

**MCC-UE 03 (#10411) Fall 2016
History of Media and Communication**

Professor [Lisa Gitelman](#)

**Lectures Mondays and Wednesdays 4:55-6:10 PM in GCASL #C95
Recitations (sections 2-7, 9, and 10) on Fridays according to your
registration.**

**Recitation Leaders: [Ayesha Omer](#), [Lygia Georgiou](#), [Anne Pasek](#), and
[Tristan Beach](#)**

Course Description

This course introduces students to the history of media and communication and to the stakes of historical inquiry. Rather than tracing a necessarily selective historical arc from alphabet to Internet or from cave painting to coding, the course is organized around an exploration of key concepts such as literacy, publicity, temporality, visual culture, networks, and information.*

Students will work with primary and secondary sources in order to analyze the ways that media emerge within and against different social, economic, perceptual, and semiotic conditions that are themselves culturally and historically specific. Only by thinking carefully about media, culture, and communication in the past can we hope to understand the pace, direction, and character of changes today.

Lisa Gitelman, Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication
Office: 239 Greene St., 722
Office Hours: Mondays at noon

Required Texts

I've ordered 3 books for you via the university bookstore. All are also available through online booksellers should you wish, and all are available in free electronic versions via the NYU Libraries. Be careful about relying entirely on the library versions, since NYU pays for intricate licenses that may limit the amount of time you can view a book, the number of pages you can download, or the number of students who can view the book at the same time. Plan ahead. You will need to read the books before class, discuss them in detail during recitations, and be able to refer to them as the semester continues, especially when preparing for exams.

- Minae Mizumura, *The Fall of Language in the Age of English* (Columbia).
- Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Harvard)
- Michael Newman, *Video Revolutions: On the History of a Medium* (Columbia)

The remaining required readings for the course will be available via Classes in the “Resources” area, or via links on the syllabus below. In order to use the links below please make sure you are logged into the [NYU Library](#). You will be tested on material from the required readings, so pick a format and mode of access that will give you the most confidence about your ability to retain and discuss what you read. Me, I’m an advocate of hard copies.

Expectations and Assessment

(1) Readings are to be completed before class. Lectures provide context for better understanding the texts. You will get a lot more out of the texts and the lectures if you do the reading beforehand. Weekly recitations are an opportunity to work through these texts and related key concepts as a community. The prerequisite for high-quality discussion is that everyone reads material ahead of time. Come to class prepared to engage. Remember, “skimming” is never enough. Bring the readings to recitation with you, so you can discuss them in detail.

(2) Engaged participation. We will be looking for knowledge-building contributions that show not only that you are trying to understand the readings but also that you can contribute to the intellectual life of the class. A pre-requisite for active and intelligent participation in discussions is prompt and regular attendance. Plan on attending every class meeting this semester.

Attendance in recitation is a course requirement; attendance in lecture is recommended as the easiest possible way to do well in the course.

As a matter of common courtesy, please refrain from walking in and out of the room while class is in session. Silence your phones and put them away. Don’t be a distraction to me, to yourself, or your peers. Laptops should remain closed unless otherwise instructed for class activities. If special circumstances make your laptop necessary please be in touch at the beginning of the semester and please sit in the two front rows.

(3) Essay Writing: You will be asked to craft three essays as part of this class (details to follow). These essays are opportunities to demonstrate close engagement with the materials of the course. This kind of analytical and persuasive essay writing is a critical skill for thriving in college and beyond. Please email an electronic copy of each essay to your recitation leader as instructed by her or him.

Any plagiarism *no matter how accidental* will result in failure for the course. Remember, it is plagiarism if you use someone else’s ideas without attribution or someone else’s words without quotation. The university’s [Writing Center](#) is an invaluable resource should you wish to take advantage of it. You are entitled to one-on-one writing tutorials if you plan ahead and make appointments. The Writing Center does not provide copyediting services.

(4) Resources: [Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#) If you are entitled to accommodations in light of a documented disability, please be in touch at the beginning of the semester. You must be proactive in making arrangements for the accommodations to which you are entitled.

(5) Grading policy: Grading will be done by the entire teaching staff working together, including and closely supervised by Professor Gitelman. Recitation leaders will assign participation grades at the moment when final course grades are tabulated. Repeated absences from recitation will have a depressing effect on your participation grade. Semester grades will be tabulated as follows:

a. Engaged Participation	20%
b. Essays	50%
Essay 1	10%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	20%
c. Examinations*	30 %
Midterm	10 %
Final	20 %

(6) 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 lacking or 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

Wednesday, Oct. 26 Reading Day
 Friday, Oct. 28 No Recitations This Week

9.

Monday, Oct. 31 Lecture #11
 Wednesday, Nov. 2 Lecture #12
 Friday, Nov. 4 Recitation VII

Read: [McDougall pp. 1-18](#), and Parks
 Read: [Stadler](#),

10.

Monday, Nov. 7 Lecture #13
 Wednesday, Nov. 9 Lecture #14
 Friday, Nov. 11 Recitation VIII

Read: Gunning and [Singer \(pp. 72-97\)](#)
 Read: [Spigel pp. 36-45](#) and [Wilk](#)

11.

Sunday, Nov. 13
 Monday, Nov. 14 Lecture #15
 Wednesday, Nov. 16 Lecture #16
 Friday, Nov. 18 Recitation IX

Essay #2 due by 6 PM
 Read: Newman, pp. 1-71
 Read: Newman, pp. 72-105

Information, Networks, Computation

12.

Monday, Nov. 21 Lecture #17

Read: [McPherson](#) & [Streeter](#) & [Mills](#)

13.

Monday, Nov. 28 Lecture #18
 Wednesday, Nov. 30 Lecture #19
 Friday, Dec. 2 Recitation X

Read: [Pfaffenberger](#) and [Brunton](#) pp. 1-19
 Read: [Eppink](#) & [Murrell](#)

14.

Monday, December 5 Lecture #20
 Wednesday, Dec. 7 Lecture #21
 Friday, Dec. 9 Recitation XI

Read: [Gillespie](#) and [Brunton](#)
 Read: [Hassett](#) and [Zittrain](#)

15.

Monday, Dec., 12 Final Exam Review
 Tuesday, Dec. 13 Study Day
 Wednesday, Dec. 14 In Class Final Exam

Essay #3 due by class

* Key concepts in this semester will include:

Technological determinism
 Primary versus secondary source
 Back formation, e.g., "orality"
 Public sphere and imagined community
 Recursive public
 Authorship, the author function
 Infrastructure
 Path dependence/inertia
 Scripts, as in gender scripts

Reading
 Writing
 Network
 Separation of transportation and communication
 Cinema of attractions
 Mobile privatization
 Global English and untranslatability

And here are 20 BIG questions for media history that you will learn to approach with reference to specifics from readings and lectures plus current events.

- Q1. How are the meanings of new media determined by users as well as producers? By uses as well as inventions?
- Q2. How does or how should accounts of media history take politics into consideration? Specify what you mean by politics.
- Q3. How do or how should we define the objects of media history; e.g., what is “video,” or “print”?
- Q4. How have mediated communications worked centripetally (pulling people together) and/or centrifugally (driving them apart)?
- Q5. How have digital media helped to complicate the notion of primary sources? Other key concepts on the list above?
- Q6. How will—how should—the history of today’s social media be told? With reference to what kinds of agents, influences, occurrences, precursors?
- Q7. How will—or how should—the history of Google be told? With reference to what kind of agents, influences, occurrences, precursors?
- Q8. How is James Carey’s history of the telegraph relevant (and not) to today’s digital networks?
- Q9. How are new media domesticated? That is, how have different media and the domestic sphere (home! family!) helped to articulate one another?
- Q10. How has imperialism shaped media history? And how have media helped to shape imperialism?
- Q11. How has democratization functioned as a media historical pattern and/or myth?
- Q12. How has media history variously involved the interplay of attention and distraction? Of privacy and surveillance or the quantified self?
- Q13. How have media variously helped to shape experiences of time and space?
- Q14. How is Gunning’s early history of cinema relevant (and not) to the early history of another medium?
- Q15. How have different media been differently structured by Foucault’s author function?
- Q16. How is media history necessarily also the history of war and/or violence? Of human abilities and disability?
- Q17. How have different media been differently structured by government regulation and/or ownership in the U.S. and/or elsewhere?

- Q18. How have modern media relied upon or helped to structure “mass” markets that are not just numerically big (masses and masses) but also structurally distinct, a.k.a. “modern”?
- Q19. How have the categories of “news” and “information” changed over time, and can you identify any of the relevant mechanisms of change?
- Q20. How might emoji offer an object lesson (and not) for the East/West dynamics of media history?