

Spring 2019

# ENG 302-HM2-002: Communication Theory

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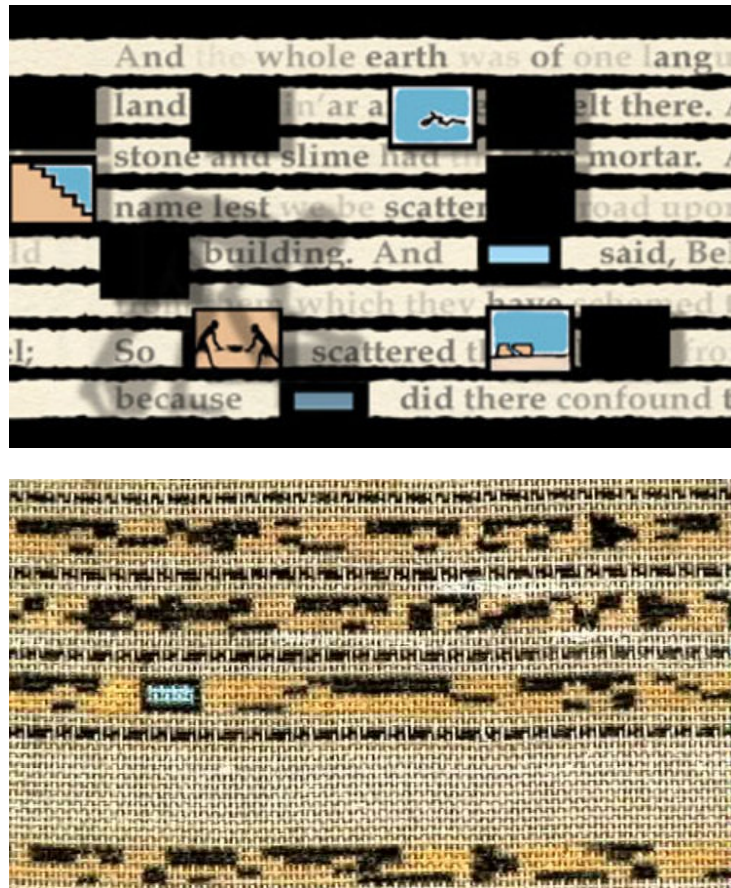
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## MEDIA + COMMUNICATION THEORY



Beryl Korot, *Babel, the 7 minute scroll*, *Babel*

### Description

This course will focus on critical approaches to the study of communication and media on both micro and macro scales. We will investigate theories that approach the most granular levels of linguistic and sensory transmission and zoom out to analyze the ideological, political and social functions and effects of mass media systems. As we evaluate, analyze and historicize a variety of media forms, our aim is not to treat each (printed text, photography, radio, cinema, the internet, etc.) as a stable and independent entity, but to probe and question the philosophically rich and conceptually ambiguous notions of “medium,” “media” and “mediate” themselves. Along the way, we will consider “theory” in a wide field: in addition to grappling with linguistic propositions of significant 19th, 20th and 21st century thinkers, we will turn our attention to artist-made media objects that serve as *embodied* forms of communication and media theory and prompt us to think through and with media in new and imaginative ways.

## Course Objectives

- Acquire and/or improve the fundamentals of media literacy in terms of one's ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms.
- Acquire a critical vocabulary in the fields of communication theory and media studies.
- Develop the capacity to identify and interpret theoretical and ideological positions as they circulate in commercial and creative media forms.
- Engage with, use, refine and critique the concepts and arguments regarding media encountered in the readings in a coherent and compelling way, in both oral and written form.

## Requirements

### 1. Online writing

Students will compose short texts in response to the week's assignment. **Each week you will find a "guide" posted on the Moodle that introduces the assigned materials.** It is crucial that you read this short introductory text first, as it will both offer a framework to guide your reading/screening and provide details about your required posts.

These online responses will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- originality
- depth and rigor of thought
- intertextual integration (thinking through multiple texts at once)
- quality of writing

The short posts are ***interpretive rather than summative***: they will showcase your active thinking-through of the assigned texts and media materials, and they should cite specific details rather than fall back on generalizations. You will need to take notes as you watch/read as a means of keeping track of your thinking and curiosities.

### 2. Participation

Thorough reading/screening of the assigned material is essential for engaged discussion (both on and offline). Bring your screening/reading notes and your marked-up texts (please print the week's assigned readings).

Each class will offer students the opportunity to discuss and question the topics presented. Following this format, 15 percent of the final grade will be based on both the frequency and quality of the student's comments, questions and observations, with the emphasis on quality. The quality is determined by, among other things, the relevance, insight and clarity of remarks. Short, unannounced quizzes may be given to ensure students are keeping up with the assigned reading.

**Please note: 25% of your final grade will result from your rigorous engagement with the assigned materials and resulting participation (15% in-class participation; 10% online responses). This doesn't mean you understand everything perfectly! It means you have devoted sufficient time to struggling with the material: reading/watching thoroughly, and keeping track of/taking responsibility for your resulting thoughts and questions.**

### 3. Presentations

Students will participate in two presentations and will sign-up for topics and dates in weeks two and three. These presentations should both integrate class material (that covered in the assigned material and in class), showcasing mastery over discourses and terminology, as well demonstrate your capacity to theorize media creatively and independently.

### 4. Final projects

A major, multi-staged media project will require students to analytically explore and theorize a contemporary media form. The project will consist of four separate and assessable components: formal proposal with bibliography, short presentation, 5-7 page research paper, and a media object or online component.

HONORS ENHANCEMENT: Students seeking Honors credit will submit a 10-12 page research paper as the written component of their final project.

The above are weighted as follows:

Online posts - 10%

In-class participation - 15%

Presentation 1 - 15%

Presentation 2 - 20%

Final Project Proposal - 10%

Final Project Presentation - 5%

Final Project - 25%

### Grading

Evaluation will follow the university's grading scale:

A = 100-90 (superior)	B = 86-80 (very good)	C = 76-70 (acceptable)	F = 59-0 (inadequate)
B+ = 89-87 (excellent)	C+ = 79-77 (good)	D = 69-60 (minimum)	

### Attendance Policy

I expect every student to attend every class and to be on time.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for catching up (please contact me to inquire about missed material) as well as for submitting assignments due on the missed day (before our class meeting time); missed in-class group exercises and workshops cannot be made up.

Every unexcused absence after the second one will reduce your participation grade. More than four unexcused absences (4 weeks of the curriculum) can result in automatic failure of the course; excessive unexcused lateness of 15 minutes or more throughout the course will be considered as one absence. According to university policy, students who expect to miss classes or exams because of religious observance must submit to their instructors, by the end of the second week of classes, a written list of dates that will be missed. Similarly, athletes should submit a list of events. If you can't make a class—due to illness, an academic commitment, an interview, or a major extracurricular event—and you wish to have the absence excused, ask the Dean of Students to review the request.

## **Technology**

Please silence your cell phone completely, and don't have it out in class. Open your laptop only when needed for class work.

## **Plagiarism and Cheating**

The NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity defines plagiarism *as using or attempting to use written, oral, or graphic work which was authored or prepared by another and submitting it as one's own*. The full Code can be found at <https://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

If your work uses the idea or language of any other person, make that use clear to your reader by citing clearly and thoroughly. If I find plagiarized work, even if it seems to stem from carelessness, I'm required to report it to the Dean of Students.

## **Documented Disabilities**

If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me at the beginning of the semester to discuss accommodations. You may also contact Student Disability Services at (973) 596-3420.

## **Writing Center**

The NJIT Writing Center, located in Central King Building G17, offers one-on-one appointments to help with your written assignments. They are equipped to work with both creative and scholarly forms of writing. Please visit: <https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter>

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**Please note:** *the syllabus is subject to change.* Any email or in-class announcements take precedence.

### MEDIUM

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#### WEEK 1: BLINDNESS + VISION

**January 28**

Course Introduction

Peter Weir, *The Truman Show* (103 min, 1998)

#### WEEK 2: IN-BETWEEN-NESS

**February 4**

Plato, "Allegory of the Cave"

Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave"

#### WEEK 3: SEMIOTICS - MYTH - IDEOLOGY

**February 11**

Roland Barthes, "Wrestling"

David Croteau, "Media and Ideology"

Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (104 min, 2017)

### FRAME-WORKS

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#### WEEK 4: VISUAL TROPES

**February 18**

MYTHOLOGIES PRESENTATIONS

#### WEEK 5: CAMERA + CONTROL

**February 25**

Agnes Varda, *Ydessa, the bears + etc* (40 min, 2004)

Randal Rogers, "Colonial Imitation and Racial Insubordination: Photography at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition of 1904"

#### WEEK 6: WENDY RED STAR

**March 4**

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (50 min, 1972)

Nick Glass, "David Hockney Painting Sells..." and associated videos

Abaki Beck, "Decolonizing Photography: A Conversation With Wendy Red Star"

Gilbert King, "Edward Curtis' Epic Project"

Newark Museum field trip: *WENDY RED STAR* exhibition

#### WEEK 7: MEDIUM/MESSAGE/EYE/EAR

**March 11**

BBC, "Introducing Marshall McLuhan"

Edward Binns, Ernest Pintoff, Guy Fraumeni, "This is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Message" (50 min, 1967)

**March 18**

— — — **SPRING BREAK / NO CLASS MEETING** — — —

## **VOICES**

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### **WEEK 8: MEDIA - LAUGHTER - SHAME**

**March 25**

Bo Burnham, *8th Grade* (94 min, 2018)

Jon Ronson, “Monica Lewinsky: ‘The shame sticks to you like tar’”

### **WEEK 9: SACRED SOUNDS**

**April 1**

George T. Nierenberg, “Say Amen Somebody” (1 hour 40 min, 1982)

Greg Tate, “How #BlackLivesMatter Changed Hip-Hop and R&B in 2015”

Guest artist/scholar visit: **IMANI WILSON**

2nd PRESENTATIONS

## **DEEP STRUCTURE**

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### **WEEK 10: TERROR, MASS MEDIA, CITIZEN JOURNALISM**

**April 8**

Raoul Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro* (95 min, 2016)

Wesley Lowery, from *They Can’t Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America’s Racial Justice Movement*

2nd PRESENTATIONS

### **WEEK 11: FEAST + FAMINE**

**April 15**

Eric Alterman, “41 Million Americans Are Food Insecure. Why Are the Media Ignoring Them?”

CBS News, *Hunger in America* (50 min, 1968)

U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2016”

Franz Kafka, “The Hunger Artist”

Robeson Gallery field trip: *FEAST OR FAMINE* exhibition

2nd PRESENTATIONS

## **HI-TECH AFFECT**

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### **WEEK 12: IDOLS + IDLING**

**April 22**

Kyoko Miyake, *Tokyo Idols* (90 min, 2017)

Sherry Turkle, from *Alone Together*

Alfie Brown, “Love in the Age of Data”

Final project proposal/bibliography due

2nd PRESENTATIONS

### **WEEK 13: SCREEN RAGE**

**April 29**

Nina Huntemann, Roger Sorkin, Sut Jhally, *Joystick Warriors: Video Games, Violence & the Culture of Militarism* (58 min, 2013)

Ed Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* (excerpt)

Stephanie Papas, "APA Issues First-Ever Guidelines for Practice with Men and Boys"

### **WEEK 14: HOW NOT TO BE SEEN**

**May 6**

Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image"

Videos by Hito Steyerl

Final project presentations

Final projects due May 9