

Ethnographic and Critical Media Studies Approaches to Digital Media

ANTH 2838

Professor Gabriella Coleman
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Spring 2024, 12:00 PM - 2:45 PM (Mondays)
Class: Peabody 12



Overview

This class conjoins recent ethnographic and media studies work on digital media with complementary pieces on politics, language, communication, and/or media & technology. The book selection will expose students to cutting edge research by anthropologists and critical internet and digital media scholars who address issues of labor, visual culture, war, journalism, algorithms, race, class, activism, and feminism. Many of the additional texts, in the form of an article or chapter, will expose students to classical, more theoretical or complementary texts around questions of labor, publics, and technology. Pairing a book with these texts together will allow students to familiarize themselves with and critically rethink theoretical paradigms and arguments around technology and related topics (like journalism, politics, embodiment etc.) vis-a-vis empirically grounded studies and ethnographies covering a range of issues about the use and abuse of digital technologies during contemporary times and in different parts of the world. While the course is not primarily concerned with methodological questions, we will pay close attention to how authors collected and analysed data and how they use their data to craft arguments.

Course Delivery Guidelines and Core Course Logistics

This class will be will be run as a seminar. Participation is essential to a seminar and will count toward percent of the final grade and will entail discussion, contribution to a collective quote file, and one class facilitation session.

Attendance at seminar is thus required. I will excuse absence for reasons of illness, religious holiday or official university business. To notify me of excused absence, please email me at least the day before class begins, documenting the reason for the absence (to

the best of your ability). Please arrange to get notes and any material shown in class from a classmate. You are allowed one unexcused class. After the second unexcused absence, your final grade will be reduced a half letter (A to A-, A- to B+, etc).

I expect students to come fully prepared to discuss all the readings critically but constructively and engage with fellow students in a respectful fashion. The goal of discussion facilitation is to cultivate directed and serious discussion that meaningfully engages with the texts and issues at hand. While facilitators bear some responsibility for seeding and guiding the discussion, we all share the responsibility to ensure that those discussions are engaging, meaningful, and respectful. To facilitate our seminar, come prepared to discuss arguments and key passages in the texts. To aid in our discussion, you will be required to identify 2 quotes to share with class on our quote file (8 times) and post up to 8 précis outlining core arguments by putting the two main texts in dialogue with each other. The précis and quotes will be due before class by 9 am, the day of class.

Quote File URL:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NUOBd5o_ommCConirH_e6Ik8t5c7JTFHnIo4AuQowOo/edit?usp=sharing

Requirements and Methods of Assessment*

○ Participation/Quote File	20%
○ Class Facilitation	20%
○ Discussion Reflections 8 (lowest one dropped)	30 %
○ Review Essay or Research Paper	30%

* Detailed instructions around assignments will be provided in an assignment booklet but the final paper is due: **Wed May 1 2024 at 5 PM** via email or canvas (the due date may be subject to change depending on the final enrollment numbers).

Book chapters and articles will be available on the Canvas class website.

Course Policies*

* Detailed course policies can be found at the end of the syllabus schedule and in the Assignment and Logistics Booklet.

Syllabus/Reading

The following is a “working schedule.” Class materials are subject to change based on the interests, understanding, and general pace of the class. More often than not, I cut readings but like to include the full list at the start of the semester. If we are reading one book (along with the companion piece), I usually assign about 70-75% of the main book and many of the exact chapters are TBD but will be determined at least a week before we meet.

Week 1, January 22: The Political Economy of Technology

- Raymond Williams, “The Technology and the Society,” *On Television and Technological Form*, 1974
- Karen Levy, *Data Driven: Truckers, Technology, and the New Workplace Surveillance*, 2023 [chapters 1, 2, 3]

Module One: Control & Entrapment

Week 2, January 29: Computation, Surveillance and Labor

- Karen Levy, *Data Driven: Truckers, Technology, and the New Workplace Surveillance*, 2023 [chapters 4, 5, 6, 7]
- Ranjodh Singh Dhaliwal, “On Addressability, or What Even is Computation?” *Critical Inquiry*, 2022

Week 3, February 5: Surveillance at Work

- Kashmir Hill, *Your Face Belongs to Us*, 2023
- Simone Brown, “Introduction,” *Dark Matter*, 2015

Week 4, February 12: Technologies as a Social Practice/Addiction by Design

- Natasha Schull, *Addiction By Design*, 2012 [Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5]

Week 5, February 19: President’s Day

No Class

Week 6, February 26: Algorithms at Work

- Angèle Christin, *Metrics at Work: Journalism and the Contested Meaning of Algorithms*, 2020
- Nick Seaver, *Computing Taste*, 2023

Module 2: Communicating & Agitating

Week 7, March 4: Theoretical Interlude

- Robert Moore, ““Context Collapse on a small island: Using Goffman’s dissertation fieldwork to think about online communication.” *Language, Culture, and Society* 2019.
- Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion*, New York, 1922 (Selections)
- William Mazarella, “The Anthropology of Populism: Beyond the Liberal Settlement.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48, 2019.

Week 8, March 11: Spring Break

Spring Break

Week 9, March 18: Evidence, A study in evidentiary contrasts

- Rebecca Stein, *Screen Shots: State Violence on Camera in Israel and Palestine*, 2021
- Ron Niezen, “Belling the Cat” *The Technologies and Politics of Justice Claims in Practice*, 2020
- “How Israeli Media Depicts the Destruction in Gaza.” *On the Media*, 2024
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/episodes/on-the-media-israeli-tv-news-sanitizes-bombing-gaza-plagiarism-political>

Week 10, March 25: News as Event

- Francis Cody, *The News Event: Popular Sovereignty in the Age of Deep Mediatization*, 2023 (Introduction, 1, 4,5 & Epilogue)
- Michael Warner, “Counterpublics.” *Publics and Counterpublics*, 2002

Week 11 April 1: Culture Wars and More

- Naomi Klein, *Doppelganger*, 2023
- Nancy Frazer, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot be Born*, 2019

Week 12, April 8: Culture Wars and More

- Moira Wegel, “Hating Theory: “Cultural Marxism,” “CRT,” and the Power of Media Affects,” *International Journal of Communication*, 2023
- Eliah Bures, “The Intellectual as Culture Warrior Metapolitics and the European New Right,” *Fascism, Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 2023
- Gabriella Coleman, “From busting cults to breeding cults: Anonymous h/acktivism vs the (a)nonymous far right,” *Hau*, 2023

Week 13, April 15: Technological Microcultures and Who Decides?

- Daniel Bessner and Nicolas Guilhot, “Who Decides?” *The Decisionist Imagination: Sovereignty, Social Science and Democracy in the 20th Century*, 2019.
- Ben Tarnoff, “Better, Faster, Stronger,” *New York Review of Books*, 2023
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/09/21/better-faster-stronger-the-philosopher-of-palo-alto/>
- Brandi Collins, “Satoshi Is Black,” *Wired*, 2023.
<https://www.wired.com/story/what-can-crypto-still-do-for-black-people/>
- Yuk Hui, “On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries” *e-flux*, 2017.
<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-consciousness-of-neoreactionaries/>

- Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “The Reluctant Prophet of Effective Altruism,” *The New Yorker*, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/08/15/the-reluctant-prophet-of-effective-altruism>

Week 14, April 22: Last class

Wrap Up
