**Course Description**

This course explores both theories and practices of media history and analyzes how media more generally contribute to the writing of history. We will consider how media’s ability to document the present—both in fiction and non-fiction—provides an archive of the recent past, in turn presenting the illusion of a more complete popular memory of the last century or so. In addition to parsing the relationship between history, the past, and mass media, we will consider the stakes of writing media history more broadly. What factors do we need to consider in writing about the past and how do we treat the materials that we use in our enquiries? As the media’s complexity and its own diverse stakes shape its history, we will explore divisions between social, aesthetic, cultural and technological media histories and the more business-minded institutional and economic studies. In examining the materials used to write media histories—primary and secondary sources, archival records, trade and fan press, promotional materials and social documents—we think about the problems of asserting truth, both on screens and the printed page. We will also consider the particular difficulties and significance of writing the history of popular media, especially given their seductive, if often false, claims to "reality."

We will examine the stakes and possibilities of the questions we ask about the past—be it the relatively distant era of silent cinema, the continual "just past" of the contemporary film or the illusion of liveness produced by television and new media. We will consider how media change the way the past is presented and accepted in contemporary cultures, circulating images that are outside living memory while embodying their own period’s approaches to the past. We will also think about the stakes of this history, how it shapes our approach towards the past and our own present as well as considering what we need to know about the past in order to understand these seemingly transparent mass media forms as historical documents.

We will analyze the different ways to write media history, considering the role and status of evidence, the ways in which we might write, support and contest claims about the past. Here we will explore the value of primary and secondary material, archival records, the status of different film prints, trade and fan press, historical claims and methodology and the slew of materials that can be used as a basis for media history. These questions are even more important in the modern and postmodern era where media carry not just the burden of news and information but are the conduits of history.
Required Texts

All texts are available at NYU Bookstore.


Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be available on NYU Classes.

Assignments

3 Short Papers (4-7 pages) 25% each, 75% total
Presentation 15%
Course Participation 10%

Should you chose, you have the option of writing one short paper and a second longer research paper (12-15 pages) for your final (worth 50% of your grade) instead of three short papers.

Presentation

Each student is responsible for presenting aspects of the readings for one week of the class. You do not have to be comprehensive—the aim is not to reiterate what was said, but rather to look critically at an aspect of the readings. You can also bring in other supporting materials, including clips from films, TV programs, websites and photography, to help develop your thoughts.

Course Policies

You are expected to come to class prepared, having completed the assigned readings and ready to participate actively.

Attendance is mandatory.
Please be on time—if you think you will be late or know you have to miss class for some reason, please email me. Absences for religious holidays, sickness and other valid reasons will be excused. Please provide documentation where relevant or available.

Please turn off cell phones and refrain from texting and internet use during class.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism involves presenting somebody else’s work as your own. It is extremely serious: a form of theft, fraud and deception. Plagiarism includes—but is not limited to:

- Submitting a paper you did not write, one purchased from the internet, copied from a classmate, written by a friend, written to order.
- Copying and pasting material from the internet, books or articles or taking material and altering it slightly (changing the odd word or two).
- Not citing sources correctly.
- Collaborating on a paper with a friend so that your work is substantially the same.

There will be no tolerance for plagiarism. You will receive a zero on the assignment and the offense will be reported to the school who may take further disciplinary action.

If you have questions about citation and the correct way to reference and quote other people’s work, please speak to me.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, 1/30: Introduction: Media History and Questions of Historiography
Screening: Selected early films and clip from television shows.
Readings: Carr, pp. 3-35.

Week 2, 2/6: Media Histories—Institutions, Texts, Society and On- and Off-Screen
Screenings: Clips from I'm Not There (Todd Haynes, 2008), The “Teddy Bears” (Edwin S. Porter, Edison, 1907).
Readings: Trope, pp. 1-10, 89-126; *Eric Smoodin, “The History of Film History,”

Week 3, 2/13: Writing Media History: Sources, Primary and Secondary Resources,
Chronicles and Historical Methods
Screenings: Assorted movie trailers, early TV shows, online news coverage. View
digitized trades and fan magazines. Press books.
Readings: Carr, pp. 70-143; Sterne, pp. 1-30.

Week 4, 2/20: Media as History: Transcribing the Past
Screenings: The Evidence of the Film (Edwin Thanhouser, Thanhouser, 1913), Color
and Black and White Photos from the early 20th Century, Early actuality films (1890s-
early 1900s), A Hard Day’s Night (Richard Lester, United Artists, 1964)
Readings: Anderson, pp. 1-16, Gitelman, pp. 1-57; Sterne pp. 31-86.

Week 5, 2/27: Media and the Historical Subject
Screenings: Clips from It (Clarence Badger, 1927, Famous Players-Lasky/Paramount)
and A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, Warner Bros., 1971)
Readings: Carr, pp. 36-69, 177-209, Sterne 215-287, *Susman, “‘Personality’ and the
Making of Twentieth Century Culture.”
PAPER 1 DUE IN CLASS

Week 6, 3/6—NO CLASS: Moya is away at the SCMS conference in Chicago

Week 7, 3/13: Historicizing Audiences, Media Use and Reception
Screenings: Clips from Sullivan’s Travels (Preston Sturges, Paramount, 1941),
Showgirls (Paul Verhoeven, Carolco, 1995), Others TBA
Readings Sterne 87-126, *Trope, pp. 171-190, Gitelman, pp. 58-85, *Kathryn Fuller-
Seeley, “Dish Night at the Movies.”

3/20: NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK
Week 8, 3/27: History: Time and Narrative

Week 9: 4/3: Escapism, Narrative and Culture as Historical Discourses
Screenings: Clips from Gold Diggers of 1933 (Mervyn LeRoy, Warner Bros., 1933), Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount, 1960), Breaking Bad (2008-, AMC)

Week 10, 4/10: History and Consumer Culture
Screenings: Clips from Kim and Kourtney Take New York, The Women (George Cukor, MGM, 1939), The Cheat (Cecil B. DeMille, 1915)

PAPER TWO DUE IN CLASS

Week 11, 4/17: Archives, Marginalia and Trivia
Screenings: Clips from South Park (Comedy Central, 1997-), Extreme Couponing (TLC, 2011-), Emphemeral Films and digital content, including archives.org.

Week 12, 4/24: Memory, Nostalgia, History
Screenings: Clips from Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story (Michael Winterbottom, 2005, BBC Films et al., UK),

Week 13, 5/1: Media Events
Screenings: Footage from 9/11, Death of Princess Diana, JFK assassination and other media events.
Week 14, 5/8: Media, Materiality, Limits: Ontology, Temporality and Historicity
Screenings: Clips from Fragments and others TBA

FINAL PAPERS DUE MAY 22th