

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Communication and Media Studies COMS 401.35 L02
Special Topics in Communication and Media Studies

Topic: New Media and the Technological Imagination

Fall 2017

Sept. 11 – Dec. 04 (excluding Oct. 9 Nov.13)

Lecture: M 12:00-14:45

Instructor: Dr. Samantha C. Thrift
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Office Hours: Mondays (10-11am); Thursdays (10-11am)

Course Description

Drawing on the notion of the technological imagination, this course examines how popular discourses about new media technologies express societal preoccupations with the threat and promise of technological innovation. From the technological sublime to fears of a dark future, “new things” provoke an array of concerns about the role of technological innovation in societal development. In this course, we will take up several historical and contemporary examples – such as black mirrors, the atom bomb, avatars and the Internet of Things – to investigate the (often hyperbolic) narratives of excitement, concern and anxiety that frame these artifacts’ development, introduction and “death” and afterlife. Why do emerging media function as a “screen” for the expression of collective concerns (Turkle 2004)? What do these narratives reveal about human agency and identity? In what ways do these discourses bear witness to anxieties about the changing relationship between human and machine?

Objectives of the Course

- critically evaluate a range of theoretical approaches to explaining the social construction of technology, particularly via the concept of the technological imagination;
- communicate knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking about core concepts by completing an analytical research and writing project;
- understand how to organize a media analysis and demonstrate this knowledge through application to a chosen new media technology;
- actively participate in class and small group discussions in order to orally express ideas and insights in a comprehensible, engaging manner.

Textbooks and Readings

A digital course pack has been prepared and will be made available on the COMS 401 L02 D2L course website.

Internet and electronic communication device information

The in-class use of computers for activities other than note-taking purposes or instructor-mandated research will not be tolerated. Therefore, cell phones and other electronic communication devices must be turned off upon entering the classroom and may not be used in the classroom or during class time. If students engage in non-course related online activity during class, the professor may confiscate your device for the remainder of the class.

Assignments and Evaluation

Note: All assignments and exams weighted more than 20% must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Weight	Course components	Due
20%	Participation (4 x 5%)	Sept. 25, Oct. 16, Nov. 6, Nov. 20
15%	Spin Study	Oct. 2
20%	Proposal	Oct. 23
10%	Draft Workshop	Nov. 27
35%	Final Essay	Dec. 4

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

I. Participation (20%) due: Sept. 25, Oct. 16, Nov. 6, Nov. 20

One purpose of a seminar like this is to teach students to form their own ideas and share them with their peers. The very work of the course consists of engaging in a discussion of ideas. Your participation entails coming to class having carefully read the day's assigned texts; being ready and willing to discuss issues raised in the readings; offering your informed, critical responses; listening to your classmate's remarks attentively and responding in a respectful and constructive manner.

Your participation will be evaluated with 4 in-class written reflections on assigned readings, lecture material and class discussion. These written responses will be held at any time during the class on the specified dates. Each reflection will be worth a maximum of 5 points. A detailed, thoughtful reflection that shows comprehensive understanding of the material will receive full marks, while a reflection that addresses the day's work in a superficial manner will receive 2.5 marks. A reflection that demonstrates significant errors in understanding course material will receive 1 point.

Please note:

- The instructor will not provide a copy of the day's readings
- Normally, a missed reflection cannot be made-up or rescheduled for any reason
- Normally, missed reflections will receive 0 points

In the case of documented illness, the grade for a missed reflection will be added to the grade for the final project. See the accommodation policy later in this outline.

Spin Study (15%) due: Oct. 2

In this assignment, students have an opportunity to apply and refine the critical analysis skills required for the final essay. Drawing on Turkle's (2004) argument that media spin tends to oversimplify narratives about new media by obscuring their often contradictory effects, you are tasked with critically analyzing one news report about an emerging media form (provided by the instructor). The analysis will be approximately 3 pages in length, include a bibliography and adhere to MLA or APA citation style. More details provided in class.

III. Case Study

The Case Study is the main writing assignment for this course. Case studies are valuable because they allow researchers to investigate phenomena within real world contexts. In this instance, we are interested in identifying the social meaning(s) of a "new" media technology: what values, beliefs, norms and practices are ascribed to an emerging media form?

One way to answer this question is to analyze media about the new technology: news reports, advertising, science fiction, and/or other sources. So, for this assignment, you will be conducting an analysis of the media representation of an emerging technology. You will collect (at least) four media documents about a new media technology. Your task is to analyze these media documents to identify the societal role, values, anxieties and risks invested in your chosen "new media." There are three parts to this assignment: the proposal, a draft workshop, and the final essay.

Proposal (20%) due: Oct. 23

The Case Study Proposal is a 3-4 page submission that:

- Identifies the new media artifact you intend to study;
- Identifies and briefly describes the four media documents you collected
 - Genre of documents: news (opinion/feature/news), advertising, product reviews, etc.
 - Rationale for selection: why do these four docs form a strong basis for an analysis? By the authority/influence or reach of the publication (NYT, WaPo)? Does it represent multiple perspectives (ex. a company spokesperson, a critic, a scholar)? When were the documents published and why does that matter? Do they address a similar theme? What type of claim will these documents allow you to make?
- Identifies two assigned readings that will be used to support the analysis
 - Provide clear and detailed explanation of why the scholarly sources were chosen: what specific ideas or concepts "fit" with the new media technology under study?
- Includes a properly formatted bibliography (APA or MLA)
 - Includes citations for BOTH media documents AND scholarly sources
 - Optional: You may choose to include an Appendix with hard copies/screen shots of your media documents.

Note: Once your proposed topic has been approved, you are committed to it for the term.

Draft Workshop (10%) due: Nov. 27

In-class time will be provided for a **draft workshop** (10%), where students share and discuss a rough version of your paper in peer groups. Students need to prepare a complete (intro, body, conclusion) draft of their final essay and bring TWO copies to class. You will submit one copy to the instructor at the end of class.

Final Essay (35%) due: Dec. 4

The final component of the Case Study is the 8-10 page analysis essay. The essay will present your analysis of the social meanings invested in your chosen new media technology, based on your analysis of the four media documents identified in your proposal and supported by the use of (at least) three scholarly sources (including 2 from assigned course readings).

Your final essay must include two bibliographies: one of the media documents analyzed ("primary sources") and one of the scholarly sources utilized ("secondary sources"). The final essay must also be properly formatted (MLA or APA).

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at marked final exams in SS 320. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip/foip-hia>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to ensure that the proper version is submitted (particularly in courses requiring electronic submission). Including a version date in your file name may be useful.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. Assignments submitted 7 or more days late from the initial due date (including weekends) without prior consultation with and permission from the instructor will automatically receive a failing grade.

Student Accommodations:

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

- Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
- For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. In this course, points scores will be given for participation (see description above), while percentage grades will be given for all other assignments.

The following chart outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. In calculating final grades in this course, the calculated percentage grade will be translated to the corresponding letter grade according to the Department of CMF grade scale equivalents (ex. a calculated percentage score of 84% will receive a final letter grade of B+).

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations* *
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%

	insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject			
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	0- 49.99%	0%

* If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades.

** These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (e.g., surveys, interviews, or observations) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 artsads@ucalgary.ca

<p>CAMPUS SECURITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	<p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333</p> <p>403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</p> <p>If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</p>
<p>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	<p>http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</p> <p>403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca</p>
<p>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	<p>http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</p>
<p>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	<p>https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</p>
<p>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	<p>403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</p> <p>403-266-HELP (4357)</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</p> <p>If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.</p>

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

To be posted on D2L prior to the first week of classes.