//////////////////////////////// METHODS IN MEDIA STUDIES (MIMS) ////////////////////////////////

Course Description:

An introduction to the concepts and methods used to analyze the content, structure, and contexts of media production and use. Students will develop a familiarity with key authors and learn to adapt and employ a variety of tools for the analysis of mediated communication.

This course uses lectures, readings, and discussion groups to introduce students to the foundational texts and key concepts of media studies. It uses exercises in practice-based research to introduce students to the research tools used by practitioners of semiotics, political economy, media history, and ethnography.

Course Evaluation Overview

1.) Module Exercise: At the end of each module, a practice-based exercise is due. Each practice-based exercise involves two deliverables: a written text of (3 pages) and a piece of practice-based research. Each module has a different practice-based deliverable: see handouts for details. Your grade is decided by the evidence of your thoughtful integration of theory and practice.

2.) Discussion: In the week that the Module Exercise is due, you will send me a preliminary version of your practice-based materials and a 1-page text. This is *not* a formal presentation! Think of it more as a group discussion or workshop. Plan to speak for 2-3 minutes and receive comments for 2-3 minutes. Your grade is decided by your capacity to frame and elicit discussion.

3.) Course Engagement: Engagement is a quality sensed by the instructor based on verbal participation, but not necessarily; it can also shine through written work, in office-hours discussion, or even over email. Attendance is mandatory for class and MCC Media Lab tutorials.

Grade Breakdown

Module 1 Exercise — 15%
Module 2 Exercise — 15% (Group Work)
Module 3 Exercise — 15%
Module 4 Exercise — 15%

Discussion 1 — 5%
Discussion 2 — 5% (Group Work)
Discussion 3 — 5%
Discussion 4 — 5%

Participation — 20%

Learning Outcomes

This course is primarily preparation for more advanced courses in the NYU MCC major.

-Students will be able to identify future courses according to the methods used in those courses, thereby helping you chart a course through the program. This means being able to identify concepts, methods, and content characteristic of major sub-fields within the interdisciplinary field of study known as *media studies.*

-Students will conceptualize and execute mini-projects that prepare them for further research using these methods: textual and visual analysis of cultural objects; political-economic analysis of data concerning communication systems; archival presentation of media-system change; and ethnographic documentation of everyday media use.

-Students will engage technically in the digital practice of image-editing, data visualization, and web-based archiving in conjunction with the methods studied in this course. This takes place through three required workshops with the MCC Media Lab. Media Lab Workshops will introduce you to the basics of production skills that could further prepare you for work in the media industries.

-Students are introduced to borrowing equipment from and working with the MCC Media Lab formally, in class, and in support of the digital practices and projects assigned. Working independently with the Media Lab will help you learn how to research and gain access to resources independently to begin organizing and planning and executing thoughtful media productions.

Pursued to the fullest, these outcomes will give you a strong groundwork for charting your path toward further academic or media industries employment; perhaps, most importantly, it will help you understand the choices and values that will shape your pursuit of either path.

Course Schedule, at a Glance

Module 1 — Textual Analysis

WEEK 1 / September 5th and 7th / Introductions / *MON.* [Labor Day] / *WED.* Course Overview
WEEK 2 / September 12th and 14th / Theory of Signs / *MON.* de Saussure / *WED.* *Photoshop*
WEEK 3 / Sept. 19th and 21st / Mind Frames / *MON.* Freud & Mulvey / *WED.* Goffman & Hall
WEEK 4 / September 26th and 28th / Exercise Prep / *MON.* Discussion / *WED.* Discussion

Friday, September 30th — Module 1 Exercise Due @ 11:59pm

Module 2 — Political Economy

WEEK 5 / October 3rd and 5th / Digital Labor / *MON.* Terranova / *WED.* *Google Sheets*
WEEK 6 / October 11th and 12th / Culture Industry / *MON.* McChesney / *WED.* Siros&Al-Ghazzi
WEEK 7 / October 17th and 19th / Exercise Prep / *MON.* Discussion / *WED.* Discussion

Friday, October 21st — Module 2 Exercise Due @ 11:59pm

Module 3 — Media History

WEEK 8 / October 24th and 26th / Philosophy of History / *MON.* Benjamin / *WED.* *WordPress*
WEEK 9 / October 31st and November 2nd / Archives / *MON.* Yaeger / *WED.* Parikka
WEEK 10 / November 7th and 9th / Counter History / *MON.* Spivak / *WED.* Rony
WEEK 11 / November 14th and 16th / Exercise Prep / *MON.* Discussion / *WED.* Discussion

Friday, November 18th — Module 3 Exercise Due @ 11:59pm

Module 4 — Ethnography

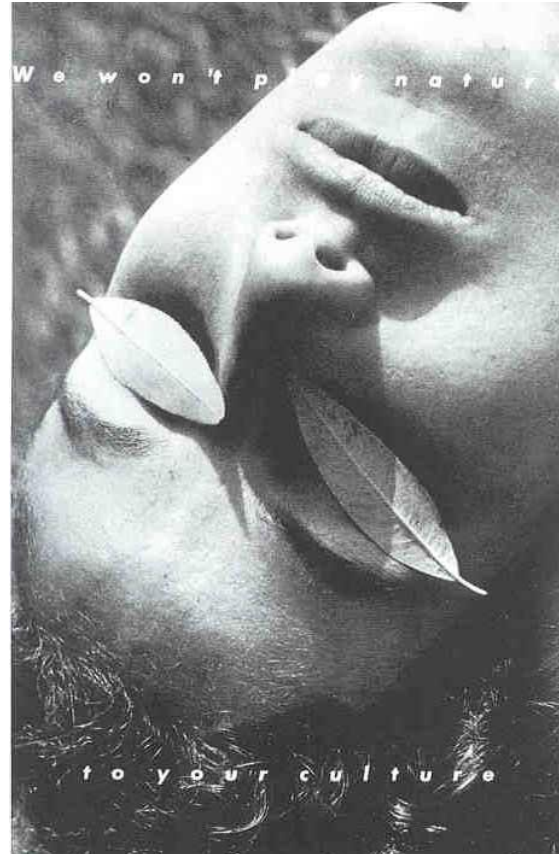WEEK 12 / November 21st and 23rd / Anthropology / *MON.* Geertz / *WED.* [Fall Break]
WEEK 13 / November 28th and 30th / The Field / *MON.* Steinmetz & Banks / *WED.* de Certeau
WEEK 14 / December 5th and 7th / Institutional Contexts / *MON.* Goffman / *WED.* Discussion
WEEK 15 / December 12th and 14th / Exercise Prep / *MON.* Discussion / *WED.* Discussion

Wednesday, December 14th — Module 4 Exercise Due @ 11:59pm

[Left] Anon. Advertisement for Panzini products, analyzed by Roland Barthes, 1964.

[Right] Barbara Kruger, "We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture", 1983.

Module Outline

Semiotics is a theory of signs and sign use. The most fundamental tenet of all semiotic theories is the idea that signs always represent something that they are not. The word *cat* is not a cat, so how is it that the word *cat* gives me the image of one in my head? In the Western tradition, explanations of how this effect of signification works originate in two places: formal logic and linguistics. Though rooted in these specialized academic traditions, semiotics has had a sweeping impact on how academics, artists, and designers understand and activate *signifying media* of all forms.

This module will introduce you to the tradition of semiotic theory through primary sources. It will also provide you with access to famous semiotic analyses of art, cinema, and popular culture. You will deepen your understanding of how sign systems produce meaning by learning how to break down their structure and interpret them within a cultural context and in light of the deep structure of mental meaning production. You will also learn techniques for manipulating images using Adobe Photoshop and deploy those techniques in ways that deepen and intensify your understanding of mechanisms meaning production.
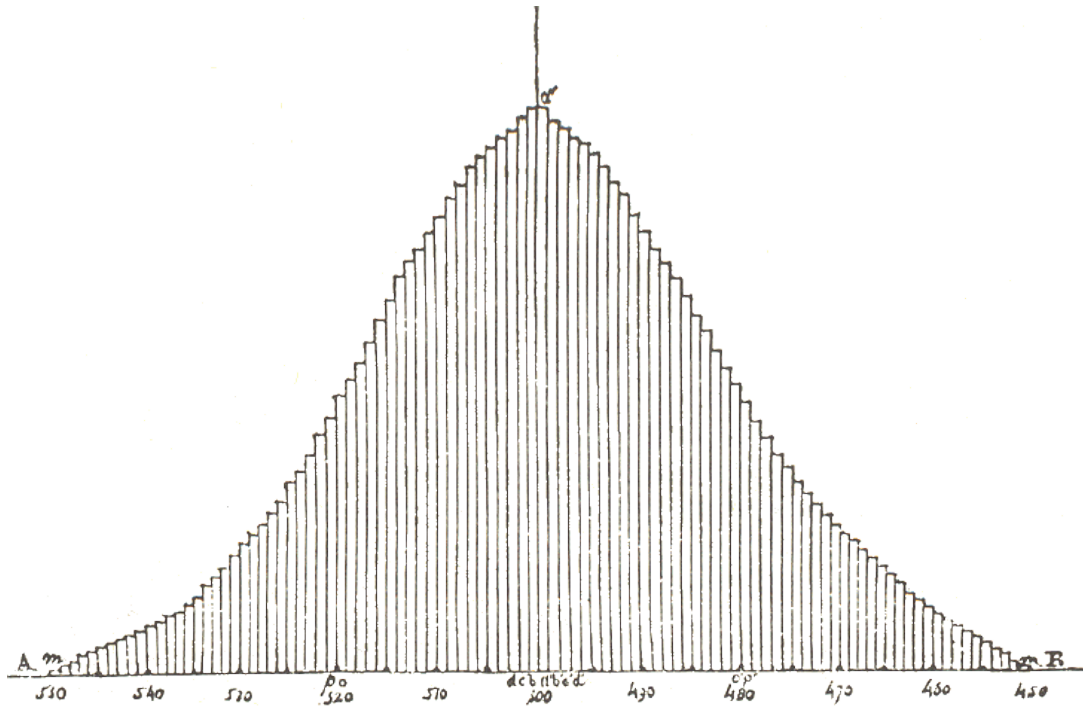
[Figure] Adolphe Quetelet, "The normal curve", in *The Theory of Probabilities*, 1849.

Module Outline

Political economy is a theory of how the government and the economy interact to create social groups. In the period of its initial use (the late 1800s), the term *political economy* referred to a combination of historical and quantitative methods that authors—Karl Marx, Frederic Engels, and Max Weber—used to describe the origins of, and the laws governing the formation of, major categories of social organization: such as the ruling class and the working class. Since then, mathematical studies of economic laws have side-lined the historical dimension of political economy in favor of quantitative market analysis. Sociologists remain committed to studying the intersection of history, politics, and the economy. Sociological continuations of the political-economic tradition have become increasingly interested in the *media industries* as those industries—broadcasting, cinema, and telecommunications—change the way political institutions, economic production, and social groups interact.

This module will introduce you to recent work in media studies that involves the study of computational media infrastructures and their effect on political and economic relations. The goal of the module is to train you to read, produce, and criticize visualizations of statistics in a critically informed manner. You will work in groups to plan and execute a questionnaire and then visualize and analyze the data you gather using Google Sheets.
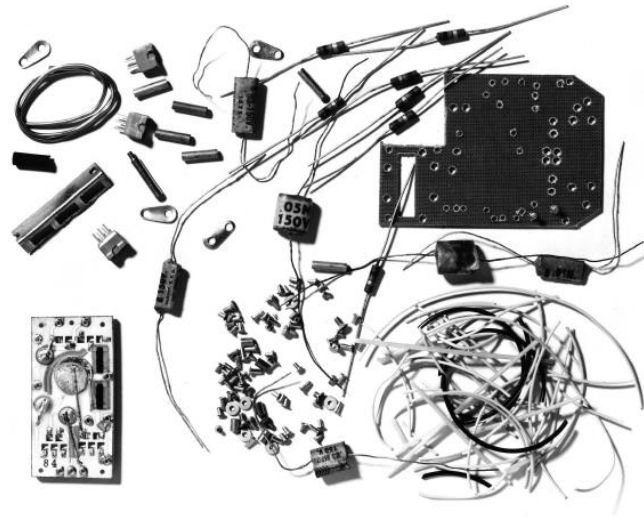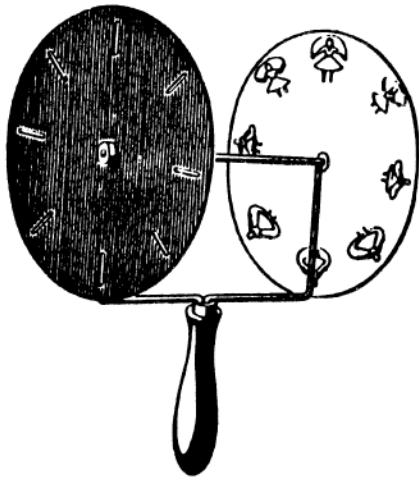
[Left] Joseph Plateau, Phenakistiscope, 1832.

[Right] Joseph Knous, So-lo pack hearing aid printed circuit (lower left), compared to parts for previous components, 1930s.

<u>Module Outline</u>

Media historians use archival research to reconstruct past contexts, meanings, and uses of media artefacts. Since the late 1940s, scholars in the field of social history, the history of the book, art history, and literary history have uncovered and catalogued artefacts that help us understand how habits of media use take shape over time. In the course of these investigations, media history has become a theory of how technology, media users, and designers interact to construct the meaning and materiality of bodies in terms of race, gender, age, and ability; it has also become a method for contesting these historically-constituted categories through the production of alternative archives and narratives.

This module will introduce you to original archival research by major contributors to the field. It will also introduce you to theoretical texts that guide historians' interpretation of those artefacts. You will learn how to do original archival research. You will also learn how to make articulate propositions about media artefacts that contribute to academic debates concerning the narrative framing or historical arcs. You will also learn how to organize and display your finding using WordPress templates, transforming your archival research skills into online content production and narration skills.

[Left] "Mollie's Everyday", map created by the subject of ethnographic interview, from Natasha Dow Shüll, *Addiction by Design*, 2014.

[Right] Model of socio-technical change, from Wiebe Bijker, *Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs*, 1995.

Module Outline

Ethnography began as a colonial science. In the nineteenth century, administrators representing the interests of European corporations, authorized to work in foreign territories, would document the languages, rituals, laws, and customs of local populations. The goal was to govern those territories profitably and to find ways of transforming those populations into workers.

During the twentieth century, ethnography has undergone a series of self-critical operations. From the 1920s to the 1970s, ethnographers became "flies on the wall"—capturing cultural traditions (often with recording media) as their rituals and customs transformed through contact with capitalist development. From the 1970s to present, the method has transformed again, with the fly on the wall method being replaced with "deep hanging out"—a method involving long-term relationships, participant observation, and an attempt to appreciate the ethical demands produced by the ethnographic situation. Field sites are now often hybrid spaces where capitalist and non-capitalist cultures collide; sites of expert knowledge production (for example, laboratories and trading floors); or sites ignored or exploited by governments and private interest.

The goal of this module is to familiarize you with the history of ethnography (especially as it intersects with the history of media) and to introduce you to contemporary approaches to ethnographic research. You will learn how to approach interviews, how to identify and document a set of research sites, and how to organize that work into a plan for further research. Again, your WordPress skills will come in handy in your presentation of the field notes you produce.

Reading Policy

Reading is the core discipline in humanistic and social-scientific research. Read slow and deep. On weeks where I have assigned two authors, I will give you a synopsis of those readings, the week before, so you can select which reading to spend time with.

Late Policy

After the deadline, grades drop by 2.5% per day—one step on the letter-grade scale every two days. Weekends are not included in the determination of late penalties.

Evaluation Criteria for Module Exercises:

A —The student learnt to use the software and followed the steps outlined for the production of the practice-based deliverable. The written text shows that the student has done the readings carefully, understood them, attended lectures, reflected on the course material, and developed a thoughtful use of software informed by course concepts.

A- — The student learnt to use the software and followed the steps outlined for the production of the practice-based deliverable. The written text shows that the student has done the readings, attended lectures, and has a good grasp of course concepts. However, the text appears to lack the depth gained through reflection and revision. Concepts might be defined well but put to use in a way that betrays a lack of reflection on their meaning.

B+ — The student learnt to use the software and followed the steps outlined for the production of the practice-based deliverable. The written text shows that the student has done the readings and attended lectures. But there is textual evidence of some misunderstanding of course concepts, e.g., inaccurate paraphrasing of course authors.

B — The student learnt to use the software and followed the steps outlined for the production of the practice-based deliverable. It is unclear from the written text that the student has done the readings and attended lectures. There is textual evidence of considerable misunderstanding of course concepts. The text is also sloppy—e.g., there are spelling mistakes and grammatical errors—and was likely produced in haste without time to refer back to course readings and notes taken in class.

B- — The student learnt to use the software and followed the steps outlined for the production of the practice-based deliverable. It is unclear from the written text that the student has done the readings and attended lectures. There is textual evidence of a neglect of course materials. Many of the propositions made in the text could have been made without any engagement with the readings. There are also spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

C+ — The student has not learnt to use the software or followed the steps outlined for the production of the practice-based deliverable and has no excuse for this lapse. The student has not attended classes during the module. None of the propositions made in the text show engagement with the readings.

Academic Integrity Policy

Statement on Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism from NYU Steinhardt:

https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/current-students/register-classes/registration/statement-academic-integrity

The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens. Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty:

- o Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
- o Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged.
- o Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
- o Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
- o Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work. Disciplinary Sanctions

When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline. The Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with the New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.

Student Resources

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students requesting reasonable accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to register with the Moses Center for students with Disabilities. You can begin the registration process by completing Moses Center Online Intake. Once completed, a Disability Specialist will be in contact with you. Students requiring services are strongly encouraged to register prior to the upcoming semester or as early as possible during the semester to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations.

NYU Writing Center (Washington Square):

411 Lafayette, 4th Floor.

Schedule an appointment online at https://nyu.mywconline.com

NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative (IDI):

The NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative (IDI) offers free and confidential legal services to NYU students and employees, and their immediate family members, on their immigration cases. IDI can assist with DACA, TPS, asylum, legal permanent residency, citizenship, employment authorization, representation in immigration court, humanitarian visas, and consultations for those who have had contact with the criminal system (e.g., arrest or conviction) or have violated their visa. IDI also provides foreign travel monitoring for those affected by the Travel Ban, or who are at risk of being denied entry to the US, Know-Your-Rights trainings, and advocacy within NYU departments (financial aid, housing, student groups).

Contact IDI at immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu or 212- 998-6435 (no walk-ins).

More information at: https://www.law.nyu.edu/immigrantrightsclinic/IDI