

Introduction to Digital Media Studies

MS 051 PZ – TR 12:45-2:00

Prof. Kouross Esmaeli

Pitzer College – Spring 2021

This course is an introduction to digital media as we focus on the media's technological, cultural, political, and economic aspects. Doing so requires students to grasp the importance of a historical understanding of the topics at hand in the context of the contradictory and contested values of contemporary society. We will employ diverse methods and theories in order to explore: 1- the role of digital technologies in our public sphere; 2- the ways in which digital circulation of media texts affects their meaning; and 3- the role of digital media in the constructions of our individual and collective selves. The fundamental objective of the class is to promote the students' critical thinking abilities about the media technologies around them. This form of critical approach aims to broaden our notions of what counts—conceptually and geographically—in grasping the new regimes of circulation, power, and resistance enabled by digital technologies.

Course Objectives:

- To study the culture of contemporary society through analysis of diverse media and media practices
- To familiarize ourselves with the main texts and arguments of theories of media and digital technologies
- To describe and analyze the roles of states, media organizations, and other key institutions in producing and circulating media
- To develop skills for writing analytically and critically

Course Materials Required Text:

All course material will be posted on Sakai, emailed or handed out in class

Course Work and Evaluation:

Attendance – 10%

Participation – 10%

Keyword Presentation – 15%

Response Papers & Quizzes – 15%

Midterm Exam – 25%

Final Exam – 25%

Attendance & Participation:

You will need a computer or other device with good internet connectivity to view streaming video and read online documents and books. Attendance in class means being present on the Zoom app at the required time with your audio AND video turned on.

This course uses the **Pacific Time Zone** (PST) for all times and deadlines. If you are in another time zone, please plan accordingly.

Late arrivals are discouraged. Three (3) late arrivals will count as an unexcused absence.

Three unexcused absences will lower your overall course grade by 5%

Five unexcused absences will lower your overall course grade by 10%

Missing more than five classes will result in an F and I will ask you to withdraw from the class.

If you have a legitimate excuse to miss class or be late, you need to share that with me BEFORE class. The only reason for you to miss class without telling me is in the case of an emergency for which you need a note from doctor, dean or advisor. If you do miss a class for any reason, you need to turn in a discussion paper of the assignments for that session within a week of your absence. If you do not turn in this discussion assignment, you will lose one point on your participation grade. The guidelines for the discussion paper is the same as the discussion paper.

This class will be structured primarily through short lectures. However, all lectures will be followed by class discussion and I will call on students to speak and answer questions. The quality of the discussion rests squarely on your preparation. The readings are relatively short because I want you to read them and have an understanding of them before class. Because your active participation in discussion is the cornerstone of the class discussion, you should come prepared to ask questions and to air your thoughts. Being prepared for class includes how carefully you have read and thought about the readings, and how often you ask and answer questions and make relevant comments. You are encouraged to either print out the texts or to read them on your computer or tablet [please do not read the texts on your phone, as this will not allow for the kind of textual and intellectual engagement required for class discussion].

Midterm & Final Exams

The midterm and final exams will be administered remotely and will be a combination of short and long response questions.

Please be advised that no late work will be accepted, and no exam will be rescheduled without a preceding agreement with me. Delayed due dates will be rare, authorized only under truly justified circumstances (which will be defined as such only by me).

Response Papers & Quizzes will be announced throughout the semester as deemed necessary by me. Most will be announced, some may not be.

Keyword Presentations: For our final week of the semester, you will each choose a word that you think was a key concept for the course. You will prepare a 2-3 minute presentation on your keyword that defines the term for the class, gives at least one example, and explain why it is an important concept for media studies.

Miscellaneous:

As in all of your courses, good faith, respect and trust are crucial to enabling class discussion. The ideas and concepts we'll be discussing may challenge or conflict with our commonly held beliefs and perspectives. Such challenges should not be construed as value judgments nor should anything discussed in class be construed as a personal offense. Our goal (and that of the university more generally) is to get us thinking critically about the things we often take for granted and to enable us to support our beliefs intelligently and thoughtfully. If you experience any discomfort with material discussed in class, please talk with me directly, and we'll work together to resolve the situation effectively

Grading Scale:

94-100	A	77-79.99	C+	60-63.99	D-
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90-93.99	A-	74-76.99	C	0-59.99	F
87-89.99	B+	70-73.99	C-		
84-86.99	B	67-69.99	D+		
80-83.99	B-	64-66.99	D		

Readings are listed on the day they are **due**.

This schedule is subject to change. I will add and subtract readings based on how our conversation develops. I may also shift due dates as seems appropriate although I will never move a due date up without full agreement on the part of the class. You will be responsible for any changes to the readings or due dates that are announced in class or via email. An up to date version of the schedule will also be available on Canvas.

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Tuesday January 26 Introductions

Thursday January 28 The Debate over Technology

- Raymond Williams, *Television*
- Neil Postman, "Now...This" in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

WEEK 2 DIGITAL MEDIA

Tuesday February 2

- Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction" *Always Already New*
- John Durham Peters, "Mass Media"

Thursday February 4

- Marshall McLuhan, Mechanization/Automation (30 pages)

WEEK 3 INFORMATION/TECHNOLOGY

Tuesday February 9

- Robert St. Amant, "From Mechanical to Electronic Computers"
- Jonathan Sterne, "Analog"

Thursday February 11

- Lisa Nakamura, "Indigenous Circuits"
- Daniela Posner, <http://www.danielarosner.com/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WdGKnppH6U>

WEEK 4**PUBLIC SPHERE**

Tuesday February 16

- Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere"
- Guy-Uriel Charles, Luis Fuentes-Rohwer "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and the Creation of a Racial Counterpublic" <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=mjrl>

Thursday February 18: Digital Public Sphere

WEEK 5**NETWORK**

Tuesday February 23

- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, selections
- Jessica Feldman, "Strange Speech"

Thursday February 25

- BLM movement building

Week 6:**DESIGN**

Tuesday March 2

- Vilem Flusser, "About the word Design"
- Langdon Winner, "Do Artefacts Have Politics?"

Thursday March 4

- Reed Berkowitz, "[QAnon, A Game That Plays People](#)"
- Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, Chapter 4, "The House that Fox Built"

Week 7:**SPRING BREAK****Week 8:****ALGORITHM**

Tuesday March 16

Week 12

REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

Tuesday April 13:

- Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other"

Thursday April 15

- Humdog aka Carmen Hermosillo, "Pandora's Vox: On Community in Cyberspace"
- Wendy Chun, Chapter 3 "Anthem Ad"

Week 13:

IDEOLOGY

Tuesday April 20

- Watch: Zizek on Ideology <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVwKjGbz60k>
- Slavoj Žižek; "Network" entry in *Keywords for Media Studies*

Thursday April 22

- Hanna and Brennan, "[Big Tech Public Ownership Surveillance Capitalism and Platform Corporations](#)", *Jacobin*, December 2020

Week 14:

AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

Tuesday April 27

- Deleuze, "Postscript on the Society of Control"
- Peter Woodbridge, [Deleuze's Postscript on the Society of Control](#)

Thursday April 29

- Sara Hendren, *What a Body Can Do*
- Hito Steyrl, "[In Defense of the Poor Image](#)," *e-flux*, 2009, "Too Much World"

Week 15:

KEYWORDS PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday May 4:

Thursday May 6: