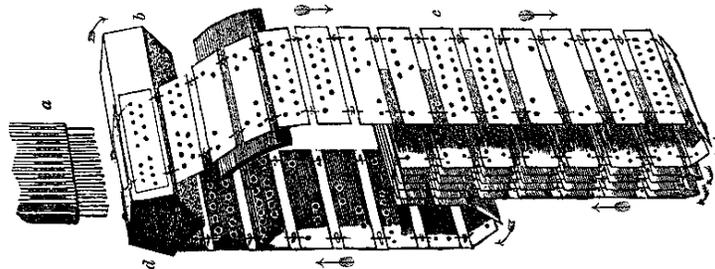ATCM 3320: Spring 2024
Critical Media Theories
Tuesdays + Thursdays 10:00-11:15am | ATC 2.602



*Punched cards coded with weaving pattern for the
operation of a Jacquard loom; 1843*

**Professor:** Daryl Meador
**Office Hours:** by appointment
**Email:** dxm230054@utdallas.edu
Please allow 24 hours for responses to email; 48 hours on the weekend or holidays.

**Course Description:**

We live in an age of unprecedented media saturation, engulfed in new technologies and information —yet, this claim that our age is technologically unprecedented one is not one that is historically new. As media technologies proliferated in the 19th and 20th centuries, fundamentally altering how humans understood the world and each other, the theories developed then about media and communication laid the groundwork for media studies in the 21st century. As such, in this course we will look both historically and presently at theories of media, seeking to best understand how the past may (or may not) help us understand our present and future. We will work together to develop a vocabulary and set of frameworks for thinking critically and carefully about our relations to technology and media.

Pressing questions of this course include: How is our experience of the world affected or shaped by media? How is knowledge and perception mediated by differing forms, apparatuses, or assemblages of media? How does the relationship between form and contents of media bear upon questions of aesthetics, technology, politics, and/or truth claims?

**Course Objectives:**

- Think critically about different mediums (writing, analog images, code, AI-generated content, etc), how their forms are related to their contents, and the capacities for information, expression, and engagement that they hold
- Develop a vocabulary for how varying forms of media relate to issues of politics, control, and notions of truth or value within our society, both currently and historically
- Apply theories of media to contemporary case studies, be they platforms, algorithms, video games, artworks, software, etc; and how those works might also resist, defy, and complicate pre-existing theories and critiques

**Course Requirements:**

**Participation: 20%** (every week)
**Readings discussion questions: 10%** (various weeks)
**Creative Assignment - playing with Generative AI:** 20% (Due March 8th)
**In-class midterm exam: 20 %** (March 7th)
**Final Project Proposal: 5%** (due week 10)
**Final Project: 25%** (Presentations during weeks 15 & 16)

*a handout with details and a grading rubric will be handed out in-class and posted to the portal for each assignment*

1. **Participation:** You are expected to have thoroughly and thoughtfully read the assigned texts and to have prepared yourself to contribute meaningfully to the class discussions. This may mean taking copious notes on the readings, or supplementing the themes with research into survey texts like the book Keywords for Media Studies (NYU Press, 2017, available as E-Book). Try to discern what approach to digesting the readings works best for you, and please come to class with copies of the assigned readings, willing to be a valuable contributor to our shared discussion. If relevant, bring your own experiences and interests with media, as they relate to the topics. Your participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Here is the rubric upon which I will be basing this grade. (20% of overall grade)

2. **Reading Discussion Questions**: Please choose ten readings in the syllabus, of the twenty highlighted in red, on which you will craft two discussion questions that will be posted to the eLearning portal on the night before the class that they are due. You can choose these as we progress through the semester, but you are responsible for ensuring you complete at least ten! Details in assignment handout. (10% of your grade)

3. **Creative Assignment, playing with AI**: Your midterm assignment will build upon our conversations in class around AI. You will be tasked with documenting an interaction with an AI text generator such as ChatGPT and write a short paper (~2 pages) that applies a critical analysis of this interaction. The use of this AI tool will be considered within some of the frameworks we've discussed in class so far. Details with options for how to stage your interaction, and what frameworks can be applied, will be included in an assignment handout. (20% of overall grade)

4. **Midterm Exam:** A multiple choice, open book exam will be administered in class. It will test your basic comprehension of the readings and topics covered in class thus far. If you've been keeping up with the readings, it shouldn't be hard. (20% of overall grade)

5. **Final Project Proposal** (5%)

6. **Final Project - Group Presentations:** Your final project for this course will take the form of a group presentation. Your presentation must be based upon scholarly research within the field of media theory, and documentation of your research (references, theoretical frameworks, proper citations) will be a part of your grade. Your presentation will either A) take on a new topic not covered in class and apply it to contemporary media (options for topics and references will be supplied) or B) propose a creative project such as a video game, work of AI art, interactive website, etc. that engages with critical theories we have covered in class. (25% of overall grade)

Resources for how to read carefully:
- Shannon Mattern, Reading Effectively https://wordsinspace.net/2010/08/20/reading-effectively/
- How to Read Theory https://terpconnect.umd.edu/~jklumpp/comm652/reading.html
- Paul Edwards, How to Read a Book http://www.cs.yorku.ca/~aboelaze/howtoread.pdf

Resource on crafting good questions:
- Kyla Wazana Tompkins on discussion questions https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/13/we-arent-here-to-learn-what-we-know-we-already-know/

**Required Materials:**
- All course readings (available in the portal in PDF form)
- A computer with an internet connection

**Class Attendance.** The University's attendance policy requirement is that individual faculty set their course attendance requirements. Regular and punctual class attendance is expected. Please email me ahead of class time if you need to excuse an absence from class. More than two absences from class will prohibit any student from fulfilling the participation requirement of the course.

**Academic Honesty.** Plagiarism is using the words and materials of others as if they were your own. It is a serious offense with serious consequences. For more information, please consult **http://www.utdallas.edu/dept/graddean/gsPolDishonesty.html**

**Regarding Generative AI:** Artificial intelligence is a timely and important subject of study, and one that we will be engaging with in class. You can use generative AI, such as text and image generators, in your work, but you **must** be honest and reflexive about its use. Our midterm assignment will be a practice in this — If you do use AI in any other assignment, please include a 150 word note (written by you, not a tool) explaining how and why you deployed this tool: how did it supplement your own brain? What kind of collaboration was involved? What did the experience teach you about how to best use these tools in the future? This note does not count toward overall word counts of assignments.

**Accessibility:** We all learn differently! If you perceive any aspects of this course that may inhibit your learning, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the goals of the course.

Students with emergency medical information or needing arrangements in case of a building evacuation should discuss this with me as soon as possible. Further resources are available at the Office of AccessAbility, located in the Student Services Building, suite 3.200. They can be reached by phone at (972) 883-2098 or by email at disabilityservice@utdallas.edu.

**Weekly Schedule**

** All screenings and readings are subject to change. I will notify you promptly if such changes do occur. **

| Week 1 | Tuesday January 16th |
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| | Introductions |
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| | Thursday January 18th |
| | Read before class: Vilem Flusser, "On Memory (Electronic and Otherwise)" (1990) |
| | In class reading: Paul Edwards, "How to Read a Book" |
| | ***Handout: reading discussion facilitation assignment*** |
| **Week 2**<br><br>**Fundamentals** | Tuesday January 23rd |
| | Read before class: |
| | Read before class: John Durham Peters, "Information: Notes Toward a Critical History," Journal of Communication Inquiry (July 1988) |
| | Screen in class: Communications Primer (Youtube, 22 min.) |
| | Sara Magenheimer, Seven Signs that Mean Silence (11 min) |
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| | Thursday January 25th |
| | James Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The case of the Telegraph" (1983) |
| | Screen in class: *Digital Disconnect* (36 min) |

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| **Week 3**<br><br>Media Old & New | **Tuesday January 30th**<br><br>Read before class:<br><br>Benjamin, excerpts from "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) - read red highlights<br><br>Hito Steyerl: "In Defense of the Poor Image"<br><br><br>In class: watch *Love is the Message the Message is Death*<br><br>_____<br><br>**Thursday February 2nd**<br><br>Mary Ann Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," in differences (2007), vol. 18, number 1: 1-6.<br><br><br>Screen in class: The Zapruder Film |
| **Week 4**<br><br>Commodity | **Tuesday February 6th**<br><br>In class screening: excerpts from "Society of the Spectacle" Guy Debord, 1973<br><br>_____<br><br>**Thursday February 8th**<br><br>Read before class:<br><br>Keywords for Media Studies, "Commodification," & "The Commodity as Spectacle," Guy Debord<br><br>"How I Modeled Debord's Brain in Software," Alexander Galloway, 2022 https://romchip.org/index.php/romchip-journal/article/view/162 |

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| **Week 5**<br><br>Artificial Intelligence | **Tuesday February 13th**<br><br>Read before class:<br><br>Apprich, Clemens. 2018. "Secret Agents: A Psychoanalytic Critique of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning." Digital Culture & Society 4, no. 1: 29–44.<br><br><br>Screen in class:<br>Jeff Hancock, "The Future of Lying," Ted Talk, September 2012, 18 minutes.<br>_____<br><br>**Thursday February 15th**<br><br>Vilem Flusser, "The Gesture of Writing"<br><br>Boris Groys, "From Writing to Prompting: AI as Zeitgeist-Machine"<br>https://www.e-flux.com/notes/553214/from-writing-to-prompting-ai-as-zeitgeist-machine<br><br>**Handout: creative assignment with generative Ai** |
| **Week 6**<br><br>Discipline & Control | **Tuesday February 20th**<br><br>NO CLASS TODAY - Please watch at home *Citizenfour*<br>_____<br><br>**Thursday February 22nd**<br><br>Read before class:<br>Foucault, "Panopticism" from *Discipline and Punish* (1975)<br><br>Galloway and Thacker, "Protocol, Control, and Networks" (2004) |

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| **Week 7**<br><br>Surveillance | **<u>Tuesday February 26th</u>**<br><br>In class screening: *Sleepdealer*<br><br>_____<br><br>**<u>Thursday February 29th</u>**<br><br>Before class: excerpts from Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015)<br><br>Shannon Mattern, All Eyes on the Border https://placesjournal.org/article/all-eyes-on-the-border/ |
| **Week 8** | **<u>Tuesday March 5th</u>**<br><br>**Creative Assignment with generative Ai due today -  in class discussion s**<br><br>_____<br><br>**<u>Thursday March 7th</u>**<br><br>**In-class midterm exam** |
| **Week 9 SRING BREAK NO CLASS** | |
| **Week 10**<br><br>Propaganda / Deception/ Persuasion | **<u>Tuesday March 19th</u>**<br>In class screening: *The Control Room*<br><br>**<u>Thursday March 21st</u>**<br>Read before class:<br><br>"A Propaganda Model," Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988)<br><br>**Final Project Proposals due today** |

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| Week 11<br><br>Cyborgs | **Tuesday March 26th**<br><br>In class screening: Complication of the Computer Mouse, Emma Rae Norton, 11 min<br>https://doodybrains.github.io/the-mouse-holds-us/<br>**Thursday March 28th**<br><br>Read before class: Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985)<br><br>Cyborg Tongues https://logicmag.io/scale/cyborg-tongues/ |
| Week 12<br><br>Video games | **Tuesday April 2nd**<br><br>Read before class:<br><br>Andreas Ervik, "The Work of Art in the Age of Multiverse Meme Generativity" (2023)<br><br>Hito Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth, Withdrawal from Representation" (2012)<br>https://www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68260/the-spam-of-the-earth-withdrawal-from-representation/<br><br>In class screenings:<br><br>How Not to be Seen Monty Python (3 min)<br><br>Hito Steyerl, How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File, (2013)<br><br>**Thursday April 4th**<br><br>Kevin Witzenberger, "The Hyperdodge: How Users Resist Algorithmic Objects in Everyday Life,"  (2018) |
| Week 13<br><br>Politics / Forensics / Truth | **Tuesday April 9th**<br>In class screening: TBD<br>(*The Thin Blue Line or Forensic Architecture or Trevor Paglen*<br><br>**Thursday April 11th**<br><br><br>Thomas Keenan, "Counter Forensics and Photography," 2014<br><br>"Negative Dialectics in the Google Era: A Conversation with Trevor Paglen" |

| Week 14 | **<u>Tuesday April 16th</u>**<br><br>In class screening: TBD<br><br>**<u>Thursday April 18th</u>**<br><br>Tung Hui-Hu - A Prehistory of the Cloud and Digital Lethargy: Dispatches from an Age of Disconnection |
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| Week 15<br><br>Final Project Presentations | Tuesday April 23rd<br><br>Thursday April 25th |
| Week 16<br><br>Final Project Presentations | Tuesday April 30th<br><br>Thursday May 2nd |