

Rev. 10/25/05

CSS Seminar in Media Ecology

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Office hours: Mondays, 13:30-15:30; Tuesdays, 10-12

Format and Duration: Ten two-hour seminars scheduled for Nov. 7, 8, 14, 21, and 28; Dec. 5 and 12; and Jan. 2, 9, and 16.

Course content: This course will use a media ecology (medium theory) approach to examine the broad social and psychological impact of communication technologies. Media ecology takes an historical, cross-cultural approach that focuses on the particular characteristics of each medium—not the content the medium conveys. Students will examine how communication technologies have inherent biases, temporal and spatial, that affect social organization and culture, as well as biases that alter humankind's sensory organization and consciousness by determining how human senses are activated and how humans organize experience. In short, students will develop a deep understanding of Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan's most famous and profound observation/aphorism: "The medium is the message."

What is media ecology? The term "media ecology" has in recent years supplanted the older term "medium theory" and is broader in its formulation and understanding.

For the late cultural critic Neil Postman (New York University), media ecology examines "how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word 'ecology' implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It structures what we can see and say and, therefore, do. It assigns roles to us and insists on our playing them. It specifies what we are permitted to do and what we are not. Sometimes, as in the case of a courtroom, or classroom, or business office, the specifications are explicit and formal. In the case of media environments (e.g., books, radio, film, television, etc.), the specifications are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing with is not an environment but merely a machine. Media ecology tries to make these specifications explicit. It tries to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing, why media make us feel and act as we do. Media ecology is the study of media as environments."

Academic aims and outline of course:

The course will begin by examining the philosophy of technology, i.e., the nature of tools/technology. Students will examine the question of whether technology is neutral (value-free) or biased (value-laden), and they will be asked to consider that no technology is neutral, that technology is a human activity, a *praxis*. Students also will consider whether technology or technological systems support cultural systems and change the ways of living for people. A central concern of the course will be the "biases" of communication technology, that is, how

particular technologies or media of communication affect transmission of language, and how these effects manifest themselves in (a) social and cultural transformations and (b) changes in human consciousness (the ways people perceive and construct their reality).

The course will be organized and structured along historical lines, adapting from Walter Ong's schema of a multi-stage transformation (or "technologizing") of the word: oral (pre-alphabetic)→scribal (chirographic)→print (typographic)→early electronic (telegraph, radio, television)→late electronic (computer-mediated communication). The late electronic era involves the Internet and World Wide Web with their capacity for many-to-many communication; the Internet is viewed as a metamedium signaling a new transformation through convergence of earlier media. Thus, the course will begin by examining the nature of primary oral (pre-alphabetic) cultures and their modes of communication or understanding. Next, students will look at the epistemological and ontological changes wrought with the invention and spread of the Greek phonetic alphabet and the development of scribal cultures. Then students will examine the enormous influence of the invention of the printing press as an agent of social change. The next part of the course will invite students to examine the impact of the inventions of the telegraph and radio, and later television. Students will compare the early promise and hype of these communication technologies, and their ultimate use and manifestation, with the promise and hype of today's cyberspace technology (Internet and World Wide Web) and other forms of so-called "new media." The concluding section of the course will be devoted to discussion of computer-mediated communication via cyberspace technology.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes:

Students will acquire an understanding of the philosophy of technology, and they will learn how media of communication influence human perception, thinking, understanding, feeling, and value, as well as social interaction and social structures. Students will conceive of media as environments with specific structure, content, and impact on people. Students will learn how media environments structure what people can see and say and do, and how these environments assign roles to us and insist on our playing them. At the end of the course, students will be encouraged to apply insights gained from their knowledge of media and media environments to assess the likely promise and impact of cyberspace technology and the convergent nature of digital communication technology. Overall, students will acquire a good sense of the "enduring issues" of communication technologies and the historic epistemological and ontological transformations that come under the heading of "technologizing of the word."

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and EVALUATION

Please consult the 2005-06 handbook for details of standard course requirements.

1. Students are expected to read all required readings found in the "Reading List and Course Schedule" below. The CSS library will make all the required readings available in PDF format; these will be available to students through the CSS Intranet. Students will be expected to prepare to discuss in class all required readings before the start of the class session corresponding to the scheduled readings. Students are expected to participate in class discussion and attend class regularly. Students' active participation in the course will be graded, with the grade constituting

10 percent of the overall mark for the course. Recognition for active participation will be based on quality of discussion, presentations, and commentary (reaction) papers.

Commentary papers: Each student will be expected to write two 2-page commentary papers based on required or optional reading material scheduled for two class sessions of the student's choosing. The paper must be based on the student's reaction to the readings scheduled for those chosen class sessions, and the paper must be turned in to the professor at the start of those class sessions. If a student has written a commentary paper on the readings scheduled for a class session, during that class session the student will be expected to do a five-minute oral presentation summarizing the main points of the commentary paper. Commentary papers will be marked up and returned by the professor. All passing papers will receive grades as follows: D (Distinction), M (Merit), and P Pass)

2. Each student will be required to write one 3,000-word essay (exclusive of abstract, endnotes, tables, etc.). Each student will select exclusively a topic for the essay from a list of topics to be provided by the professor. The list will be distributed to students early in the course.

About the professor:

Professor George Albert Gladney is assigned to CSS for 2005-06 as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar. He is a senior member of the faculty of the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Wyoming. He spent more than a dozen years as a newspaper reporter and editor before obtaining his MA degree in journalism from the University of Oregon and his Ph.D. in communication from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. He was a member of the journalism faculty at the University of Illinois during 1994-95, and he has taught at Wyoming from 1991 to 1994 and from 1995 to the present. He won the highest award for undergraduate teaching at Illinois, and he has twice won "Top Prof" honors from Mortar Board, the senior honorary society at Wyoming. Dr. Gladney's articles have been published in numerous books and journals, including *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Broadcast & Electronic Media*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, and the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*. His two most recent publications are a chapter titled "Global Village Disconnected?" in the 2004 book *Global Media Go To War*, and a co-authored article titled "Euphemistic Text Affects Attitudes, Behavior," which appears in the winter 2005 issue of *Newspaper Research Journal*. For six years at Wyoming he was the director of graduate studies in the Department of Communication and Journalism. His primary teaching and research interests include media ethics, law, theory, and ecology, as well as journalistic innovation and standards of journalistic excellence. He also teaches a graduate course in qualitative research methods. He has three sons: Zeb, 16; Bridger, 13, and Boone, 10.

Media Ecology

Reading List and Course Schedule

NOTE: The CSS library is making all assigned readings available in PDF format; these may be accessed through the CSS Intranet. The Ph.D. students are assigned additional select readings for most class sessions, but M.A. students are welcome and encouraged to read them as well. In addition to the required readings listed here, Professor Gladney occasionally will distribute much shorter readings (e.g., photocopies of newspaper stories, material drawn from the Internet, etc.) for reading in class or for the following class session.

NOVEMBER 7 and 8—Philosophy of Technology

Mandatory readings for all students:

- >“A Theory of Normative Technology,” by Clifford Christians, in *Technological Transformation*, edited by Edmund F. Byrne and Joseph C. Pitt
- >From *Technopoly*, by Neil Postman:
 - >“The Judgment of Thamus,” Chapter 1
 - >“Invisible Technologies,” Chapter 8
- HANDOUT #1: “What Is Media Ecology?” (6 pages)
- HANDOUT #2: “Views About the Nature of Technology, ‘Progress,’ and Expertise” (5p)
- HANDOUT #3: “Technopoly” (4p)
- HANDOUT #4: “The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis” (4p)
- HANDOUT #5: “British and French to Halt Concorde Flights” (2p)

Additional readings to be assigned to Ph.D. students on select basis:

- From *Technopoly*, by Neil Postman:
- >“From Tools to Technocracy,” Chapter 2
 - >“From Technocracy to Technopoly,” Chapter 3
 - >“The Improbable World,” Chapter 4
 - >“The Broken Defenses,” Chapter 5
 - >“Scientism,” Chapter 9
- >HANDOUT #6: “Mapping the Debate Over Technology,” by Eugene Miller, from Tech Central Station

***Class meeting of Tuesday, Nov. 8, will make up for cancelled class on Oct. 31. Both class sessions will be at the same time, 6:30-8:30 p.m.**

NOVEMBER 14—Primary Orality and Oral Tradition

Mandatory readings for all students:

- >”Some Psychodynamics of Orality,” Chapter 3, from *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*,” by Walter J. Ong.
- >”The Oral Culture,” Chapter 4, from *Analyzing Media: Communication Technologies As Symbolic and Cognitive Systems*, by James W. Chesbro and Dale A. Bertelsen
- >”The Five Ages of Communication,” by Robert K. Logan, published in *Explorations in Media Ecology* journal.
- HANDOUT #1: “Intro to Primary Oral Cultures” (7p)
- HANDOUT #2: “From Homer to Hop-Hop,” from *ChristianityToday.com* (5p)
- HANDOUT #3: “Walter J. Ong, 90, Jesuit, Teacher and Scholar of Language, Dies,” obituary from *The New York Times* (2p)

Additional readings to be assigned to Ph.D. students on select basis:

- >”Oral and Written,” first portion (pp. 12-30) of Chapter 1 from *The Implications of Literacy*, by Brian Stock.
- >”An Overview of Walter J. Ong’s Work,” Chapter 2, from *Media, Consciousness and Culture*, edited by Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup

NOVEMBER 21—Writing and Print, Part I

Mandatory readings for all students:

- >”Writing Restructures Consciousness,” Chapter 4, from *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*,” by Walter J. Ong
- >”The Literate Culture,” Chapter 5, from *Analyzing Media: Communication Technologies As Symbolic and Cognitive Systems*, by James W. Chesebro and Dale A. Bertelsen
- >”Media Technology and Social Change,” Chapter 9, from *Media/Society*, by David Croteau and William Hoynes

HANDOUT #1: “Ong and How Writing Restructures Consciousness” (a synthesis/summary of portions of Ong’s *Orality and Literacy*) (3p)

HANDOUT #2: “So It Is Written: Books Are Memory,” by Jonathan Rosen (2p)

Additional readings to be assigned to Ph.D. students on select basis:

- >”The Emergence of Written Culture,” second portion (pp. 30-87) of Chapter 1 from *Implications of Literacy*, by Brian Stock

NOVEMBER 28—Writing and Print, Part II

Mandatory readings for all students:

- >”Print, Space, and Closure,” Chapter 5, from *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*,” by Walter J. Ong
- >From *The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization*, by Robert K. Logan:
 - >”Print, the Alphabet and Science,” Chapter 13
 - >”The Social and Cultural Impacts of the Printing Press,” Chapter 14
- >”Is Literacy Passe?,” Chapter 24 from *Problems and Controversies in Television and Radio*, edited by Harry J. Skornia and Jack William Kitson.

HANDOUT #1: Time-Space Polarities of Harold Innis

Additional readings to be assigned to Ph.D. students on select basis:

- >”Technological Realism: Harold Innis’ Empire of Communications,” Chapter 4 from *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, by Arthur Kroker
- >”Harold Innis and the Empire of Speed,” article by Ronald J. Deibert in *Review of International Studies*
- >Various chapters from *Harold Innis*, by Paul Heyer

DECEMBER 5—Typographic Vs. Telegraphic Epistemologies (Postman and Czitrom)

Mandatory readings for all students:

- > from *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, by Neil Postman:
 - >”The Typographic Mind,” Chapter 4
 - >”The Peek-a-Boo World,” Chapter 5
- >”Lightning Lines’ and the Birth of Modern Communication, 1838-1900,” Chapter 1,

from *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan*, by Daniel J. Czitrom

>“The Ethereal Hearth: American Radio From Wireless Through Broadcasting, 1892-1940,” Chapter 2, from *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan*, by Daniel J. Czitrom

>“The Mother of All Networks,” Chapter 1, from *The Victorian Internet*, by Tom Standage
HANDOUT #1: “Telegraph and Radio” (5p)

Additional readings to be assigned to Ph.D. students on select basis:

And additional chapter or chapters of your choice from *The Victorian Internet*

DECEMBER 12—“The medium is the message” (McLuhan)

Mandatory readings for all students*:

>”Introduction” and “The medium is the Message,” Chapter 1, from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, by Marshall McLuhan

>From *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, by Marshall McLuhan and edited by Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines.

>”Foreward” by Tom Wolfe

>”Man and Media”

>”Electronic Revolution: Revolutionary Effects of New Media”

”Meet Marshall McLuhan: A Less Scientific Approach to Media Impact,” Chapter 12, in *Media Effects Research*, by Glenn G. Sparks

>”Playboy Interview: A Candid Conversation With the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media,” Chapter 13, from *Essential McLuhan*, edited by Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone

HANDOUT #1: “Key Concepts of Marshall McLuhan” (2p)

>**SPECIAL MCLUHAN PACKET:** Each student will be assigned to read and discuss in seminar a select reading from the special packet. Readings from the packet will be assigned and distributed in class on Dec. 5. These are all rather short readings.

Additional readings to be assigned to Ph.D. students on select basis:

>”Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan,” by James W. Carey, from *Antioch Review*

>”Technological Humanism: The Processed World of Marshall McLuhan,” Chapter 3, from *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, by Arthur Kroker

>”Towards An Inclusive Consciousness,” from *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, by Marshall McLuhan and edited by Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines

DECEMBER 19—NO CLASS

JANUARY 2—More on the impact of television (Postman and Meyrowitz)

Mandatory readings for all students:

>From *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, by Neil Postman:

- >Chapter 6, “The Age of Show Business”
 - >Chapter 7, “Now . . . This”
 - >From *No Sense of Place*, by Joshua Meyrowitz
 - >Chapter 1, “Introduction”
 - >Chapter 2, “Media and Behavior: A Missing Link”
 - >Chapter 3, “Media, Situations, and Behavior”
- HANDOUT #1: “Joshua Meyrowitz’s Analysis of the Social Effects of the Medium of Television” (a synthesis of portions of *No Sense of Place*) (7p)
- HANDOUT #2: “Neil Postman’s Analysis of Television” (a synthesis of portions of *Amusing Ourselves To Death*) (6p)

Additional reading assigned to Ph.D. students:

- >”The Human Option: Media Evolution and Rationality as Checks on Media Determinism,” by Paul Levinson, Chapter 22 in *Studies in Mass Communication and Technology*, vol. 1, edited by Sari Thomas

JANUARY 9—The current transformation—cyberspace technology (the metamedium)—Part I

Mandatory readings for all students:

- >”Some Enduring Issues of Cyberspace Technology: A Medium Theory Perspective,” by George Albert Gladney, in the *New Jersey Journal of Communication*
 - >”Disorganizing the ‘New Technology,’” by David Sholle, from *Critical Perspectives on the Internet*, edited by Greg Elmer
 - >”The Internet as Mass Medium,” by Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan, from the *Journal of Communication*
 - >”The Internet Audience: Web Use as Mass Behavior,” by James G. Webster and Shu-Fang Lin, from *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*
 - >”Forms of Interactivity: The Disappearance of the Audience,” Chapter 2 from *New Media Cultures*, by P. David Marshall
- HANDOUT #1: “Enduring Issues of Cyberspace Technology—The Medium Theory View: Ways of Thinking and Knowing” (4p)
- HANDOUT #2: “‘New Media’: Ready for the Dustbin of History?” by Steve Lohr, from NYTimes.com (2p)

Additional readings assigned to Ph.D. students:

- >From special issue about the Internet, from *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*: (These articles are somewhat dated, but it is interesting to see what people were saying about the Internet and its future in the late 1990s. They illustrate how rapidly the Internet has developed, and often in ways not foreseen.)
 - >”Which Communication Revolution Is It, Anyway?” by Mitchell Stephens
 - >”The Internet and the End of the National Communication System: Uncertain Predictions of an Uncertain Future,” by James W. Carey
 - >”The Internet and Continuing Historical Discourse,” by Hazel Dicken-Garcia
 - >”The Visible Hand: Money, Markets, and Media Evolution,” by David Abrahamson

January 16—The current transformation—cyberspace technology (the metamedium)—Part II

>From *Digital McLuhan*, by Paul Levinson:

Chapter 1, "Introduction: Coinciding Realms"

Chapter 2, "The Reluctant Explicator"

Chapter 3, "Net Content"

Chapter 4, "The Song of the Alphabet in Cyberspace"

>"Introduction: 'New media' and cultural studies," Chapter 1 from *New Media Cultures*," by P. David Marshall

SPECIAL TOPIC for seminar discussion: The Internet's Affect on War and Peace in the Global Village. To prepare for discussion, all students are to read the following:

>"Global Village Disconnected?" by George Albert Gladney, Chapter 2 from *Global Media Go To War*, edited by Ralph Berenger"

>"McLuhan's Messages, Echoing in Iraq Coverage," by Sarah Boxer, from *NYTimes.com*

>"Flocking Together Through the Web," by Joel Garreau, from *washingtonpost.com*

>"The Massless Media," by William Powers, from *The Atlantic*

>"Shifting Worlds of Strangers: Medium Theory and Changes in 'Them' Versus 'Us,'" by Joshua Meyrowitz, Chapter 11 in *Readings in Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture*, edited by Kimberly B. Massey

Additional readings for Ph.D. students:

IN ADDITION to the above, read any two chapters of your choice (that have not already been assigned as required reading) from *Critical Perspectives on the Internet*, edited by Greg Elmer, or *New Media Cultures*, by P. David Marshall

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BOOKS

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*Available at CSS library or for loan from Professor Gladney

**On order