

LMC 6316: Historical Approaches to Digital Media

FALL 2025 - SKILES 302

Instructor Information

Instructor	Email	Office Location & Hours
André Brock	andre.brock@lmc.gatech.edu	TSRB 318a Zoom/Thursdays 2p-4p by appointment

****This syllabus subject to change at the discretion of the instructor¹****

General Information

Description

How do we understand, and write about, our media past? What are the differences between a history of technology, and a technology of history? This course examines the connections between digital media and earlier media through history, philosophy, and cultural theory. The course will therefore explore the historical and material relationships between language, print, videogames, multimedia, and online cultures.

Students will consider concepts such as the relationship between analog and digital media technologies, as well as the shifting sites of production, distribution, and reception of digital media. By establishing a comparative approach to digital media's past and present, students will learn to consider the historical, social, and institutional forces that have engendered myriad forms of the digital media, discover the roots of our contemporary mediascape, and gain a greater understanding of digital media's place in culture and society. These relationships will be further addressed through the combination of close readings of media forms and artifacts with conceptual rubrics such as failure, obsolescence, glitch, intermedia, multimedia, remediation, medium specificity, and technological determinism. By the end of the course, students will be able to discuss and use several historiographic modes and put them to use in the historical, cultural, and material analysis of media—not to mention as inspiration and influence for media design, no matter the material.

¹ With as much advance notice as possible. There may be typos.

Format and Expectations

The class consists of a combination of participatory lectures, in-class and online discussions based on the assigned readings, and multiple writing assignments both online and offline. The writing assignments are designed to build up to the final paper, so there will be opportunities for revision and peer-review during the semester.

As a student in this class, you are expected to:

- Bring an open mind and critical perspective to the course materials, in-class, and online discussions
- read the assigned readings BEFORE class, not during
- complete writing assignments in a timely fashion.

As your instructor, I will:

- provide stimulating OR informative course materials
- actively facilitate in-class discussions and monitor/moderate online discussions,
- and give feedback on writing and assignments in a timely fashion

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

MS in Digital Media

1. Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate existing digital media artifacts, services, and environments using formal knowledge, and to explain and defend one's critical evaluation.
2. Analysis: Can analyze digital media as cultural objects
3. Evaluation: Can summarize their work orally and in written form using formal terminology

PhD in Digital Media

1. Students have knowledge, comprehension and ability to apply historical, cultural, and theoretical concepts to the study of digital media.
 2. Knowledge: Identify the historical and cultural roots of digital media
 3. Knowledge: Identify the major theoretical traditions contributing to scholarly discourse about digital media
 4. Comprehension: Discuss and distinguish among historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts for digital media
 5. Application: Apply theoretical concepts to specific digital media works
- Required

Texts, Tools, and Materials

All readings can be found on Perusall in either PDF or ePub form (but not both). Feel free to buy physical copies to support the authors. The readings below are not exhaustive; other supplemental readings will be suggested by myself or your classmates.

Formal discussions of course readings will take place on Piazza.

Perusall

Perusall is an annotation layer for any online content; this tool is intended to allow y'all to collaborate on your reading, synthesis, and understanding of the reading selections across the semester. In addition to highlighting snippets of text that you find interesting (or confusing), Perusall also allows the use of images and other multimedia content within your annotations.

We'll use Perusall to read and take notes on each assigned reading *together*. You'll find the link to the course Perusall on Canvas; i'll explain how we'll use this tool during class.

NOTE: I USE PERUSALL AS A BASIS FOR YOUR MIDSEMESTER AND FINAL GRADE

Let me explain: Perusall tracks

- how far you get into each reading
- how many annotations/notes you make on each reading, and
- the *quality* of your annotations. (It also checks to see if they're AI generated, so watch your step)

As such, i use it to monitor attendance and participation, as well as to assess your mastery of the concepts, theories, and examples. As such, *if you have trouble accessing Perusall, let me know IMMEDIATELY instead of waiting until you get a grade you're unhappy with because you didn't participate fully.*

Piazza

This term we will be using Piazza for class discussion. The system is highly catered to getting you help fast and efficiently from classmates and myself. Rather than emailing me questions I encourage you to post your questions on Piazza. If you have any problems or feedback for the developers, email team@piazza.com.

Find our class Piazza site at: <https://piazza.com/gatech/fall2024/lmc6316ab/home>

Assignments and Assessments

Your final grade will be determined by the following assignments:

Assignments	%age of Total Grade
IT Biography	10%
Portfolio - Annotations, Reading Reflections, and Responses	30%
Class Participation (online/offline)	60%
Discussion Leader	(25%)
Reading Comments	(15%)
Annotations	(10%)
In-class Discussion	(10%)

Grade Policies

A good grade requires thoughtful, informed participation in class and online, well executed arguments in writing, and an outstanding portfolio. Readings will be DISCUSSED on the day marked on the syllabus. Assignments are due as scheduled.

Absence Policies

I will expect you to attend class regularly. Students who are absent because of participation in approved Institute activities (such as field trips, professional conferences, and athletic events) will be permitted to make up the work missed during their absences. Approval of such activities will be granted by the Student Academic and Financial Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate, and statements of the approved absence may be obtained from the Office of the Registrar <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>. In this course, you will be allowed five absences. If you have six absences, your final grade will be lowered 10 points (a full letter grade). If you have seven unexcused absences, you will receive a grade of “F” for the course. You may use your five absences for job interviews, illness, trips home—all the usual reasons—but five is the limit.

Students with Disabilities

For any student needing an accommodation for any sort of disability: please visit the Office of Disability Services to obtain an accommodation letter. Once you have that, make an appointment to see me during my office hours; you must bring your accommodation letter. The Office of Disability Services for Students offers a variety of resources for students with disabilities <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu>

Honor Code

The penalties for plagiarism (submitting other people's words or ideas as your own) are severe. I will report all cases of academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Integrity. Please adhere to the Georgia Tech Academic Honor Code. You may review that code at www.honor.gatech.edu.

Assignments

Due Date	Subject
September 3	IT Biography
Every Class	Annotations + Online Discussion in Piazza +
As Assigned	Discussion Lead + Media Example
December 3	IT Reflection
December 8	Portfolio + Comments

Course Schedule

<i>Date</i>	READING
August 18	Introduction: Interpersonal and Reading for Class Huber, "Shadow Syllabus" Hicks, "Reading Tips for History Classes"
August 20	Introduction: Technology and Assignments "Annotating a Text" Canvas, Perusall, Piazza,
August 25	<i>Reading Discussion selection day</i> Darnton "Good Way to Do History" deCook, "White Cyborg Manifesto"
August 27	Pacey Culture of Technology, chapter 1 Bush "As We May Think"
September 1	Labor Day - No Class
September 3	BM "Why Study the History of Digital Media and How"
September 8	Carey "A Cultural Approach to Communication"
September 10	Carey "Technology and Ideology"
September 15	Turner, From Counterculture to Cyberculture"
September 17	Latour "On Actor Network Theory"
September 22	Manovich, Language of New Media p. 30-114
September 24	Williams, "Television"
September 29	Brock, "Ayo Technology!"
October 1	McLuhan TBD
October 6	Fall Break - No Class

<i>Date</i>	READING
October 8	Gitelman, Introduction - Ch. 2
October 13	Bender et al "Stochastic Parrots"
October 15	Parisi, "AI"
October 20	Weizenbaum, "Artificial Intelligence"
October 22	Bianco, "Algorithm"
October 27	Amaro, "Afrofuturism"
October 29	Bogost, <i>Unit Operations</i> , Ch 1-4
November 3	Van Dijck, "Platform Society"
November 5	Wittkower, "What Is it like to be a bot"
November 10	Brock, "Black Cyberculture and the Black Technocultural Matrix"
November 12	Brey, "Understanding Engineering Design"
November 17	Tavinor, "Virtual Reality Media and Aesthetics"
November 19	Shew, "The Minded Body in Technology and Disability"
November 24	Ess, "Toward an Existential and Emancipatory Ethic of Technology"
November 26	No Class
December 1	Reflections and Post-mortem

Assignments in detail

Information Technology Biography

Part One (Due September 3):

In approximately 1000 words, write an autobiographical account of your history of, experiences with, and beliefs about information and communication technologies.

Part Two: (Due December 3)

Using your written discussion portfolio as reference and as citations, update your IT bio to reflect upon what you've discovered during this class. If you haven't learned anything, that's fine - but you still need to tell me what you already knew that wasn't enhanced by the readings and discussion

Rubric

Write from your history, using your memory of technology use to shape the narrative.

This assignment is meant to be a reflection, and as such will not be graded for grammar or style.

Annotations

Rubric

These are YOUR notes. The more you engage with the text, the better your discussion comments will be.

In addition, you can and should mention your annotations as discussion topics for in-class discussion.

(Due Every Class)

You must read and annotate every reading, using Perusall.

If you have difficulty using Perusall, let me know as soon as possible to troubleshoot

In addition to highlighting snippets of text that you find interesting (or confusing), Perusall also allows the use of images and other multimedia content within your annotations. I am inclined to offer extra credit for those whose annotations include compelling, relevant multimedia content illustrating difficult or interesting concepts in the reading.

Your annotations will count as 15% of your participation grade.

Discussion Leader

You are required to lead a discussion on a reading of your choice. There are multiple aspects to this assignment:

Monday reading responses must be posted by *Friday* at 11PM. Comments to these posts should ideally be made by Sunday at 12 midnight.

Wednesday reading responses must be posted by *Monday* at 11pm. Comments to these posts should ideally be made by Tuesday at 12 midnight.

Reading Analysis

1. You must provide an analysis of the arguments made in your assigned reading.
2. You must also provide at least ONE discussion question (see below) with your analysis
 - a. Post your analysis and discussion questions to the Canvas/Piazza “Reading Summaries and Discussion” for the course.
3. In class, lead the discussion by offering a (brief) media example that highlights an element or argument found in the reading

Rubric

Do not summarize the reading. This isn't a book report.

- if you want to annotate it for future research, that's fine...but don't turn in a summary. Instead, situate your analysis of the reading in what you learned, supported by your annotations. If you have insights from your major, work experience, interests, or hobbies, please share those with us!

What's the field of study or discipline?

- Who are the key thinkers cited? (This will help you answer the next question)

Identify the theoretical frame used and//or the method

- Qualitative or Quantitative research?
- Are they using Political Economy? Critical Race Theory? Foucauldian analysis?
- Is the method archival/Historiography? Discourse Analysis? Interviews? Ethnographic? (Hint: what's the data?)

Find the intervention: what questions are they answering?

Now: write the main arguments.

- 1) Write an analysis and a /gracious/ criticism of method, data, analysis, and//or findings
- 2) How could this apply to your future career or future research?

Discussion Question(s)

You must write one or more questions to generate discussion for class and to demonstrate mastery.

Your discussion question can/should be based on current (or recently completed) readings. You must also ANSWER your question using your experiences, knowledge of, or reactions to the subject matter of the reading.

Suggestions for Discussion questions:

- What social or cultural theories about science and technology were presented in these readings?
- What ideas did you find the most challenging or provocative? Why?

- Can you map any of the ideas from the readings into your own life or work experiences?
- How comfortable or difficult did you find reading and discussing these topics? Why do you think this is?

Discussion Participation

If you're not the discussion leader, you must follow, post, and contribute to the Canvas/Piazza "Reading Summaries and Discussion" for the appropriate reading.

You must post a MINIMUM of five (5) discussion comments

Participation online can include:

- Posting questions or responding to other students' forum postings
- Providing examples and counter-examples
- Performing scholarly, constructive criticism of the assigned reading
- Proposing additional literature, websites or resources
- Sharing current news items and media reports that are relevant to class topics

The best comments will respond actively to the topic of discussion, or extend discussions from section or even lecture. Thread-jacking or trolling will not be tolerated and will result in a grade reduction.

Rubric:

Comments are not graded here, but instead you'll choose YOUR best 3 comments for the portfolio.

Participation is mandatory - your midterm assessment/grade will be based upon your comments on EVERY reading to that point. I understand that you may miss a few here or there, but if you have less than 75% of comments on the readings, you'll only get half of the grade (half of 20%) for participation.

Discussion Portfolio - Due December 3

Your Discussion Leader post, together with your THREE best responses to another classmate's forum/post, will comprise your written participation grade. Fulfilling the bare minimum requirements will earn only 60% for written participation.

Both discussion comments and reading responses will be assessed based on clarity of argument, skill in framing the issue, and the weight of supporting evidence drawn from course materials and lectures. Attempting to complete this assignment in its entirety in the first few (or the last few) weeks of the semester will be considered SPAM and will result in a reduction of your grade.

NB: Canvas tracks your participation across the semester. Your participation counts will affect your grade. This means that you should not wait until the end of the semester to write comments.

Hints and Tips

Participation is mandatory - your midterm assessment/grade will be based upon your comments on EVERY reading to that point. Your final

I understand that you may miss a few here or there, but if you have less than 75% of comments on the readings, you'll only get half of the grade (half of 20%) for participation.

Comments are not graded, but instead you'll choose YOUR best 3 comments for the portfolio.