

**History of Media and Communication**  
**E59.0003**  
**Fall 2010**

**Prof. Max Liboiron**  
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Section 01: Mon/Wed 11:00am - 12:15pm- East Building, 239 Greene Street, Rm 420

Section 02: Mon/Wed 2:00pm - 03:15pm- Waverly Building, 24 Waverly Place, Rm 366

Office Hours: By Appointment

**Course Description**

A survey of the four great revolutions in human communication: orality (speech), literacy (writing & reading), typography (print & mass literacy), & the electronic media (telegraph, telephone, photography, & film, radio & television, computers, & communication satellites). Different forms of communication have emerged within and against different social, economic, perceptual, and semiotic conditions that were themselves specific to different historical moments. Only by thinking carefully about transitions and interactions among media and culture in the past can we hope to understand the pace, direction, and character of changes today. In addition, we examine how latter forms of communication deeply affect the former through combination and overlap.

**Outcomes**

Students who have successfully completed this course will have a facility with key technological innovations as they pertain to mediated communications, an ability to critically engage historical 'facts', a more complex understanding of the ways in which technology and culture are co-constituted at different historical intersections.

**Required Texts**

Briggs, Asa & Burke, Peter (2005). *A Social History of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity. (available at Bookstore)

Other readings posted to Blackboard throughout the semester.

**Class Format**

Each week, we will undertake a specific theme that interrogates the ways in which communication technologies and other mediations both shape and are shaped by history. We will engage the themes through class lectures (typically Mondays) followed by a full class session dedicated to discussion of the readings, lectures and/or film screenings (typically Wednesdays). Class discussions will be student-led.

**Class Requirements**

**Weekly Discussion:** All students are expected to come to class prepared. It is assumed that you will have completed all readings.

As in all of your courses, good faith, respect and trust are crucial to enabling class discussion. The ideas and concepts we'll be discussing may challenge or conflict with our commonly held beliefs and perspectives. Such challenges should not be construed as value judgments nor should anything discussed in class be construed as a personal offense. Our goal (and that of the university more generally) is to get us thinking critically about the things we often take for granted and to enable us to support our beliefs intelligently and thoughtfully. If you experience any discomfort with material

discussed in class, please talk with me directly, and we'll work together to resolve the situation effectively.

**Attendance:**

Your attendance is required at all sessions. There will be a policy of 2 excused absences over the term. A 3rd absence will result in an extra assignment to be determined by me (updating, correcting, or nuancing a Wikipedia entry relevant to the class). More than 3 absences will negatively affect your final grade for the course. Three lates equal one absence.

Should you require a long absence, be sure to notify me in advance. Arrangements can be made with prior notice, but do not expect consideration after the fact (unless, of course, in the case of extreme emergencies). You are responsible for obtaining any missed notes or material.

**Assignments:** There will be two assignments due on dates specified. More details on attached sheet (and black board).

**Exams:** 1 Midterm and 1 Final Exam, both take-homes, on dates specified.

**Assignments & Grading**

Midterm Exam 20%

Assignment #1 20%

Assignment #2 20%

Final Exam 20%

Participation\* 20%

*\*includes pop quizzes, in-class exercises, quality of discussion, asking questions, reading/class notes & attendance*

**Evaluation Rubric**

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed

This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

Any discussions of grades will be entertained 24 hours after they have been received. Remember that grades are earned, not negotiated.

### **Late Assignments**

All work is due on the dates indicated in the Course Syllabus (unless other arrangements have been made in advance). Late assignments are subject to a penalty equivalent to five (5) percent for each day after the due date. Generally, this means that a one-day late assignment awarded an A will be given an A-, and so on. *Work more than 4 days late will not be accepted, and will result in zero points - no partial credit.*

### **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

"Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do.... You violate the principle 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 that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. Plagiarism, *whether intended or not*, is academic fraud. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you. " (See School of Education Bulletin, 2009)

### **Students with Disabilities:**

Please do not wear any scented products such as perfumes, colognes, scented sprays, or use heavily scented soaps before or during class. Thank you for your consideration in this matter. Any student wearing such products will be asked to leave class, shower, and return. This will count as a late. Any student who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). They will ensure accommodations are provided.

## Schedule of Classes (subject to change)

### **Week 1**

Wednesday 09/08: Introductions, Course Outline, the Uses of History (Lecture and Discussion)  
No readings required

### **Week 2: Introductions**

Monday 09/13: The Uses of History (Discussion)

Readings:

Briggs & Burke – Introduction

Davies, Martin (2005). "Variation 3: History as Prosthesis," from *Why History Dominates Contemporary Society*. London: 120-183. (selection)

Definition: Communication & Media

Wednesday 09/15: Visual Culture and Cave Paintings (Discussion)

Readings:

Pfeiffer, J. (1983). "Was Europe's Cave Art the Start of the Information Age?" *Smithsonian*.

Marshack, A. (2007). "The Art and Symbols of Ice Age Man." In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 5-13). Boston: Pearson.

### **Week 3: Orality**

Monday 09/20: Orality (Lecture)

In-class exercise

Wednesday 09/22: Orality (Discussion)

Readings:

Ong, Walter (2002). "The Psychodynamics of Orality," In Ong, *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge.

Webster, Anthony K. (2006). "Keeping the Word: On Orality and Literacy (With a Sideways Glance at Navajo)" *Oral Tradition*, Volume 21, Number 2, October 2006, pp. 295-324

### **Week 4: Alphabets and Inscription**

Monday 09/27: Alphabets and Inscription (Lecture)

Wednesday 09/29: Alphabets and Inscription (Discussion)

Readings:

Innis, H. (2007). "Media in Ancient Empires." In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 23-29). Boston: Pearson.

Robinson, A. (2007). "The Origins of Writing." In P. Heyer & D. Crowley (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 36-42). Boston: Pearson.

Drucker, J. (2007). "The Alphabet." In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 46-54). Boston: Pearson.

### **Week 5: Plato & Aristotle Lay it Down**

Monday 10/04 Communication in the Ancient World (Lecture)

Wednesday 10/06 Plato's *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Discussion)

#### **DUE: Assignment #1**

Readings:

Peters, John Durham. (2001). "Dialogue and Dissemination." In Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Plato. (360 BCE). *Phaedrus*.

Aristotle (350 BCE). *Rhetoric Book I* Parts 1-7  
Midterm exam questions given

### **Week 6**

Monday 10/11 **NO CLASSES**. School holiday.  
Wednesday 10/13: Midterm exam- no class.  
Take home exam. DUE Saturday, 10/16 at NOON.

### **Week 7: Middle (St)ages -- Looking Back to the Future**

Monday 10/18: Overview of Early-Middle-High Middle Ages (Lecture)  
Wednesday 10/20: Middle Ages and Communication (Discussion)

Readings:

Burke, J., & Ornstein, R. (2007). "Communication and Faith in the Middle Ages." In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 73-80). Boston: Pearson.  
Rubenstein, R. (2004). *Aristotle's Children*. New York: Harvest Books. (Prologue & Ch. 7)

### **Week 8: Gutenberg Galaxy**

Monday 10/25: The Social Impact of the Printing Press (Lecture)  
Wednesday 10/27: The Public Sphere (Discussion)

Readings:

Briggs & Burke -- Chapters 2, 3  
Graff, H. (2007). "Early Modern Literacies." In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 104-112). Boston: Pearson.  
Definition: Public

### **Week 9: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Technology: Revolutions in Time and Space**

Monday 11/1: Role of Technology & The Industrial Revolution (Lecture)  
Wednesday 11/3: Time-Space-Sensory Revolutions (Discussion)

Readings:

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang (1986). "Panoramic travel" from *The Railway Journey: The industrialization of time and space in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*.  
Carolyn Marvin, "Annihilating Space, Time, and Difference: Experiments in Cultural Homogenization," *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford UP, 1988).  
Briggs & Burke -- pages 121 to 141

### **Week 10: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Technology: New Networks and Electrical Communication**

Monday 11/8: Electrical Communication: Telegraphy & Telephones (Lecture)  
Wednesday 11/10: Electrical Communication (Discussion)

Readings:

Michèle Martin, "The Culture of the Telephone," in: "Hello, Central?" *Gender, Technology, and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems* (McGill-Queen's UP, 1991).  
Briggs & Burke. Pages TBA

### **Week 11: Fidelity and Sound**

Monday 11/15: The Phonograph, the telephone, and Radio (Lecture)  
Wednesday 11/17: Sound, Liveness, and the Performance of Fidelity.

Readings:

Winston, B. (1998). "The Capture of Sound," Chapter three, in *Media Technology and Society*. London: Routledge.

Sousa, "The Menace of Mechanical Music," *Appleton's Magazine*, August 1906.

Kompare, D. (2005). "Transcribed Adventures: Radio and the Recording." In D. Kompare (Ed.), *Rerun Nation* (pp. TBA). London: Routledge.

James Lastra, "Fidelity Versus Intelligibility"

### **Week 12: Photographic Literacy**

Monday 11/22: The Invention of Photography (Lecture)

Wednesday 11/24: Photography (Discussion)

Readings:

Sekula, A. (1982). "The Invention of Photographic Meaning," In V. Burgin (Ed) *Thinking Photography* (pp. 85-109). Houndsmill, UK: MacMillan Press.

Keller, U. (2007). "Early Photojournalism." In D. Crowley & P. Heyer (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 161+168). Boston: Pearson.

Hirsch, M. (2003). "I Took Pictures." In J. Greenberg (Ed.), *Trauma at Home* (pp. 69-86).

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

### **Week 13: Mass Stirrings – Radio and Television**

Monday 11/29: History of Radio and Television Technologies - From the Military to the Home (Lecture)

Wednesday 12/1: Mass Stirrings (Discussion)

Readings:

Briggs & Burke -- Chapter 5 (from p 124-132) & 6

Williams, R. (1974). "The Technology and The Society." In R. Williams (Ed.), *Television* (pp. 3-31). London: Fontana/Collins.

### **Week 14: A Consuming Culture**

Monday 12/6: Motion Pictures and Comic Books (Lecture)

#### **DUE: Assignment#2**

Wednesday 12/8: Cinematic Visions, Spectacular Narratives (Discussion)

Readings:

Briggs & Burke -- Chapter 5, PAGES 132 - 145

Wright, Bradford (2001). "Turning Point" in *Comic Book Nation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Czitrom, D. (2007). "Early Motion Pictures." In P. Heyer & D. Crowley (Eds.), *Communication in History* (5th ed., pp. 176-183). Boston: Pearson.

Definition: Consumption

Definition: Mass

Definition: Popular

### **Week 15: Convergence & Fragmentation**

Monday 12/013 Computers, Webs, Networks and Hybrid Forms (Lecture)

Wednesday 12/15: The (Not So) Radical Potential of the Digital? (Discussion)

Readings:

Briggs & Burke -- Chapters 7, 8

**Final Exam Questions given. Due date TBA.**