an historical continuum shaped by cultural, political, and industrial forces
2. Analyze the representation of media technologies in cultural discourse and artistic productions as well as their role in shaping such expression
3. Develop critical arguments about media technologies, media industries, media productions, and media criticism that you express through conversation, formal and informal writing assignments, and research projects
4. Interact with media technologies as historical forces shaping human interpretations of self and society over the past 120 years (and long before that)

Course Resources

Course Website

• Blackboard - https://campus.georgetown.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp

Required Course Texts

• Course readings available on Blackboard
• Films on reserve in the Gelardin Media Center, Lauinger Library
  (see schedule below)

Course Assignments and Grading Scheme

Course Assignments

• Seminar Participation: On Tuesdays and Thursdays, our class is devoted to talking through the assigned readings and screenings in order to work collectively toward our course goals. I expect you to come to class with observations about the assigned material and to be willing to share them with the class. In exchange, I will make sure this classroom is a safe space where everyone’s ideas are respected and developed. **Attendance is mandatory. I also require everyone to come to my office hours at least once over the course of the semester.** Office hours are an important component of your educational experience at Georgetown; they are your opportunity to address your interests and concerns to your instructor and for your instructor to get to know you as an individual. Therefore I consider them an integral part of our course. If you have a conflict with my regularly scheduled office hours, please email me. I would be happy to set up another time to talk (10%).
• Techno-memoir (3 pages): This course is premised on the assumption that our interactions with media technologies change who we understand ourselves to be and how we understand the world we live in. With that in mind, I would like you to write about a formative interaction you have had with a new media technology. For this essay, I would prefer that you write about hardware—a particular technology
or platform—so that you can describe how the design and function of the object changed your interpretation of yourself, someone else, or the culture you grew up in (10%).

- Midterm: Through short-answer and essay questions, the midterm exam will ask you to make connections between units and between course materials not currently paired on the syllabus. Its form is designed to encourage critical thinking and provide practice for your Alternative History Essay while also evaluating your mastery of course materials (25%).

- Alternative History Essay (7-8 pages): As I mention in the course description, there are many, many themes one could trace to better understand the cultural history of media technologies. They might focus on gender and sexuality, ethnicity and national identity, marketing and consumerism, or issues of economic and geographic access. They might trace a figure, like the cyborg, or a theme, like cyberpunk. They might cover decades or a few years. In your alternative history essay, I will ask you to use materials from this course as a jumping off point to craft a new history of new media. These essays should incorporate at least three class sources and three original sources and make an interpretive argument about them that broadens the reader’s understanding of the impact of media technologies on human perception (30%).

- Weekly Blog or Final Exam: The purpose of this assignment is to evaluate your engagement with course materials. We will discuss the merits and limits of blogs and final exams together on the first day of class and decide collectively which better assesses your mastery of course material (25%).

### Grading System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Numeric Scale</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95 - 100</td>
<td>Outstanding/Superlative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>Pretty Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>Above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>Below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>Inferior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-64</td>
<td>Failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For a more detailed description of how these expectations apply to formal essays, see the grading rubric attached to this syllabus.*

### Late Assignments

Forty-eight hour extensions on essays and blog posts may be granted if they are requested at least forty-eight hours in advance. There will be no extensions on exams.
Course Policies

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date noted in the course schedule.

You are expected to attend all scheduled screenings and seminar meetings. Attendance will be taken when class starts, and your final grade will reflect your attendance record. Every student will be granted **two absences per semester** (including sporting events, illnesses, and extra-curricular commitments). Thereafter your participation grade will be lowered by one third of a grade for each absence. If special circumstances arise, please email or speak to me as soon as possible.

_Please note that you will need to take notes during all screenings. I implore you: please do not find out the hard way that watching a film for fun is different than watching a film for class. You need to record your observations about images and sounds as them happen, or it will be very hard to describe this audio-visual evidence convincingly later on. In addition, please note that some of the films we will be screening this semester contain graphic representations of violence or sexual activity; some were rated R upon original release. If this presents a problem for you, I would like to address it, but you must speak with me about your concerns before the end of the first week of class._

Course Expectations

- I expect you to
  - Be on time to class, attend all class meetings, and attend office hours at least once over the course of the semester.
  - Do all of the readings assigned for each class meeting.
  - Participate actively in discussions. To do this, you must bring to class your questions, ideas, and a copy of each assigned reading in the format you find most conducive for taking notes.
  - Check in regularly on our Blackboard site for course readings, assignments, and announcements.

- You can expect me to
  - Respond to emails within 24 hours.
  - Provide detailed feedback on your essays and ideas. If you’d like more feedback on any of the work you do for this course, please come see me in office hours.
  - Hold regular office hours that are reserved for you.

_Last but not least, please note that cell phones, PDAs, tablets, and laptops will not be allowed in screenings. You may use your laptop to take notes in seminar until and unless it distracts you, other students, or your instructor from participating fully. At that point, I will require that you leave your computer at home for the rest of the semester._

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct, a.k.a. plagiarism, a.k.a. submitting someone else’s work as your own, will not be tolerated in this class and will result in course failure or worse. For a more detailed
explanation of Georgetown’s Academic Integrity Policy, see http://www.library.georgetown.edu/tutorials/academic-integrity/refresher-tipsheet. For the complete Georgetown Honor Code, see http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/.

**Academic Resource Center**

If you are working with the Academic Resource Center for disability or academic support and require modification of seating, testing, or other course requirements, please see me during office hours to make appropriate arrangements. You can contact the ARC at (202) 687-8354 or http://ldss.georgetown.edu/ for more information.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1:** *Introduction*

**Th 8/29**  “1984” (Ridley Scott, USA, 1983) (in class)

“Big Brother” (Remo Camerota, 2009) (in class)

**Week 2:** *Interactivity*

**M 9/2**  LABOR DAY

**Tu 9/3**  The Wilderness Downtown

<TheWildernessDowntown.com>

Manovich, “What New Media Is Not”

**Th 9/5**  *Limbo* — Please download the game demo and play for an hour or until you reach the end <www.limbogame.org>

Gazzard, “Unlocking the Game World”

Smuts, “Are Video Games Art?”

Grodal, “Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles”

**Week 3:** *Interactivity*

**M 9/9**  no screening

**Tu 9/10**  CLASS TRIP TO THE CARROLL PARLOR (HEALEY 107)

Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

**Th 9/12**  Clip: *The Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934) (DVD 1994) (in class)

Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

**Week 4:** *Screens and Visual Culture*

**M 9/16**  *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, USA, 2005) (DVD 1519)

*Technomemoir due*

**Tu 9/17**  Manovich, “The Database”

**Th 9/19**  *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, France, 1962) (DVD 3057) (in class)

Schefer, “On *La Jetée*”
**Week 5:** Screens and Visual Culture

*M 9/23*  
*Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929) (DVD 1978)

*Tu 9/24*  
Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”
Vertov, Manifestos

*Th 9/26*  
“L’arrivée d’un train” (August Lumiere, France, 1895) (DVD 3421) (in class)  
“Fred Ott’s Sneeze” and “Rice-Irwin Kiss” (William Heise, USA, 1894, 1896) (DVD 4736) (in class)  
Baron, “The Cybernetic Logic of the Lumière Actualities, 1895-1897”

**Week 6:** Screens and Visual Culture

*M 9/30*  
GUEST LECTURE: OLIVER GAYKEN, TIME AND LOCATION TBA

*Tu 10/1*  
Bazin, “Science Film: Accidental Beauty”

*Th 10/3*  
**Midterm exam**

**Week 7:** Distance

*M 10/7*  
*Catfish* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, USA, 2010) (DVD 8064)

*Tu 10/8*  
Boyd and Ellison, “Social Networking Sites”
Albrechtslund, “Online Social Networking”
Foucault, Selection from *Discipline and Punish*

*Th 10/10*  
Clip: *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, #1 (Burns and Allen, USA, 1950) (DVD TBA) (in class)  
Spigel, “The Suburban Home Companion”

**Week 8:** Distance

*M 10/14*  
**COLUMBUS DAY**

*Tu 10/15*  
Wilson, “Sparks”
Kipling, “Wireless”
Covert, “We May Hear Too Much’: American Sensibility and the Response to Radio, 1919-1924”

*Th 10/17*  
Peters, “The Telephonic Uncanny and the Problem of Communication”

**Week 9:** Distance

*M 10/21*  
no screening

*Tu 10/22*  
The Once and Future Web  
Winston, “The Telegraph”

**Th 10/24**  *The Lonedale Operator* (D. W. Griffith, USA, 1911) (DVD 1526, pt. 2) (in class) Jepsen, “My Sisters Telegraphic”

**Week 10:** *Copyright and Control*

**M 10/28** no screening — Please post one and watch three additional videos from our course archive of YouTube clips on BlackBoard

**Tu 10/29** “The Corruptibles” (Electronic Frontier Foundation, USA, 2008) (in class)
Hilderbrand, “YouTube: Where Cultural Memory and Copyright Converge”
Juhasz, “Learning from YouTube”
<http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/>

**Th 10/31** Phone Story <http://www.phonestory.org/> Wortham, “Game that Critiques Apple...”
Thomas, “Innovation, Piracy, and the Ethos of New Media”
Godwin, *What Every Citizen Should Know about DRM*

**Week 11:** *Copyright and Control*

**M 11/4** *Y tu mama también* (Alfonso Cuarón, Mexico, 2001) (DVD 775)

**Tu 11/5** Benson-Allott, “Sex Versus the Small Screen”
Guins, “Introduction” and “Sanitizing”

**Th 11/7** Guins, “Cleaning”

**Week 12:** *Copyright and Control*

**M 11/11** no screening

**Tu 11/12** Selection from Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*
Selection from Alice Randall, *The Wind Done Gone*
*Sun Trust v. Houghton Mifflin*

**Th 11/14** Patterson, “Copyright in Historical Perspective”

**Week 13:** *Material Embodiment*

**M 11/18** *Paprika* (Satoshi Kon, Japan, 2006) (DVD 4009)

**Tu 11/20** Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto”

**Th 11/22** Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto”
Nakamura, “Cyberrace”
**Week 14:** Material Embodiment

*M 11/25*  
no screening

*Tu 11/26*  
Perlow, “On Production for Digital Culture”
Perlow, “Producing *The Simpsons*”

*Th 11/28*  
THANKSGIVING

**Week 15:** Material Embodiment

*M 12/2*  
*Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, Japan, 1995) (DVD 309)

*Alternative History Essay Due*

*Tu 12/3*  
Freud, “The Uncanny”
Hoffman, “The Sandman”

*Th 12/5*  
Chun, “The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future is a Memory”

Wrap-Up

**FINAL EXAM: Thursday, December 19th, 9:00-11:00am, Location TBA**
**Persuasive Essay Rubric**  
*Heidi Goodrich Andrade*  
**Rubrics and Self-Assessment Project, Harvard University**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D-F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The claim</strong></td>
<td>I make a claim and explain why it is controversial.</td>
<td>I make a claim but don’t explain why it is controversial.</td>
<td>My claim is buried, confused and/or unclear.</td>
<td>I don’t say what my argument or claim is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons in support of the claim</strong></td>
<td>I give clear and accurate reasons in support of my claim.</td>
<td>I give reasons in support of my claim but I may overlook important reasons.</td>
<td>I give 1 or 2 weak reasons that don’t support my claim and/or irrelevant or confusing reasons.</td>
<td>I do not give convincing reasons in support of my claim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons against the claim</strong></td>
<td>I discuss the reasons against my claim and explain why it is valid anyway.</td>
<td>I discuss the reasons against my claim but leave some reasons out and/or don’t explain why the claim still stands.</td>
<td>I say that there are reasons against the claim but I don’t discuss them.</td>
<td>I do not acknowledge or discuss the reasons against the claim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>My writing has a compelling opening, an informative middle and a satisfying conclusion.</td>
<td>My writing has a beginning, middle and end. It marches along but doesn’t dance.</td>
<td>My writing is organized but sometimes gets off topic.</td>
<td>My writing is aimless and disorganized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice and tone</strong></td>
<td>It sounds like I care about my argument. I show how I think and feel about it.</td>
<td>My tone is OK but my paper could have been written by anyone. I need to tell more about how I think and feel.</td>
<td>My writing is bland or pretentious. There is either no hint of a real person in it or it sounds like I’m a fake.</td>
<td>My writing is too formal or too informal. It sounds like I don’t like the topic of the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word choice</strong></td>
<td>The words I use are striking but natural, varied and vivid.</td>
<td>I make routine word choices.</td>
<td>The words I use are often dull or uninspired or sound like I am trying too hard to impress.</td>
<td>I use the same words over and over and over and over. Some words may be confusing to a reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence fluency</strong></td>
<td>My sentences are clear, complete, and of varying lengths.</td>
<td>I have well-constructed sentences.</td>
<td>My sentences are sometimes awkward, and/or contain run-ons and fragments.</td>
<td>Many run-ons, fragments and awkward phrasings make my essay hard to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions</strong></td>
<td>I use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.</td>
<td>I generally use correct conventions. I have a couple of errors I should fix.</td>
<td>I have enough errors in my essay to distract a reader.</td>
<td>Numerous errors make my paper hard to read.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>