LMC 6316 • Historical Approaches to Digital Media • Spring 2019

Class Meetings: T/Th   9:30-10:45am   Skiles 002
Professor Gregory Zinman: gzinman3@gatech.edu
Office Hours: Skiles 324, T/Th, 12am-1:30pm and by appointment
Class blog: http://blogs.iac.gatech.edu/histdm2019/

COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do we understand, and write about, our media past? What are the differences between a history of technology, and a technology of history? This course examines the connections between digital media and earlier media through various histories. The course will therefore explore the historical and material relationships between various forms of media, including cinema, digital art, the moving image online, videogames, multimedia, artificial intelligence, and smart cities. Students will consider concepts such as the relationship between analog and digital media technologies, as well as the shifting sites of production, distribution, and reception of digital media. By establishing a comparative approach to digital media's past and present, students will learn to consider the historical, social, and institutional forces that have engendered myriad forms of the digital media, discover the roots of our contemporary mediascape, and gain a greater understanding of digital media's place in culture and society. These relationships will be further addressed through the combination of close readings of media forms and artifacts with conceptual rubrics such as failure, obsolescence, mediatic death, glitch, intermedia, multimedia, remediation, medium specificity, and technological determinism. By the end of the course, students will be able to discuss and use several historiographic modes and put them to use in the historical, cultural, and material analysis of media—not to mention as inspiration and influence for media design, no matter the material.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

MS in Digital Media

1. Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate existing digital media histories, artifacts, and environments using formal knowledge, and to explain and defend one's critical evaluation.
2. Analysis: Can analyze digital media as historical and cultural objects
3. Evaluation: Can summarize their work orally and in written form using formal terminology.

PhD in Digital Media

1. Students have knowledge, comprehension and ability to apply historical concepts to the study of digital media.
2. Knowledge: Identify the historical and cultural roots of digital media through the study of earlier media forms.
3. Knowledge: Identify the major historical concepts contributing to scholarly discourse about the history of digital media.
4. Comprehension: Discuss and distinguish among historical contexts for and digital media.

READING
Required course texts are available via your favorite online book seller. Titles with an * are available as ebooks through the GaTech Library.

James Bridle, *The New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (New York: Verso, 2018)

*Noam Elcott, *Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

*Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

*Tung Hui-Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015)

Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wurtz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). [one copy available in the library]

Shannon Mattern, *Code + Clay, Data + Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2017). [available from the library via Emory]

*Zabet Patterson, *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art* (The MIT Press, 2015).

Joy Lisi Rankin, *A People's History of Computing in the United States* (Harvard University Press, 2018)

Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

All other readings will be available as .pdf files or web links on the SYLLABUS page of the class blog.

REQUIREMENTS
Attendance
You are allowed three absences. Beginning with the fourth absence, your overall course grade will be lowered by a full letter grade (e.g. A to B) for each unexcused absence. This means that if you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course.

Please be respectful to your fellow students and arrive on time. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, you will be considered absent for that class. If you absolutely must miss a class meeting, please contact me at least 24 hours in advance in order to make alternate arrangements.

All written work must be handed in/posted on time except in the case of serious illness, medical emergency, or some other compelling mitigating circumstance. Should you submit an assignment after the due date, your grade for that assignment will decrease by a full letter grade for each day that

it is late. Should you fail to submit an assignment entirely, you will receive an F on that assignment and, consequently, you will receive a lower grade for the course.

Participation
This course is designed as a seminar in which active participation from all students is necessary; the benefits of this class come from talking as much as listening. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in depth, and to devote engaged attention to classmates' contributions. "Participation" means: thoughtful contributions to the discussions in the classroom. You do not have to talk all of the time in class (nor should you), but you absolutely must speak up on a regular basis in order to receive an excellent participation grade. This goes for your participation online as well. Be a good colleague and engage with your fellow students—the idea is to learn from one another.

A large portion of your grade will be determined by your in-class participation and I encourage you to bring questions to class about the readings. Bring the week's readings to class with you. These will be discussed with respect and consideration by all members of the class. I want to be sure that this class is a space where everyone is comfortable when articulating concerns, struggles, and opinions without feeling bashful or under threat.

Reading Responses
• This is a seminar course. That means students will be expected to thoroughly read a lot of material each week. Every week, you will write a reading response of 300-500 words that you will post to the class blog by 5pm on Monday. Each entry must: (1) demonstrate having done the reading, (2) note particular topics and questions that you would like to discuss in class.

• REMEMBER TO **TAG** AND **CATEGORIZE** (Week) YOUR POSTS.

• Cite authors/page numbers where appropriate.

Questions to ask yourself as you are preparing your weekly written response:

1. What are some running themes or recurring concerns in these pieces?
2. What is the central argument?
3. How is that argument constructed? What is the methodology/approach to history employed?
4. Who/what is cited frequently—books, people, presses, and journals?
5. What historical or theoretical models do these authors find useful? What are the gaps in your own historical or theoretical training that you need to fill in order to read this work better?
6. What patterns, if any, do you notice? Where might you make an intervention?
7. Which authors and texts seem to be most central to a media studies canon?
8. What kinds of rhetorical *moves* do you notice these authors making? Do these moves change over time?
9. Are there particular passages that stand out to you? Can you offer a reading of one or more of these passages?
10. Can you articulate questions for further class discussion?
11. Can you offer an application of the reading to current Digital Media projects/objects, whether they're yours or someone else's? (Provide links if/when applicable).

- Remember the **"three yeses,"** an approach to reading that comes from literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak. The idea is that a proper critique consists in saying yes to the text three times. The first yes is to reading the text carefully and in full; the second yes is to reconstructing the argument on its own terms (without criticizing it for what you think it doesn't do, or what it silences, or what you think it is wrong about); the third yes is the hardest, and it is to taking the argument, on its own terms, as far as you can go with it, considering what it can do and what you can do with it (again, before and without attacking it for what it can't do). Spivak says that only after you have said yes to the text these three times, can you say a properly critical no to it, which is to say only then can you fully and rigorously elaborate the text's limits.

Presentations
Over the course of the semester, each student will be responsible for one presentation of the weekly readings. A signup sheet will circulate the first week of the course to determine the schedule of student presentations. Guidelines for presentations can be found on the PRESENTATIONS page of the class blog.

Final Projects
You will propose and prototype an example of obsolete media in digital form. This prototype will be accompanied by a high-quality historical essay on your chosen subject/object (approximately 2-4k words) that both incorporates the ideas of the class and extends your individual goals. Ideally, this assignment will result in a portfolio piece, or will act as a stepping stone to a larger research or design project.

We will devote time in class to developing, critiquing, and revising these works. The idea is to produce a project that can aid in your historical understanding of digital media. You will have benchmark assignments related to the project due every four weeks of the class.

Grading
Your grade for the course will be calculated as follows:
- Participation: 20%
- Weekly reading responses: 25%
- Presentations: 15%
- Final essay/project: 40%

A note on technology
Please silence your phone. Please do not text, IM, tweet, read the internet or play games during the seminar.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Violations of academic integrity will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty is not allowed in any form. Plagiarism (quoting, presenting, or paraphrasing someone else's ideas as if they were your own without appropriate footnote and bibliographic citation) is a serious academic offense and will result in a grade of F. Do not submit material found on websites or from online sources as your own – you *will* receive an F. Discussing and sharing your ideas with your classmates, peers, friends, etc. (live or online) is highly recommended; the work you turn in, however, must be of your own creation. If

you do not know how to properly cite sources in an academic paper, speak with your professor and/or a college librarian. In addition, any identified case of academic dishonesty will immediately be reported to the University.

For more information, please refer to the definition of "academic misconduct" included in the Georgia Tech honor code, available online at:
http://www.honor.gatech.edu/

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE
The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts supports the Georgia Institute of Technology's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in the broader society.

The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts enthusiastically embraces these values. We take as inherent in all that we do that our policies and practices will demonstrate respect for all human beings, regardless of how those people may differ. The rights of all people to function with dignity are crucial, whether we are interacting within this vibrant intellectual community or with others across our streets and around the globe. We recognize that engendering a spirit of inclusiveness and respect and creating, thereby, a climate in which we can all thrive requires each of us to be socially conscious and culturally well-informed, and to operate with a keen sense of ethical responsibility. We believe that, when we accept that human excellence has the capacity to emerge from many, many sources, a strong and enabling sense of community can be set in motion, a belief that makes quite real an enabling of our greatest expectations. At Georgia Tech and in the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, we expect high performance and world-class achievements in research, education, and public action, and we believe that with an inclusive culture, these expectations become, not just possible, but predictable and sustainable.

WRITING SUPPORT
The Georgia Tech communication center, CommLab, is open for undergraduate use. At CommLab, professional and peer tutors are available to work with you to improve your writing skills. More information, including instructions for how to set up an appointment via the website, is available here: http://www.communicationcenter.gatech.edu/

Phone: (404) 894-3805
Email: commlab@gatech.edu

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Students with disabilities should self-report to the Office of Disability Services:
https://disabilityservices.gatech.edu
Email: dsinfo@gatech.edu

SYLLABUS

Week 1 (January 8+10): Introduction
Andre Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," *What is Cinema*, 2 Volumes, trans/ed. Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 23-27.

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940).

Charles Musser, "Toward a History of Screen Practice," *Quarterly Review of Film Stu*dies Vol. 9, Iss. 1 (1984): 59-69.

Week 2 (January 15+17): The Digital's Ever-Present Past
<u>Tuesday:</u> Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), pp. 1-87

<u>Thursday:</u> Jentery Sayers, "Prototyping the Past," *Visible Language* 49.3, special issue, "Critical Making: Design and the Digital Humanities" (December 2015), <u>and</u> "Before You Make a Thing."

Week 3 (January 22+24): Media Archaeology
Tung Hui-Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

Week 4 (January 29+31): Light and Dark
One-page proposal for researching obsolete media, with 5 resources

Noam Elcott, *Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Week 5 (February 5+7): Writing Histories of Technology
Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wurtz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Week 6 (February 12+14): Computing
Joy Lisi Rankin, *A People's History of Computing in the United States* (Harvard University Press, 2018)

Week 7 (February 19+21): Computational Art
Zabet Patterson, *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

Week 8 (February 26+28): Video Games
3 -page historical survey + 3 sketches detailing potential materials and methods for reconstruction

Laine Nooney, "The Odd History of the First Erotic Computer Game," *The Atlantic* (December 2, 2014).

Hito Steyerl, "On Games, or, Can Art Workers Think?" *New Left Review* 103 (January-February 2017).

Zoya Street, "Queering Games History: Complexities, Chaos, and Community," in *Queer Game Studies*, edited by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2017): 35–42.

Week 9 (March 5+7): Media Environments/Social Histories
Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Week 10 (March 12): Smart Cities
Shannon Mattern, *Code + Clay, Data + Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Week 11 (March 19+21): SPRING BREAK

Week 12 (March 26+28): Computational Labor
Outline and paper/cardboard/preliminary physical prototype

Lisa Nakamura, "Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (December 2014): 919-941.

Jonathan Beller, "Informatic Labor in the Age of Computational Capital," *Lateral* 5.1 (Spring 2016).

Evan Hill, "Silicon Valley Can't Be Trusted With Our History" *Buzzfeed* (April 29, 2018).

Week 13 (April 2+4): Cyberculture
James Bridle, *The New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (New York: Verso, 2018).

Week 14 (April 9+11): Artificial Intelligence
Ian Bogost, "'Artificial Intelligence' Has Become Meaningless" *The Atlantic* (March 4, 2017).

Kate Crawford, "AI Now: Social and Political Questions for Artificial Intelligence" [video lecture] (2018).

Week 15 (April 16+18):
Work on final projects/conferences with Prof. Zinman

Week 16 (April 23):
Work on final projects

The final paper + project is due on **Friday, April 26**, by noon, via email to Professor Zinman *and* posted to the class blog.