

Spring 2024

COM 318-002: Communication Theory and Practice

Rebekah Rutkoff

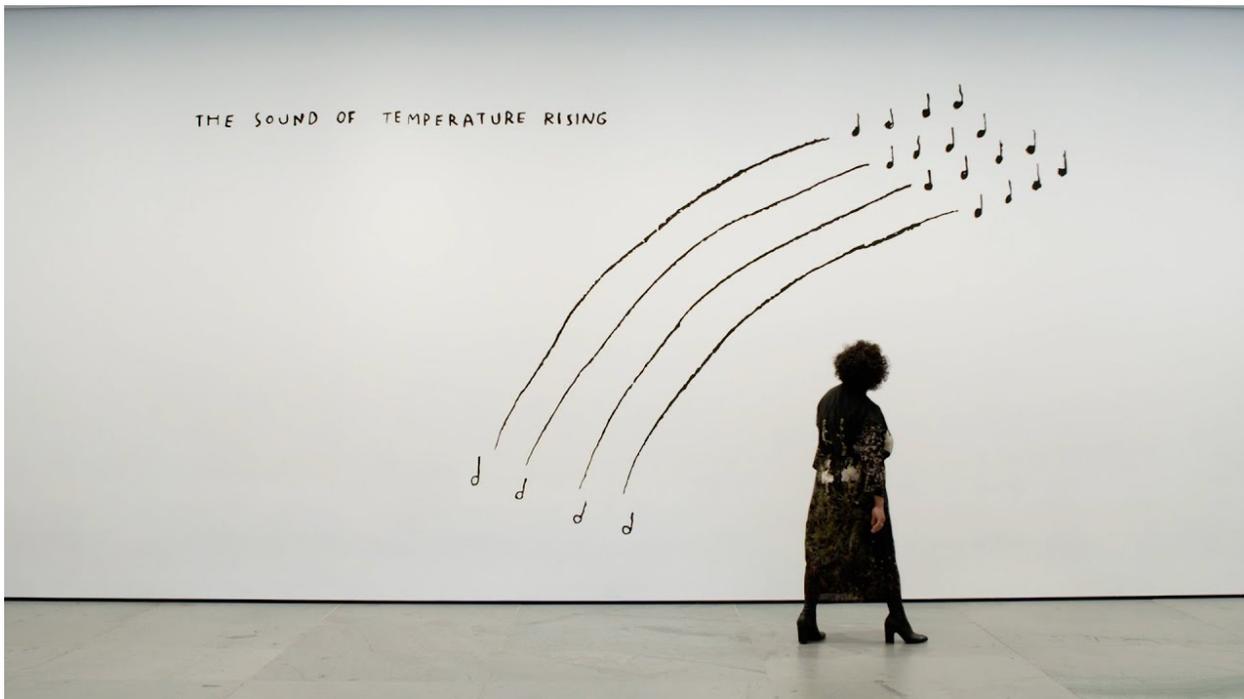
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Recommended Citation

Rutkoff, Rebekah, "COM 318-002: Communication Theory and Practice" (2024). *Humanities Syllabi*. 737.
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COMMUNICATION THEORY + PRACTICE



Christine Sun Kim, *The Sound of Temperature Rising* (2019)

Description

This course is both an introduction to critical theories of media and communication and an applied workshop for the production and discussion of student theory/practice experiments. We will approach “theory” in a wide field: grappling with the critiques and interventions of 20th and 21st century media philosophers and investigating the ways contemporary artists prompt us to think through communication and media in unexpected ways.

Course Objectives

- Acquire a critical vocabulary in the fields of communication and media theory
- Develop the capacity to identify and interpret theoretical and ideological positions as they circulate in a range of media forms
- Refine media literacy by producing multi-registered intertextual analyses
- Apply theoretical models to the production of conceptual and experimental work
- Learn to effectively critique peer-produced work in a workshop structure

Materials

Most course materials are available on Canvas. If you don't already have one, please sign up for a Newark Public Library card (available to all NJIT students) so that you can access films via Kanopy.

Pre-requisites/Co-requisites

HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher.

REQUIREMENTS

Participation

Participation is a central component of this course. Please come to class ready to share insights, ideas and questions about the assigned materials; bring your reading/screening notes as well as the assigned text(s). Each week you will find a posted "guide" that contextualizes the assigned material. Read this short text first, as it will provide questions to prepare you for engagement. Participation also includes low-stakes writing, forum posts and pop quizzes. Unless otherwise noted, assigned weekly material is to be completed for our Mon. meetings.

During many of our Wed. meetings, two or three students will workshop theory/practice assignments. Non-presenting students will review their peers' work in advance of the workshop and make and submit comments according to provided guidelines.

If you encounter issues that obstruct or limit your capacity to participate fully in our course, please communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can design solutions together. I am available to meet face-to-face as well as via Zoom and phone.

Theory/Practice Assignments

Each student will produce four theory/practice assignments. I will provide instigating prompts for these assignments that spring from the themes and questions we encounter in our assigned readings and media objects.

Final Projects

Following the development of project proposals and the receipt of feedback, students will produce final projects in essay or multi-media form.

The above are weighted as follows:
Participation - 30%
Theory/Practice Assignments - 35%
Final Project - 35%

Final Exam

There is no final exam in this course.

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

Every unexcused absence after the second one will reduce your participation grade. 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.

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

If your work uses the idea or language of any other person—in a paper, forum post, video essay or any other work—make that use immediately clear to your reader/viewer. Unacknowledged use of ChatGPT or similar generative artificial software to produce writing is a violation of academic integrity.

Late Work

If you know in advance that you are having trouble completing a formal assignment, please contact me as soon as possible. Extensions require 24 hours' notice; without an extension, the grade of late work will go down by five points per day. Late Canvas posts will receive partial credit for two weeks following the due date.

Accommodations

If you need an accommodation due to a disability, please contact Scott Janz, Associate Director of the [Office of Accessibility Resources and Services](#), to discuss your specific needs or to request a Letter of Accommodation Eligibility.

Writing Center

The NJIT Writing Center 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 Canvas or in-class announcements take precedence.

INTRODUCTION

Jan. 17

FORESTS, CAVES + MEDIATIONS

Jan. 22/24

"Allegory of the Cave," Plato
"The Social Life of Forests," Ferris Jabr
"Live for Now" commercial, PepsiCo.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Jan. 29/31

"Things I Thought Made Sense Just Don't Anymore," Mira Jacob
"The Poet John Lee Clark's 'How to Communicate' Brings DeafBlind Experience to the Page,"
New Yorker Radio Hour
"When Suicide Speaks Arabic," Ibrahim Sablaban
"The Face and the Book," John Durham Peters
>>>[practice workshop](#)

SIGN/CODE/MYTH

Feb. 5/7

"The Whiteness Myth," Rund Abdelfatah et al.
"Plastic," Roland Barthes
"Faces/Voices," Paul Basu/Paul Thomas Allen
"Flagging Patriotism: The Myth of Old Glory," Debra Merskin
Semiotics of the Kitchen, Martha Rosler

Workshop 1

OBJECTS + SPECTACLES

Feb. 12/14

"Commodity as Spectacle," Guy Debord
"The Racialisation of the Cultural Commodity," Anamik Saha
Century of the Self, Adam Curtis
Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse, Sut Jhally
>>>[asst. 1 due](#)

Workshop 2

ENCODE/DECODE

Feb. 26/28

Coded Bias, Shalini Kantayya
AI, Aint I A Woman? Joy Buolamwini
selections, *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Noble
"Encoding/Decoding," *Stuart Hall*
A Communications Primer, Ray and Charles Eames

Workshop 3

RE-DISTRIBUTION

Mar. 4/6

"In Defense of the Poor Image," Hito Steyerl
How Not to be Seen, Hito Steyerl
Strike, Hito Steyerl
A History Of The World According To Getty Images, Richard Misek
>>>[asst. 2 due](#)

Workshop 4

SPRING BREAK—————**March 13/15**

WAYS OF SEEING

Mar. 18/20

Ways of Seeing, John Berger
Field Trip — Newark Museum of Art: *The Spanish Caribbean Body*

GAZING

Mar. 25/27

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey
"The Oppositional Gaze Black Female Spectators," bell hooks
Get Out, Jordan Peele
Illusions, Julie Dash
>>>[asst. 3 due](#)

Workshop 5

LISTENING

Apr. 1/3

Deep Listening: The Story of Pauline Oliveros, Daniel Weintraub
“Kiss me softly | crackly | sharply,” Lucy Fife Donaldson
“Your Work Is a Product of Your Experience,” Christine Sun Kim
Love is the Message, The Message is Death, Arthur Jafa

Workshop 6

STEALING

Apr. 8/10

Citizen Four, Laura Poitras
AI with a Thinking Brush, Refik Anadol
“Daniel Ellsberg, Edward Snowden and the Modern Whistleblower,” Malcolm Gladwell
“Plagiarize This Paper,” Brian Frye
>>>asst. 4 due

Workshop 7

SLEEPING

Apr. 15/17

Sleep Dealer, Alex Rivera
“The Near Future, Like Tomorrow: An Interview with Alex Rivera,” Sara Haughn
“Pessimism, Futility and Extinction: An Interview with Eugene Thacker,” Thomas Dekeyser
selections, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway

Workshop 8

Apr. 22/24 —FP Workshop/Works-in-Progress Presentations

Apr. 29 — FP Works-in-Progress Presentations