

Capstone in Communication:
Media Technology and the History of the Senses
COMM 480: Section 4
Dr. David Parisi
Fall 2013
Maybank 211: TTU 12:15-1:30

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Course description:

Media, Marshall McLuhan claimed, function as “stuttering extensions” of the human senses. With McLuhan’s observation serving as our starting point, we will examine the ways that media embody changing conceptualizations of the senses. By working through empirical and theoretical work from the fields of media archaeology, visual culture, sound studies, sensory anthropology, and Science and Technology Studies, we will develop a framework for understanding the co-evolution of media technologies and the human body in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Particular attention will be devoted to the rise of electronic media in the twentieth century, and to the more recent transition to mobile digital communication technologies in the twenty-first century. Informed by class readings dealing with the complex dynamics of media change and its impact on the body, students will be encouraged to speculate on the future development of media technologies.

This course is positioned at the intersection of several different fields of study, some more coherently developed and articulated than others—media history, sensory studies, visual culture, sound studies, and digital media studies. Throughout the year, we’ll be teasing out the connections between these fields, and forging productive links between what might seem like disparate bodies of scholarship. Thinking through communication from the standpoint of the senses forces a reconceptualization of taken-for-granted approaches to the study of communication.

Note: This capstone runs for two semesters; the second portion will take place during the spring semester, and be scheduled for the same time slot, and meet in the same room.

Course Objectives (all sections):

- Demonstrate the ability to engage in challenging and advanced subject matter

- Work independently and collaboratively to produce substantial course products that serve an external audiences or enhance the College, the Charleston area or other constituent communities
- Prepare conference- or publication-ready original research project
- Demonstrate the ability to conduct both primary and secondary research
- Create a portfolio of work products
- Demonstrate mastery of oral, written and visual communication competencies

Section-specific objectives:

- Cultivate an understanding of the senses as historical subjects
- Develop a deeper appreciation for the relationship between the senses, communication practice, and technology
- Apply theoretical perspectives on the senses to the study of historical and contemporary sensory formations
- Develop your ability to write across different platforms, for different audiences, and in different contexts
- Design and execute a research project that allows you to examine a specific topic in sensory culture

By the end of the year, you will have produced:

- A set of blog posts showcasing your writing and critical thinking skills
- Several short papers demonstrating your ability to apply the seminar themes
- A collaboratively-created and edited Zotero library that provides a bibliography for scholars wishing to study the senses
- A research project proposal that illustrates your ability to develop an idea into a executable plan for scholarly research
- A final paper demonstrating your creativity as a thinker, and diligence as a researcher

Methods of Evaluation/Assignments

As a continuation of the work you began last semester in Comm 480, much of what we do in 481 will involve developing and building on the

Discussion leader: 10%

CRL: 15%

Short paper 1- Analysis of a sensory environment: 15%

Short paper 2- Report on a sense modality: 15%

Blog posts (4): 20%

Annotated bibliography: 10%

Literature review: 10%

Participation: 15%

Discussion leader:

Together with a partner, you will be responsible for leading the discussion on a given topic. This will include doing additional readings and summarizing them for the class. Further details will be provided.

Critical Reading Log:

The Critical Reading Log is a mandatory assignment intended to get you actively engaged with the course readings. Using the discussion board function on OAKS, you will compose a response to the readings and post it to the appropriate thread. Your post will consist of **at least two observations** and **at least one question** you want to pose to the class about the readings. Your observations and questions will serve as the foundation for class discussions. You are also strongly encouraged to think of examples from your everyday media diet that illustrate or challenge the themes raised in that session's readings (you may want to link to these examples if they're available online). Posts should be roughly 250-300 words, and are due by **10 AM** on the morning of class. Posts made later than this will not be accepted. You are expected to complete **10** entries over the course of the semester.

Short paper 1- Analysis of a sensory environment:

You will be assigned a short (5-6 pages) paper in which you analyze a sensory environment. Further details will be provided.

Short paper 2- Report on a sense modality:

You will be assigned a short (5-6) page paper in which you summarize critical thinking and scholarship around a particular sense modality. Your paper will be oriented toward helping you to formulate ideas for a research project.

Blog posts:

During this semester, you will make four substantive, original posts to the class's Wordpress blog. You will also be expected to regularly contribute comments to others' posts. Your substantive posts must be at least 600 words, composed thoughtfully, and carefully edited. You will also collaborate in the blogs visual design. At the end of the semester, you will submit an electronic copy of all of your posts via OAKS.

Annotated bibliography:

Over the course of the semester, you will prepare a detailed literature review on your chosen subject. Step one of the literature review will entail composing an annotated bibliography.

Participation:

Because of the class size and format, participation will be an essential component of your grade during the first semester of the capstone. You must take responsibility for your own learning and participate as an active learner. Active participation includes listening, building on what others say, asking questions, advancing reasoned arguments, identifying theories relevant to the discussion, and working collaboratively with others.

Research project (spring semester):

Your capstone will culminate in a substantial group-based research project. You will complete the bulk of your work on this project during the second semester of the capstone; during the first, you will have some preliminary portions of the project to execute (see above). You will be graded separately on these. While it is important that you pursue research into a topic that's compelling to you, you must take care to ensure that your approach is both scholarly and critical.

Course Materials:

Note: As you will be specializing your knowledge over the course of the year, it is essential that you learn to navigate your way through the resources pertinent to your group's project. I have provided some resources to get you started, both below and on the class OAKS site. Please spend some time familiarizing yourself with the various sensory studies-related bibliographies. We are working in an emerging research area, which presents unique challenges, but also exciting opportunities to approach problems in new and inventive ways.

Required:

Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2005).

Supplemental 1:

These anthologies are available for purchase at the College of Charleston book store. You will be required to purchase one of them, based on the group you are assigned to. The bolded codes next to each reading are used in the course schedule.

Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Berg Press, 2003) **ACR**

Constance Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Berg Press, 2005) **BoT**

Jim Drobnick, *The Smell Culture Reader* (Berg Press, 2006) **SCR**

Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik Bhaumik, *Visual Sense* (Berg Press, 2008) **VS**

Veit Erlman, *Hearing Cultures* (Berg Press, 2004) **HC**

David Howes, *The Sixth Sense Reader* (Berg Press, 2009) **SSR**

Carolyn Korsmeyer, *The Taste Culture Reader* (Berg Press, 2005) **TCR**

Supplemental 2:

David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Berg Press, 2005). **EotS**

Caroline Jones, ed., *Sensorium: embodied experience, technology, and contemporary art* (MIT Press, 2006) **SEN**

Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (University of California Press, 2007) **StP**

Pertinent Academic Journals:

Note: CofC may not have access to all of these, but they will secure individual articles for you through Interlibrary Loan. We will be expanding on this list as we move through the semester.

Senses and Society

Journal of Sensory Studies

Journal of Visual Culture

Web resources:

The Sensory Studies website contains many valuable resources, including course syllabi for classes related to the subject (for example, “Religion and the Senses” and “Experiencing Food Through the Senses”) and a list of recently-published books.

<http://www.sensorystudies.org/>

<http://www.sensorystudies.org/books-of-note/>

Centre for Sensory Studies

<http://www.centreforsensorystudies.org/>

Sensory Studies papers on Academia.edu

http://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/Sensory_Studies

Online tools:

OAKS: <https://lms.cofc.edu/>

Class Wordpress Blog: <http://mediasenses.wordpress.com/>

Wikispaces: <http://www.wikispaces.com/>

Zotero browser-based citation manager: <http://www.zotero.org/>

Zotero group for the course: https://www.zotero.org/groups/history_of_the_senses

Twitter: posts tagged with #mediasenses will appear in the feed on the class's OAKS page

Class Schedule

Notes:

*During the semester, you will spend several class sessions conducting research with your group members. As such, some weeks will not require us to meet together as a class. I expect you to be meeting regularly with your group members and/or with me during those weeks.

**The following is a working schedule and subject to change based on the trajectory of the course. I will notify you of all changes in class and/or via e-mail announcement; it is your responsibility to make sure you're aware of all announcements. All readings should be done in advance of the class for which they are listed.

***For each sense modality, we have an open session. For that session, the group assigned to present will circulate 2-3 related readings of their choosing (roughly 30 pages total), drawn from the appropriate anthology. Those readings will provide the basis for class discussion during the open session.

Logistics: You must notify me by e-mail of your reading choices two full weeks in advance of your group's session, so that I can photocopy and scan the readings for distribution.

Module 1: Introduction: Studying Technology, History, and the Senses

Week 1

Class 1 (8/20): Course overview

Class 2 (8/22): **Investigating the senses**

Jütte, "Tuning up: Conspicuous Manifestations—(Un-) Timely Reflections," 1-6.

Martin Jay, "In the Realm of the Senses: An Introduction," *American Historical Review* 116 (April 2011): 307-315.

Week 2

Class 1 (8/27): **The senses and media aesthetics**

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (New York Schocken, 1968), 217-252.

Class 2 (8/29): **Technology and the mediatization of the senses**

Donald Lowe, "History of Perception" in *History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-16.

Week 3

Class 1 (9/3): History and the senses

Jütte, "Approaching the Suprahistorical," 8-17.

Mark Smith, "Introduction: Making Sense of History" in *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1-18.

Class 2 (9/5): Separating and ordering the senses

WJT Mitchell, "There are no visual media," *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2), 257-66.

Phillip Vannini, Dennis Waskul, and Simon Gottschalk, "Sensory Order," in *The Senses in Self, Culture, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 126-147.

Week 4

Class 1 (9/10): Showing sensing

Phillip Vannini, Dennis Waskul, and Simon Gottschalk, "Somatic Work: Toward A Sociology of the Senses," in *The Senses in Self, Culture, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3-22.

Class 2 (9/12): Consuming Sensations

David Howes, "HYPERESTHESIA, or, The Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Empire of the Senses*, 281-303.

Lowe, "Bourgeois Society," 17-34.

SHORT PAPER 1 ASSIGNED

Week 5

Class 1 (9/17): Training the body and the senses

Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2 (1) (1973): 70-88.

Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" in *Our Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press), 27-45

Class 2 (9/19): The materiality of sensory media

Visit to the Communication History Museum at 58 George Street

Module 2: The Five (or six, or seven) Senses

Week 6

Class 1 (9/24): Vision and seeing

Jütte, "Ways of Seeing—or The Human Rights of the Eye," 295-308.

Smith, "Vision," *StP*, 19-39.

Class 2 (9/26): Student-lead session on vision; readings TBA

Week 7

Class 1 (10/1): **Hearing and listening**

Jütte, "Listening Effects—or The Art and Power of Noises," 281-294.

Smith, "Hearing," *StP*, 41-58

SHORT PAPER 1 DUE

Class 2 (10/3): No class!

Week 8

Class 1 (10/8): Student-lead session on hearing; readings TBA

Class 2 (10/10): **Touching and feeling**

Jütte, "Touching—or The New Pleasure in the Body," 238-252.

Smith, "Touching." *StP*, 93-116.

Week 9

Class 1 (10/15): FALL BREAK, no class!

Class 2 (10/17): Student-lead session on touch; readings TBA

Week 10

Class 1 (10/22): Research Workshop—navigating and managing a bibliography

Come to class with two academic journal articles or book chapters related to the senses

Class 2 (10/24): Advisory Council visit; topic TBA

Week 11

Class 1 (10/29): **Tasting and taste cultures**

Jütte, "Tasting—or What Do Fast Food and Nouvelle Cuisine Have in Common?," 253-264.

Pierre Bourdieu, "Taste of Luxury, Taste of Necessity," *TCR*, 72-78.

Roger Haden, "Taste in an Age of Convenience," *TCR*, 344-358.

Class 2 (10/31): Student-lead session on taste, readings TBA

Week 12

Class 1 (11/5): Smelling and odoring

Jütte, "Scenting—or From Deodorization to Reodorization," 265-280.

Jim Drobnick, "Introduction: Olfactocentrism," SCR, 1-9.

Mark Paterson, "Digital Scratch and Virtual Sniff: Simulating Scents," SCR, 358-370.

Class 2 (11/7): Student-lead session on smell; readings TBA

Week 13

Class 1 (11/12): The 'sixth' senses

Jütte, "Psi Phenomena—or The Exploration of Extra-Sensory Perception," 309-323.

Howes, "Introduction," SSR, 1-54.

Class 2 (11/14): Student-lead session on sixth senses; readings TBA

Week 14

Class 1 (11/19): Sensing in the City

Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" [1903] in *The Blackwell City Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 11-19.

Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," in Leo Charney Vanessa Schwartz (eds) *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 72-99.

Class 2 (11/21): Sensing in virtual spaces

Selected readings from SEN TBA

Week 15

Class 1 (11/26): Sensing in the future

Jütte, "Cyberspace and the Future of the Senses," 324-335.

Ivan Sutherland, "The Ultimate Display"

Caroline Jones, "Sensorium," SEN, 5-49.

Class 2 (11/28): NO CLASS, eat turkey

This course continues as COMM 481 in the Spring 2014 semester