CSCL 1202W: Media

Course Description:

We often talk about “new media,” and the “mediated” environment in which we live. We complain about “the media” and its biases. Artists describe themselves as working within a specific “medium” (painting, sculpture, novels, video, etc.) But to what, precisely, do these terms refer? This course provides an introduction to the concepts of “medium” and “media” from a critical and philosophical perspective. In this course we will favor “deep cuts” over comprehensive knowledge; our focus will be on short but challenging texts and objects that require critical thinking and careful discussion. This course is also writing intensive; the submission of well-written, thoughtful papers will be crucial to your successful completion.

We begin with a philosophical question central to the study of human culture, technology, and society: What is a tool, and how can it serve as a medium for action, communication, and expression? Who makes it and how do we share it? Does it have power? How is it part of a system? We will then turn to a set of historically significant media apparatuses that dramatically altered the transmission and reception of words, images and sounds: the printing press, the phonograph, radio, amplification, photography, and techniques of the moving image. We will develop a technical understanding of the inventions themselves while placing them in dialogue with different (and often competing) interpretations and explanations forwarded by historical, philosophical, and literary writers. Our aim is to think critically about the ways these apparatuses frame, condition, and reproduce objects for our senses, and how they are imbricated with society, culture, and relationships of power.

In the second half of the course, we will shift our focus to the modern media age since World War II, one that has seen the rise of television, Hollywood, the record industry, the modern news media, corporate media conglomerates, and the internet. We will approach this modern “culture industry” by way of a critical orientation towards the media’s relationship to capitalism, imperialism, state propaganda, and corporate power, as well as the reproduction of inequality and unevenness. We will also focus attention on the recent media of the digital age, though without assuming “new media” to be entirely “new,” or a stable, knowable object. Rather, we will approach contemporary problems in light of historically relevant economic, political, cultural, and geographic systems. While the course will feature a substantial amount of theory, the particularity of various objects will be as important to our approach as the power of ideas. We
will explore a variety pamphlets, newspapers, television shows, radio broadcasts, podcasts, pirate media, web art, and beyond.

CSCL 1202W fulfills the Liberal Education core in Arts and Humanities. A liberal education allows you to develop the broad array of knowledge and skills required to successfully navigate the complexities of a diverse and changing world. 1202W: Media (Word/Image/Sound) is designed to help you refine the writing, speaking and critical thinking skills necessary to be informed citizens and active participants in ongoing debates about the role of media and technology in the context of a complex global society. In this course students will develop a sophisticated and well-informed understanding of modern media through 1) a rigorous foundation in the philosophical questions central to media studies 2) historically-grounded knowledge of the science, engineering, and social context that pertain to an array of media apparatuses, and 3) practical exercises in the critical analysis of expressive objects, texts, and case studies produced across the media of word, sound, and image.

As you will soon see, the “meaning” of a given media text will depend on the questions you ask, which is to say the questions the course will provoke you to ask. These derive from the four perspectives that matter most in the field of cultural studies: aesthetics (questions of form, content, affect, and structure), society (questions of subjectivity and difference, including race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, etc.), history (all texts, including theory, both shape and are shaped by their historical moments; nothing made by humans exists outside of time), and politics (struggles for power, justice, equality, and the persuasive and ideological uses of media).

Above all, we will step back and examine the kinds of knowledge that emerge from this complex approach to the study of media and we will reflect upon its relative value and its role in creating us as individuals, scholars, and citizens—as active participants (rather than passive observers) in the world. This, in short, is the goal of Liberal Education. This course is open to undergraduate majors and non-majors; there are no prerequisites.

Student Learning Objectives
At the conclusion of this course you will be able to:

⇒ Approach media as a philosophical problem that has defined human culture, technology, and its societies from their origins;
⇒ Identify and critically evaluate the way words, images, and sounds of modern media are predicated upon historical apparatuses as well as enduring structures of power, economy, knowledge, and authority;
⇒ Develop a cross-disciplinary understanding of modern media through readings in philosophy, critical theory, media theory, literature, visual culture, sound studies and cultural history
⇒ Integrate theoretical knowledge from the course with the details of a particular case study in modern media by writing a formal essay

Required Readings
All readings are available on the course Moodle site through e-reserve.

Recommended Texts
1. A standard, unabridged English dictionary. The U of M also subscribes to a number of good on-line dictionaries, including the *OED* (Oxford English Dictionary). You can access these valuable resources at http://www.lib.umn.edu.

2. A book of MLA guidelines. All of the essays you write for this class must follow MLA rules for formatting text and documenting sources. You can find examples of MLA-formatted papers on the course Moodle site.

**Website**

You can find the course’s moodle site by clicking your “My Courses” tab at the “myU” page: http://myu.umn.edu. Bookmark this link because you will be visiting this site often. All assignment sheets and handouts are posted to the course website in PDF-format. If you misplace a copy of anything distributed in class, please consult the moodle site before asking the instructor or section leader for another copy.

**Lectures and Discussion Sections**

Each student in the course is required to attend two common seventy five-minute lecture sessions each week as well as a fifty-minute discussion section. Discussion sections are led by graduate student teaching assistants, who will foster small-group discussion of the theoretical concepts we cover during lecture and provide other examples of uses of the media apparatuses we study.

Please do feel free to speak up at the lectures—ask questions, make comments, offer your ideas—but it is especially important that you actively participate in the small group discussion sections (and this will comprise 15% of your grade). The course includes small-group experiences as mandated by the CLE. Discussion sections meet weekly to provide students with an opportunity to develop smaller and more intimate intellectual communities within the course. Group work is used to conduct writing workshops and close-reading assignments. Electronic forums allow students to collaborate and share ideas when class is not in session.

**Required Assignments**

**Exams.** There will be two exams over the course of the semester—a mid-term exam and a final exam. On these tests, you will be asked to answer multiple choice and short essay questions about the readings, lectures and keywords introduced in class. The exams are designed so that you will do well if you keep up with the readings, attend lecture and discussion sections, and actively engage the material.

**Critical Response Essays.** You will be required to write five critical response essays throughout the first half of the class. For each assignment, we will provide you with a detailed writing prompt asking you to formulate a critical response to a specific question. These papers will be 2-pages each. All papers should be typewritten and free of grammatical errors.
**Final Essay.** In the second half of the semester, you will be given a list of themes with suggested readings from which you can choose to write an analysis of a case study in modern media. In this paper, you will need to produce a close reading of a media text, explain its historical and ideological context, and incorporate critical readings into your analysis. You will have the opportunity to develop and workshop this paper in your discussion section. Two weeks prior to the end of the semester you will hand in a first draft of this essay. After having received comments from your discussion leader and classmates, you will submit a revised, final version to your instructor.

**Grading Breakdown**

Five Critical Response Essays, 2 pages each (30%)
Midterm Examination (15%)
Final Examination (15%)
Final Essay, 6-7 pages (25%)
Attendance/Participation (15%)

**Explanation of Grades**

Grading will follow the CLA grading standards, which are as follows:
A – achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
B – achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
C – achievement that meets the course requirements in every way
D – achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
F – unsatisfactory work that does not meet the course requirements

**Class Policies**

**Late Papers.** We will mark down paper grades one-half of a letter grade for each class day they are late. The only exceptions to this rule are documented death in the family or prolonged illness. If you know that you are going to miss class on a day that something is due, turn it in early. All assignments must be completed to pass this class.

**Incompletes.** Incompletes will be granted only in emergency circumstances. In order to receive an incomplete, we must agree upon its terms before the last day of classes.

**Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom:** No screens of any kind are allowed in the classroom by students. Cell phones, laptops, and all other electronic devices must be turned off and put away before the start of class. If you choose not to follow this protocol, you will be asked to leave class and will not receive credit for attendance for that day.

**Email:** Email should be used sparingly and for brief questions. If you are having difficulties understanding a concept, please visit our office hours. Before sending an email, make sure to consult the syllabus and the course Moodle site for answers to your questions.
Office Hours: The section leaders and I will always welcome you at our office hours should you have particular concerns, anxieties, questions, interesting or complex ideas you’d like to discuss, etc.

Attendance: It is critical that you attend class prepared to engage with the material. Much of our understanding of this material will come from class lectures and discussion. You are allowed three unexcused absences. Each absence you accrue thereafter will result in half a letter grade deduction from your final grade. If you must miss class, please consult another student to learn what you missed.

Plagiarism: You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. (Student Conduct Code: http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf) If it is determined that a student has cheated, he or she may be given an "F" or an "N" for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see: http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/INSTRUCTORRESP.html.

The Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty: http://www1.umn.edu/oscai/integrity/student/index.html.

Participation: In order to fully participate, you must prepare the readings before the class period for which they are due. Active participation requires that you turn off your cell phones, stay off of facebook and the internet, not read newspapers, and not distract your classmates by coming in late. If you engage in any of these practices, you will be asked to leave and will not receive attendance credit for that class. If this becomes a recurrent problem, disciplinary action will be taken. Participation will be taken into account when determining final grades.

Ethical Engagement: We will be discussing sensitive, political and controversial issues in class. If you are not prepared to do so, please find another course that suits you better. By enrolling in the course, you are agreeing to be respectful toward the classroom community.

Accessibility: If you have a condition that affects your ability to fully participate in class or to meet all course requirements, please speak with me immediately so that we can work together to arrange appropriate accommodations.

Disabilities: The University of Minnesota is committed to providing all students equal access to learning opportunities. Disability Services is the campus office that works with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. Students registered with Disability Services, who have a letter requesting accommodations, are encouraged to contact the instructor early in the semester. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability (e.g.
psychiatric, attentional, learning, vision, hearing, physical, or systemic), are invited to contact Disability Services for a confidential discussion at 612-626-1333 (V/TTY) or ds@umn.edu. Additional information is available at the DS website http://ds.umn.edu.

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING & CONSULTING SERVICES: As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu/.

STUDENT WRITING SUPPORT: This is an excellent free service for students that provides instruction in all aspects of the writing process: http://writing.umn.edu/sws/index.html
15 Nicholson Hall
Phone: 612-625-1893

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Please consult Board of Regents Policy: http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/humanresources/SexHarassment.html

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: The University will provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult Board of Regents Policy: http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/administrative/Equity_Diversity_EO_AA.html

FERPA DISCLAIMER: In this class, our use of technology will sometimes make students' names and U of M Internet IDs visible within the course website, but only to other students in the same class. Since we are using a secure, password-protected course website, this will not increase the risk of identity theft or spamming for anyone in the class. If you have concerns about the visibility of your Internet ID, please contact me for further information.
CALENDAR AND READINGS

I. Technics and Media

Week 1 (September 8 & 10)

Course Introduction

Lewis Mumford, “The Tool and the Object” from *Art and Technics* (1952)

Week 2 (September 15 & 17)

Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor” from *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message” from *Understanding Media* (1964)

Technics Paper Due [Friday, 5 p.m.]

II. Apparatuses

Words: Orality, Writing & Print

Week 3 (September 22 & 24)

Plato, *Phaedrus* (257c–279c) (370 BCE)
Walter Ong, “Introduction” and “The Modern Discovery of Primary Oral Cultures” from *Orality and Literacy* (1982)

Objects: pictographs, alphabets, hieroglyphs, ideographs, graffiti

Week 4 (September 29 & October 1)


Objects: movable type, the assembly line, the screw press, the hand mould, the bible, cookbooks, newspapers, the novel

Words Paper Due [Friday, 5 p.m.]
Sounds: Inscription & Amplification

Week 5 (October 6 & 8)

Thomas Edison, “Top Ten Uses for the Phonograph” (1878)
Franz Kafka, “Josephine the Singer, or the Mousefolk” (1924)

**Objects**: Edison’s “Mary Had A Little Lamb,” Alan Lomax’s field recordings, Secret Museum of Mankind field recordings, the stylus, Cros’s phonautograph, Berliner’s gramophone, player pianos

Week 6 (October 13 & 15)

Marshall McLuhan, “Radio: The Tribal Drum” (1964)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Chs. 1 & 2 (excerpt) (1845)

**Objects**: vacuum tubes vs. solid state, the carbon microphone, AM vs. FM, Hitler’s Speeches, Martin Luther King, “I Had a Dream” and “I've Been to the Mountaintop” / Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, “Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace”

**Sound Paper Due [Friday, 5 p.m.]**

Images: Still & Moving

Week 7 (October 20 & 22)

Edgar Allen Poe, “The Daguerreotype” (1840); Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” (1859); Charles Baudelaire, “The Modern Public and Photography” (1859)


**Objects**: camera obscura, the daguerreotype, exposure, shutter speed, color vs. black & white, Matthew Brady’s 1865 photographs of the American Civil War; Walker Evans, photographs from James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Polaroid
Week 8 (October 27 & 29)

Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage of Attractions” (1923)

Objects: Eadweard Muybridge, motion studies; the magic lantern, celluloid, the Kinetoscope; Eisenstein clips; The Honeymooners

Image Paper Due [Friday, 5 p.m.]

Week 9: Midterm Week (November 3 & 5)

Midterm Exam [November 3]

John Berger, Ways of Seeing [in-class screening] (1972)

Week 10: Mass Culture 1 (November 10 & 12)

Clement Greenberg, “The Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939)
Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered” (1967)

Objects: Weeds, “Opening Sequence,” “My Favorite Things” from The Sound of Music; McDonald’s “Big Mac”; Blin Donalts; Arnold Schoenberg, Erwartung; paintings by Jackson Pollock & Marc Rothko; works by Komar and Melamid

Week 11: Mass Culture 2 (November 17 & 19)

Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding” (1973)
Jean Baudrillard, “Astral America” from America (1986)

Objects: Disneyland; Los Angeles Freeways; Berger’s Images; Warhol; Death Valley

Mass Culture Paper Due [Friday, 5 p.m.]
Week 12: What We Mean By “The Media” (November 24)

Tom Fenton, “The Culture of Spin” from Bad News (2005)

Objects: Fox News vs. MSNBC, MTV, The Onion, The Daily Show

Week 13: Media Imperialism (December 1 & 3)

Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, How to Read Donald Duck (1971)

Objects: clips from Disney cartoons

[Final Paper Draft Due]

Week 14: Monopoly Markets (December 8 & 10)

Ben Bagdikian, “Uncommon Media for an Uncommon Nation” from The New Media Monopoly (1983)

Week 15: Media Convergence (December 15)


Final Exam: Final Exam: 1:30-3:30 p.m., Friday, December 18