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considering what we need to know about the past in order to understand these seemingly transparent mass media forms as historical documents.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.
We will also look at the relationship between media and the new—the attractions of novelty and their inherent associations with popular culture. How does this dialectic of the new and the past affect media histories and our use of media to help us remember and to shape our continually revised understandings and use of the past?

**Course Objectives/Learning Goals**

At the end of the class, you should have a deeper understanding of the following:

Debates around the theories of history and the writing of history, including questions about sources/facts, the ever changing relation of the past to present, the role of narrative and questions about selection and interpretation’s roles in history,

Media’s status as historical document, source of historical understanding, mode of preservation and dissemination.

Major developments in media history and debates around the writing of different forms of media history.

Media’s relationship to history, memory and modern events.

The problems of history in the modern era, particularly the questions raised by the Holocaust and its histories.

**Required Texts**

All texts are available at NYU Bookstore.


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

3 Short Papers (6-9 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 (12-18 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 silence cell phones and refrain from texting and unnecessary 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.

**Late Papers**

Late work will only be accepted if you have contacted me in advance and have a valid reason like a religious holiday, sickness, family problems or other unexpected disasters. Please let me know when you will be able to complete the work and keep in touch with me should any eventuality prevent you from completing work on time.

**Incompletes**

As with late work, incompletes will be given only to students who have contacted me in advance (where possible) and have valid reasons for not completing the course work on time (illness, family problems, unexpected disasters). Students taking incompletes should also contact me to discuss a reasonable schedule for finishing the course. Please consult the Gallatin website for the school’s policy on Incompletes for more information.

**Use of Laptops/Tablets**

Laptops are permitted in class but **ONLY** for course-related activities like taking notes and looking up relevant examples online. They must **NOT** be used for google chat, IM, email, Facebook, shopping, game playing, etc.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, 9/2: Introduction: Media History and Questions of Historiography

Week 2, 9/9: Media History: Institutions, Aesthetics Texts and Society

Week 3, 9/16: Historiography and Early Cinema: Attractions, Novelty, Narrative
Screenings: Assorted Early Films (pre-1912)

Week 4, 9/23: Novelty and New Media: Media and Their Histories
Screenings: Early films and early TV shows (UK and USA)

Week 5, 9/30: Writing Media History: Sources, Chronicles, Narrative and Historical Methods
Screenings: TBA—will look at digitized trades, fan magazines and press books.
Readings: Landsburg, pp. 1-25; Carr, pp. 3-35, 70-143; *Hayden White, “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,” *Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940)

Week 6, 10/7: Popular Culture as History: Archives, Marginalia and Trivia
Screenings: Empemheral Films and digital content, including archives.org.
PAPER 1 DUE IN CLASS

Week 7, 10/14: Digital Histories
Screenings: TBA
Readings: Landsburg, pp. 147-180; Anderson, pp. 100-170
Week 8, 10/21: Media as History: Transcribing the Past on Screen
Screenings: Clips from The Evidence of the Film (Edwin Thanhouser, Thanhouser, 1913), The Marriage of Maria Braun (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Albatros et al, 1979, West Germany), Barry Lyndon (Stanley Kubrick, Warner Bros., 1975)

Week 9: 10/28: Holocaust Historiography and the Problems of Retrieving the Past
Screenings: Clips from A Film Unfinished (Yael Hersonski, Oscilloscope et al, 2010, Israel)

Week 10, 11/4: Media Events
Screenings: Footage from 9/11, Death of Princess Diana, JFK assassination and other media events.

Week 11, 11/11: The Historical Subject and Consumer Culture
Screenings: Clips from It (Clarence Badger, 1927, Famous Players-Lasky/Paramount), Mad Men (AMC 2007-2015,) The Women (George Cukor, MGM, 1939)
PAPER TWO DUE IN CLASS

Week 12, 11/18: Memory, Nostalgia, History
Screenings: Clips from Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story (Michael Winterbottom, 2005, BBC Films et al, UK), 2046 (Kar Wai Wong, Jet Tone et al, 2004, Hong Kong)

11/25: NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK
Week 13, 12/2: Escapism and Affect: Media, Narratives and Cultural Forms as Historical Discourses
Screenings: Clips from Gold Diggers of 1933 (Mervyn LeRoy, Warner Bros., 1933), Breaking Bad (2008-2014, AMC)
Readings: Landsburg, pp. 111-146, Anderson, pp. 17-48

Week 14, 12/9: Historicizing Audiences, Media Use and Reception
Screenings: Clips TBA
Readings: Gitelman, pp. 1-30, 175-206

FINAL PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 19