

FILMSTUD 6: Introduction to Media (Fall 2016)

Lecture:

Mon, Wed: 11:30am-12:50pm

Room: 200-034, Lane History Corner, Quad

Professor: Shane Denson

Office: McMurtry 318

Office Hours: TBD

shane.denson@stanford.edu

Screenings (required):

Tues 7:30-9:20pm

Room: McMurtry 102

Teaching Assistant:

Daniel Benjamin Cohen

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Discussion Sections (required):

Thurs 4:30-5:20pm,

Fri 12:30-1:20pm

Course Description:

What is a medium? This course starts from the assumption that the answer to this question is not as obvious as it might at first appear. Clearly, we know some media when we see them: radio, film, and television are in many ways paradigmatic media of the twentieth century. But what about the computational, networked media of the twenty-first century? Are these still media in the same sense, or has the nature of media changed with the emergence of digital technologies? And what, for that matter, about pre-technical media? Is painting a medium in the same sense that oil or acrylic are media, or in the sense that we speak of "mixed media"? Is language a medium? Are numbers? Is the body?

As we shall see, the question of what a medium is raises a number of other questions of a theoretical or even philosophical nature. How is our experience of the world affected or shaped by media? Are knowledge and perception possible apart from media, or are they always mediated by the apparatuses, instruments, or assemblages of media? What is the relation between the forms and the contents of media, and how does this relation bear on questions of aesthetics, science, technology, or politics?

The lecture-based course addresses these and other questions and seeks in this way to introduce a way of thinking about media that goes beyond taken-for-granted ideas and assumptions, and that has a potentially transformative effect on a wide range of theoretical and practical interests.

Please make sure you are registered for the class on Canvas. Handouts and additional course material will be posted there.

Required Textbooks:

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. [1980] Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

Ihde, Don. *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Mitchell, W. J. T., and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. [1964]. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.

These books are available at the bookstore. Additional readings (listed in the course schedule) will be made available via Canvas.

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Course Requirements and Grading:

1. Regular attendance and preparation for class. This includes lectures, screenings, and discussion sections. Irregular attendance will negatively affect your final grade. Active participation will help improve your final grade. Readings are to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.
2. Short written responses to the reading and viewing assignments each week. Questions or prompts will be announced in class or by email. Please be prepared to present or discuss your responses in class. Late assignments (i.e. assignments received after class and up to 7 days afterwards) will count as half-complete. Assignments received more than 7 days late will not be accepted. Collectively, these weekly assignments will count for 15% of your final grade.
3. Midterm paper (or, with prior approval, a comparably rigorous critical media project). This assignment will count for 35% of your final grade.
4. Final paper (or, with prior approval, a comparably rigorous critical media project). This assignment will count for 50% of your final grade.
5. Only one of the papers (midterm or final) may be replaced with a critical media project.

Guidelines for Papers:

Midterm papers (4-5 pages) are to be submitted by **November 4, 2016, at 5:00pm (electronic submission)**. Final papers (8-10 pages) are to be submitted by **December 16, 2016, 11:30 am (electronic submission)**. As a prerequisite for the final paper, a 1-page proposal will be due in class on **November 28**. In your proposal, you should outline the focus or object of your analysis, explain the specific method(s) of analysis, state your reasons for choosing this approach to the topic, and formulate a tentative thesis statement. The final paper should be written in a scholarly format, with a complete bibliography, and should consist of the following:

1. A brief introduction outlining your topic and stating – as clearly and precisely as possible – the thesis of your paper. This section should usually be no more than one paragraph long.
2. A short description of the film(s), artwork(s), or other object(s) of your analysis. Here you should provide any essential background that might be needed for the reader to understand your analysis. You should assume an educated reader, who is familiar with film and media studies but perhaps has not seen the works being discussed in your paper. If it is not relevant to your argument, do not engage in lengthy plot summaries. On the other hand, make sure that the reader has enough context (narrative or otherwise) to understand the more detailed analysis that follows. Overall, in this section you must find the right balance, which you can do by considering whether each detail is truly relevant and informative with respect to your argument. Anthropologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson defined information as "a difference which makes a difference," and you can use this formula as a test for determining which details truly belong in this section. If, for example, providing a plot summary or details about production costs and box-office revenues of a film will make a difference with respect to your thesis (i.e. if a reader needs to know these things in order to process your argument), then this is clearly relevant and belongs in this section; on the other hand, if it doesn't make a difference to your argument, then it probably doesn't belong here. This section should usually be no more than 2-3 paragraphs long.
3. An in-depth analysis of the film(s), artwork(s), or other media object(s) under consideration. Your analysis should be interpretive and argumentative in nature. In other words, it is not enough simply to describe what you see on screen; you need also to persuade the reader that this is important, and that it has certain implications that may not be obvious at first glance. (If something is overly obvious, then it's probably not very informative and certainly not worth arguing.) You are not just describing things but providing a "reading" of them. Keep in mind that the analysis you provide in this section constitutes the main support for your thesis statement. Your analysis is the argumentation that you offer to back up your thesis, while the thesis statement should be seen as the logical conclusion of your argument/analysis. In other words, while you have already told the reader what

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your thesis statement is (in the introduction), it is through your analysis that you must now prove that your thesis is correct or plausible. Ideally, after reading the analysis in this section, the reader should see your thesis statement as the logical outcome. Keeping this in mind as the test of success, you again need to ensure that your analysis is relevant and informative with respect to your thesis statement (if it doesn't make a difference with regard to your thesis, then it can hardly prove it). In addition, you need to make sure that your analysis/argument proves your thesis *sufficiently*. This is a question of the scope of your thesis, and of your ability to prove it through your interpretive analysis. Have you claimed too much in your thesis? Not enough? Ideally, there should be a perfect match between what you claim in your thesis and what your analysis actually demonstrates. When writing this section, you may find that you have to adjust your thesis (and re-write your introduction accordingly) or look for stronger arguments to support it. This should be the longest section of your paper.

4. A brief conclusion. Try not to be too mechanical in summarizing and repeating what you've written, but do make sure that the conclusion demonstrates the paper's overall relevance and coherence. For example, you might return to a detail mentioned in the introduction and use it to highlight the significance of your argument: maybe the detail seemed rather unimportant before but has a very different meaning in the light of your analysis or interpretation. Foregrounding the transformative effect of your argument (i.e. the fact that it makes us see things differently) is a good way to demonstrate the overall importance of your paper, and the device of returning in the end to something mentioned at the beginning is an effective way of giving your paper closure. Obviously, though, it is not the only way to approach the conclusion. You might also demonstrate the relevance of your argument by opening up the scope even farther and considering the questions that your thesis raises for other areas of inquiry. Does your analysis suggest alternative readings for other films or media objects? Does it suggest the need to re-think various assumptions about cinema, about a given genre, or about some other aspect of media inquiry? However you decide to approach it, the point of the conclusion, generally speaking, is to take a step back from arguing for your thesis (you are supposed to be finished doing that by now) and to reflect, on a quasi meta-level, about the overall significance of your argument/thesis. This section should normally be one paragraph in length.
5. A full list of works cited, according to MLA style.

In addition to the above guidelines, consider consulting the Duke University Writing Studio's handout "Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy: Writing About Film" (<https://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/film.pdf>) when conceiving and writing your paper. The handout includes links to several other helpful resources, including similar handouts from Dartmouth and Yale. A more comprehensive guide is provided by Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. Eighth Edition (Boston: Pearson, 2011).

If, in lieu of one of your papers, you plan to produce a critical media project of some sort (e.g. video essay, website, or other type of project that engages critically with the themes and ideas of the course), you will need to outline your idea in writing and receive prior approval from the instructor. The project itself should be accompanied by a short written statement outlining the significance and critical potential of the project with respect to the course and the theories and approaches we have explored. You may only replace one of your papers (midterm or final) with a project of this sort.

Students with Documented Disabilities:

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://oae.stanford.edu>).

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Course Schedule:

Week 1

09.26. **Introduction: What is a Medium?**

09.27. **Screening: SAFE (Todd Haynes, 1995)**

09.28. **Theorizing Media**

READINGS: W. J. T. Mitchell & Mark B. N. Hansen, "Introduction" to *Critical Terms for Media Studies*;
Mark B. N. Hansen, "Media Theory"

Week 2

10.03. **"The Medium is the Message"**

READINGS: Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, Part I (Introduction and Chapters 1-7)

10.04. **Screening: VIDEODROME (David Cronenberg, 1983)**

10.05. **Technology and the Mediation of Experience**

READINGS: Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4

Week 3

10.10. **Media Phenomenology**

READINGS: Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld*, Chapters 5-6

10.11. **Screening: FRANKENSTEIN (James Whale, 1931)**

10.12. **Media Images/Media Worlds**

READINGS: Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld*, Chapters 7-8

Week 4

10.17. **Language as Medium**

READINGS: Cary Wolfe, "Language" (in Mitchell & Hansen, *Critical Terms*, 233-248);

Marshall McLuhan, "The Spoken Word: Flower of Evil?" (Chapter 8 of *Understanding Media*)

10.18. **Screening: GOODBYE TO LANGUAGE/ADIEU AU LANGAGE (Jean-Luc Godard, 2014)**

10.19. **Writing, Text, Code**

READINGS: Lydia H. Liu, "Writing" (in Mitchell & Hansen, *Critical Terms*, 310-326);

Friedrich Kittler, "Code (or, How You Can Write Something Differently)"

Week 5

10.24. **The Telegraph, Technical Media, and Information**

READINGS: James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph";

Friedrich Kittler, "The History of Communication Media"

10.25. **Screening: DRACULA (Tod Browning, 1931)**

10.26. **Sound and the Analogical Inscription of the Real**

READINGS: Friedrich Kittler, "Gramophone" (from *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*)

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Week 6

10.31. Images and Art

READINGS: W. J. T. Mitchell, "Image" (in Mitchell & Hansen, *Critical Terms*, 35-48);

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility"

11.01. Screening: LA JETÉE (Chris Marker, 1963)

11.02. Photography (1)

READINGS: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part I (Sections 1-24)

Week 7

11.07. Photography (2)

READINGS: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Part II (Sections 25-48)

11.08. Screening: DON'T LOOK NOW (Nicolas Roeg, 1973)

11.09. Cinema and Suture

READINGS: Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema"

Week 8

11.14. Alternate Modes of Address

READINGS: Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess";

Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde"

11.15. Screening: RUN LOLA RUN/LOLA RENNT (Tom Tykwer, 1998)

11.16. New Media

READINGS: Lev Manovich, "How Media Became New" and "Principles of New Media" (from *The Language of New Media*);

Mark B. N. Hansen, "New Media" (in Mitchell & Hansen, *Critical Terms*, 172-185)

Thanksgiving Break

No Classes 11.21.-11.25.

Week 9

11.28. Networks (Final paper/project proposal due!)

READINGS: Alexander R. Galloway, "Networks" (in Mitchell & Hansen, *Critical Terms*, 280-296);

Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control"

11.29. Screening: THE FORGOTTEN SPACE (Allan Sekula & Noël Burch, 2010)

11.30. Media Infrastructures

READINGS: Lisa Parks, "Water, Energy, Access: Materializing the Internet in Rural Zambia";

Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"

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Week 10

12.05. **Protocols and Platforms of Experience**

READINGS: Jonathan Sterne, "Format Theory" (from *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*);

Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" (from *The Wretched of the Screen*)

12.06. **Screening: KOYAANISQATSI (Godfrey Reggio, 1982)**

12.07. **Media, Earth, Environment**

READINGS: Jussi Parikka, "An Alternative Deep Time of the Media" (from *A Geology of Media*);

Peter K. Haff, "Technology as a Geological Phenomenon: Implications for Human Well-Being"