STS 3173 [2743]: Hypermedia in Context
1:30 to 2:50 pm, Mondays and Wednesdays, RH 214
Department of Technology, Culture and Society
Polytechnic Institute of New York University
Fall 2013

Instructor
Dr. Christopher Leslie (cleslie@poly.edu)
LC 131 Dibner Building; (718) 260-3130

Office Hours
Generally, I’ll be available from 12–1 pm Mondays and 1–2 pm Tuesdays when classes are in session. Weekly, I’ll provide details on my actual availability on my Google calendar (NetID is csl261, or go to http://tinyurl.com/chrisleslie). If the times I list are not convenient, contact me to make an appointment.

Prerequisite
Students must have completed HuSS 1023W (or the equivalent second-level writing course) before taking this course. It is also recommended that you have taken a level 2 STS course previously.

Course Description
Although it seems like technological advances like hypertext, social media and Google Glass are radically new ideas, each supposed revolution has its antecedents. Even before computers, there were ways to help people comment on published material (the commonplace book), a device for creating arbitrary associations (the cabinet of curiosities), a plan for collaborating on an encyclopedia (Diderot’s Encyclopédie), a proposal for an international repository of the world’s knowledge (the Mundaneum), and a forehead camera that would help a user annotate documents (Bush’s Memex). Although today we extol the nonlinear principles of hypertext, oral and early print cultures also imagined multiple entry points into their creations. In some ways, these earlier visions are eerily familiar – and in other ways, they require a completely different understanding of audience and purpose. Studying new media in their historical and cultural context leads to remarkable and unexpected findings, such as the cosmopolitan, networked world that cultural figures imagined themselves in even before computer networks. Our task this semester will be untangle these precursors to hypermedia with the intention of learning more about the assumptions of the present and the possibilities for the future.

Objectives
This semester, you will learn to:
• Use the history of technology to broaden your understanding of new media, including as a source for future innovation
• Critique technology in its social, economic, and intellectual contexts
• Complement a broad understanding of the history of technology with specific examples of earlier forms of media and the aspirations of their practitioners
• Utilize key concepts in media and technology studies, such as actor-network theory, association, feminist technology, hailing function, homology, immersion, lifeworld, open/closed work, public sphere, technological determinism, and technology complex
Structure

The class is divided into three sections, each of which will be covered by an exam. Most class time is devoted to lectures and discussions about course topics and discussion of the reading material.

Readings

The required texts for the course are:


The required books are at the NYU bookstore and on reserve in Dibner library. In addition, there will be journal articles that you can download from library databases and PDFs that you will find on Blackboard. Please let me know in advance of class if you have any trouble locating a required reading.

Grading

I shall calculate your semester grade as follows: Letter grade equivalents are:

- Presentation 10% A: 100–92; A+: 91–90
- Papers 20% (10% each) B+: 89–88; B: 87–82; B–: 81–80
- Quizzes 20% C+: 79–78; C: 77–72; C–: 71–70
- Exams 50% (15%, 15%, 20%) D+: 69–68; D: 67–60; F: <60

Requirements

Attendance: On-time attendance for the entire class period is mandatory. Students who miss four or more classes automatically fail the course. For the purposes of attendance, missing fewer than twenty minutes counts as one-third of an absence (arriving late, departing early, leaving the room). Missing more than twenty minutes counts as an absence. Doctor’s notes or other documents are not necessary, but if you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out from a classmate what you missed.

Attentiveness: Please pay attention during class and avoid behaviors that distract others. Do not eat, drink, or sleep during class. You should not use electronic devices, such as cell phones or laptops, at all. Do not hold side conversations; if someone tries to talk to you during class, tell him or her to speak to you after class. Do not bring visitors without advance permission.

Examinations: There are three examinations in this class, two during our regular class period and one final exam during the exam period at a date and time the Registrar sets. The exams are cumulative and closed-book. They consist of short answer and essay questions. Missing an exam results in a zero.

Honesty: Please be advised that I take the University policy about academic dishonesty seriously and will punish cheating or plagiarism by awarding a grade of “F” for the course and referring cases to Student Affairs for further action.

Papers: Two papers of 1,000–1,500 words (3–5 pages) are required for this class. The topics are assigned in advance. Both must be uploaded to Blackboard and scanned by SafeAssign before the deadline.

Preparation: According to New York State guidelines, a student should spend at least two hours to prepare for each hour in class. Thus, for this course, you can expect to spend at least six hours per week outside of class getting ready to be in class. Please plan accordingly so that you can read thoroughly, write carefully, and reflect thoughtfully. It is not possible to let this class “happen” without your active
involvement. Bring the class materials we are discussing with you and be ready to make observations on the course themes every time.

**Presentations:** Throughout the semester, one student per class period will make a presentation that introduces the material we are discussing that day. A presentation includes images and explain the relevance of the new material in relationship to what we have covered so far in class. It does not have to involve outside research, but if it does, you must cite your sources on the slides themselves.

**Quizzes:** There will be unannounced quizzes on the reading assignments and course lessons. You may consult your own handwritten notes, but not books or printouts, for these quizzes. If you miss a quiz due to lateness or absence, you shall receive a zero.

**How to Do Well**

1. **Be on time.** At the start of class, you will notice that I provide a preview of what is coming up and also answer questions. If you regularly miss these first minutes, you will start to feel the uncomfortable sensation that you do not know what is going on. Keep in mind that trains, subways and busses usually take much longer than they “should,” so plan accordingly. Being late once is ok; it happens to everyone. If you are always late, then you are doing something wrong.

2. **Ask questions.** Please raise your hand at the beginning of class or during a presentation. It does little good to whisper to the person next to you; instead, feel free to ask me for clarification. Also, use office hours or write an e-mail message for additional information.

3. **Take notes,** even if I am not writing on the board. Taking notes helps you stay focused on the material we are studying. Note taking also serves another purpose: it helps you to get used to writing about the course materials in your own words. Since the evaluation in this course is written, taking notes is valuable practice (and good exercise for your writing muscles!). There is no need to write down everything I say, but make sure you take down interesting ideas and connections to the course themes. Go over your notes after class to fill in the gaps.

4. **Read actively.** Prepare by reading the assignment for the day carefully before class. Mark key phrases and passages that have to do with the ideas in the course. Take notes like you are preparing a laboratory notebook – write down what you think is important, with examples, and prepare questions you want to ask.

5. **Avoid grade jockeying.** Some students sometimes use the grade weights in this syllabus to plan toward which 80% of the course they will make an effort. The theory seems to be that even by neglecting 20% of the assignments, one can still get a B in the course. This is a flawed strategy. Instead, you should aim for a slightly higher grade on each assignment than you would like for the class. If you want a B, make sure you do B+ or A- work on all assignments. In the end, factoring in for misunderstandings and emergencies, you will probably get that B.

6. **Work proactively.** Start an assignment when it is assigned, not when the deadline is looming. It sometimes takes a little bit of time wondering about an assignment before you make progress, and there are often times that you need guidance. If you wait until the last moment to get started, you cannot negotiate these hurdles adequately.

7. **Prepare for emergencies.** Things often go wrong during the semester; there are always computer problems and unfortunately there are family emergencies as well. It is important to plan for the unexpected by making backup copies and to be ready to hand in a paper or assignment well in advance of the deadline in case there is an unexpected calamity that will prevent you from using the last days before a deadline.
Bibliography

I shall refer to these standard reference books during the semester. Since you may find them useful, I have placed them on reserve in the Bern Dibner Library where possible.


**Assignment Schedule (Tentative)**

**Wednesday, September 4** Introduction

**Monday, September 9** From Orality to Literacy

Albert Lord, “Singers: Performance and Training” from *The Singer of Tales*

Walter Ong, “African Talking Drums and Oral Noetics” from *Interfaces of the Word*

*Note: Tuesday, September 10, is the last day for program adjustments in the fall semester. If you drop this class before this deadline, no notation will appear on your transcript. No one may add the course after this date.*

**Wednesday, September 11** Printed Page

Frances Yates, “Medieval Memory and the Formation of Imagery”

Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters*, Introduction and Chapter 1

**Monday, September 16** Entry Points to the Text

Mak, Chapters 2 and 3

**Wednesday, September 18** Finding the Page

Mak, Chapters 4, 5 and Conclusion

**Monday, September 23** Magic Lanterns

Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media*, 2.2 to 2.3.4 (pp. 70–117)

*PAPER 1 DUE*

**Wednesday, September 25** The Encyclopedia Project

Richard Yeo, “Lost Encyclopedias, Before and After the Enlightenment”

Denis Diderot, “Prospectus”

**Monday, September 30** Slips and Catalogs

Marus Krajewski, “Paper as Passion: Niklas Luhmann and His Card Index”

**Wednesday, October 2** World Documentation

W. Boyd Rayward, “Mundameum: Archives of Knowledge”

**Monday, October 7** Exam #1

**Wednesday, October 9** Telegraph


“**Monday,” October 16** Broadcasting before Broadcasting

Jules Verne, chs. 4 and 5 from *Paris in the Twentieth Century*; Carolyn Marvin, excerpt from *When Old Technologies Were New*
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, October 21</td>
<td>The Industry of Culture</td>
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<td>Walter Benjamin, Part IV: Photography and Part V: Film</td>
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<td>Wednesday, October 23</td>
<td>Production and Reproduction of Art</td>
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<td>Benjamin, Part 1: The Production, Reception, and Reproduction of the Work of Art</td>
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<td>Monday, October 28</td>
<td>Radio</td>
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<td>Benjamin, Part VI: The Publishing Industry and Radio</td>
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<td>Wednesday, October 30</td>
<td>The Information Age</td>
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<td>Nicola Tesla, “The Magnifying Transmitter”</td>
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<td>Michael Buckland, “Microdots” and “The Statistical Machine” from Emanuel Goldberg and His Knowledge Machine</td>
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<td>Monday, November 4</td>
<td>Exam #2</td>
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<td>Wednesday, November 6</td>
<td>Networked Information</td>
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<td>H. G. Wells, excerpts from The World Brain; Department of the Navy, Principles of Telegraphy (Teletypewriter)</td>
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<td>Monday, November 11</td>
<td>The Memex</td>
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<td>Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think” and “Memex II”</td>
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<td>Wednesday, November 13</td>
<td>New Media at Midcentury</td>
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<td>Thierry Bardini, Introduction and Chapter 1 of Bootstrapping</td>
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<td>Note: Wednesday, November 13, is the withdrawal deadline. If you withdraw before this date, you will see a “W” on your transcript. Otherwise, you will see a grade A to F at the end of the course.</td>
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<td>Monday, November 18</td>
<td>Timesharing</td>
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<td>Chapters 2–4 of Bootstrapping</td>
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<td>Wednesday, November 20</td>
<td>Hypertext</td>
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<td>Chapter 5 of Bootstrapping; Douglas C. Engelbart, “Special Considerations of the Individual as a User, Generator, and Retriever of Information” (1960) and Theodor Nelson, “A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing and the Indeterminate” (1965)</td>
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<td>Monday, November 25</td>
<td>Reconfiguring the User</td>
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<td>Chapters 6 to end of Bootstrapping</td>
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<td>Wednesday, November 27</td>
<td>The People’s Network</td>
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<td>Stewart Brand, “Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death of the Computer Bums”</td>
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<td>Monday, December 2</td>
<td>Computer Graphics</td>
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<td>Arthur Norberg and Judy O’Neill, “Getting the Picture” from Transforming Computer Technology</td>
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<td>Wednesday, December 4</td>
<td>The Worldwide Web</td>
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<td>Tim Berners-Lee. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of Weaving the Web</td>
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<td>Note: At a later date, the Registrar will schedule our final exam, currently anticipated to be between December 11 and 20. Do not make travel plans until the exam schedule has been announced.</td>
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