I OVERVIEW
We say we live in the Information Age as if such an age never existed before. But throughout time the introduction of new forms of media and communication technologies and information systems have transformed existing social, political, and economic life creating new perceptual pathways to our understanding. This course then follows a historical track through the prism of these communication “revolutions,” beginning with the arrival of the spoken word, the development of writing systems, the spread of the printed word, the age of electricity before leading to the modern era and our own digital revolution, one that has inspired a cultural transformation with enormous social, political, psychological and ethical consequences. Throughout this journey, we will explore through readings and assignments the philosophical, ethical, social, and political impacts that come with the emergence of new media “environments.” It is through our investigation of these previous revolutions that we may come to some greater understanding about the promise—and consequence—of our own technological age.

II Learning Goals:
1. Students will develop a deeper understanding of the historical and evolutionary nature of human communication and the philosophical, ethical, social and psychological ramifications that comes with the emergence of new media technologies.
2. Students will enhance research, writing, critical thinking and presentation skills through diverse assignments and projects.
**Primary Reading:** Neil Postman, Technopoly, Vintage

Short Reads: In chronological order:
1. Sherry Turkle, “Flight from Conversation”
2. Nicholas Carr, from The Shallows
3. George Yule, “The origins of language”
4. Walter Ong, “The psychodynamics of orality”
5. George Yule, “The development of writing”
7. Neil Postman, from Amusing Ourselves to Death
9. Sherry Turkle, “Julia” from Life of the Screen

**Screenings:**
Sherry Turkle, TED talk
“The Gods Must Be Crazy”
The Printing Press
Edison’s experimental films; early silent films
Chaplin’s “Modern Times”
Kazan, “On the Waterfront”
Hitchcock’s “Psycho,” and “The Birds”
“The Sixties”
Nixon-Kennedy debate
“Blade Runner”

**III ASSIGNMENTS**
All assignments must be completed by their due date to be relevant and eligible for full credit. I am interested in your take on reading assignments, so be prepared to critically assess them in class. Likewise, written work should demonstrate your own critical thinking. All work should be handed in during class session on hard copy—please avoid email submissions. Assignments coming after deadline will be penalized five points; assignments more than a week late will not be accepted.

Major assignments and requirements are as follows:
1. Media Log: 15 Points
2. The Communications Journal Review: 20 points
3. Critical Imagination Essay: 20 Points
4. Media Technology Projects: 25 Points
5. Attendance and participation: 20 points
1. **Media Log**
Track and keep a log of your media habits for week, breaking down each day by noting the media you use, for how long, and for what purpose (for computers and cell phones, note the particular functions you use: e.g. email; Facebook; watching movies; accessing news, etc.). In a few paragraphs, can you draw any conclusions as to why certain mediums are more/less appealing to you, how you use these technologies, and how these technologies in some way affect the way you socialize, behave, and think (3 pages, 15 points)

2. **The Communication Revolutions Journal (CRJ)**
The class will be divided into two editorial groups. You will be constructing the Communication Revolutions Journal through your articles as contributing writers. Each student will select one significant piece of media criticism or analysis from a book chapter, journal, article or other types of contemporary critiques and then reflect on how this work ties into our course and your understanding of our media environment. Your reflections (and include a copy of your original material) will be reviewed in class. The two groups (A & B) will discuss their findings during two separate sessions of the course (see Schedule).

Some questions to consider: 1) What is the writer’s “thesis”?; 2) How does it fit into our class perspective?; 3) Do you agree with the conclusions reached by this writer?; 4) Can you expand or challenge any ideas?; 5) Does the work offer a moral perspective and, if so, what insights can you offer?; 6) How does this writing apply to your understanding of our contemporary media world? (4 pages, 20 points).

2. **Critical Imagination Essay:** Using your critical imagination, I would like you to add your thoughts/analysis to one of the following questions:

1. Write an essay in which you reverse a common assumption or attitude about communication and show that, in some way, the opposite is true.
2. Write an essay in which you take note of some trend of theme in the media and show what would result if it was extended into new territory or taken to its logical conclusion.
3. Write an essay in which you argue that something most people think of as progress is actually destructive to some important value.
4. Write an essay about the dumbest idea about communication or technology you have ever heard.
5. Write an essay in which you give a name to something happening in the media which has not yet been named.
(3-4 pages, 20 points)

4. **Invent a Technology**
This creative assignment asks that you design and construct a technology that does not yet exist that answers a “problem” within the culture (you may select either a media on non-media technology or technique that enhances—or diminishes—in any way what you deem to be “progress”). You may “construct” this technology in various ways:
Examples:
1) a three-dimensional model
2) A diagrammatic representation (poster; Power Point, etc.)
3) A working prototype (extra credit)

The technology model/representation itself is to be accompanied by a short paper explaining how the technology works; its uses; its possible social and psychological consequences; its benefit/harm to one person/group or another; its impact of existing institution, or in constructing new institutions; moral concerns; and how, overall, we would be better off (or not) with this invention within our technological society. (3-4 pages)

Students will submit an abstract outlining the idea for the project along with the project title. Each student will present his/her work at the Future World Conference during the final two weeks of the semester. (25 points)

5. Class Participation and Attendance
I am looking for original thinking in both class activity and home assignments. The strength of our class depends on your active participation in which you engage in and formulate new ideas about media and communication. All students should feel free to share in class discussion; and keep up with readings since that are central to class lectures, discussions and our exam. (10 points).

I take attendance seriously and regular class attendance is expected. If you miss class, you essentially miss the course. Attendance is taken at the start of each session. Excused absences will be granted for religious observance or for documented medical reasons. Each unexcused absence will be penalized three points; more than two unexcused absences may result in a failing grade. Two late arrivals are equivalent to one absence. Full credit will be given to students who promptly attend each session and intelligently participate in the class give and take. (10 points).

III GRADING
Each aspect of the class has been given a set number of points. A final grade is computed by taking points earned and converting them to a letter grade using the following scale. Extra-credit points may also be awarded on assignments and class participation.

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
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IV CONTACTS
Students are encouraged to meet with me at the Gallatin School, 1 Washington Place, Room 614, on Wednesdays, 5:15 -6:15 p.m. (appointments are advisable). Correspondence can also be left in my faculty box on the fourth floor of Gallatin. All email should be sent to both my personal address at pthaler@aol.com and NYU email at pet1@gmail.com.

V RULES
1. Academic Freedom and Responsibility
   This class will deliberately address issues with the intent of challenging students’ beliefs and assumptions. During our discussions, all students should feel free to speak his or her mind without concern that that any idea will be penalized or disqualified. It is expected that every member of the class act in a respectful manner toward others.

2. Academic Honesty
   Students are expected to meet the highest standards of academic integrity and adhere to the norms of a serious intellectual community. Students are required to submit their own work. Ideas, data, direct quotations, paraphrasing; any other incorporation of the work of others must be clearly referenced. To do otherwise constitutes plagiarism and will disqualify a student from receiving a passing grade in the course and subject him/her to university sanctions.

3. Academic Courtesy
   Some simple rules (based on common courtesy) are important to maintain an effective learning environment for all:
   1. The class will start on time. If you must enter late, enter quietly and take a seat near the door;
   2. The class will end on time. Do not interrupt the class by leaving before its conclusion. If you must depart early, coordinate with me ahead of time;
   3. If you must converse with a colleague, please do so in a manner that is not disruptive to other students or the instructor;
   4. Please shut off all electronic devices—the class is an oral environment with no operating digital devices, including computers, cellphones, and other tablets allowed.
   5. Students may bring drinks and light food into the classroom (but, please, no meals!)
SCHEDULE
While this outline sets up an overall academic plan, it is a living document that will be modified to reflect class interests and current trends in communications evolving over the course of the semester. Additional reading assignments will be announced in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>FOUNDATIONS</th>
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| I (Sept. 7) | Course Introduction: The media clock and five Ideas about media and culture  
Course outline and requirements  
Discussion: Symbolic environments and Communication Revolutions  
Assignment for Sept. 14 — Log: Your Media ‘Environment’ |
| II (Sept. 14) | Student Introductions and media logs: Your media ‘environment’  
Theories and Models: McLuhan’s “Medium is the Message” and Postman’s Media Ecology  
Reading for Sept. 21: Postman, from *Technopoly* - Introduction and chapt. 1.; Carr, 39-57 |
| III (Sept. 21) | Aristotle’s communication model, “The Art of Rhetoric”  
Shannon and Weaver information model  
Reading for Sept. 28: Yule, “The Origins of Language”; Postman, chapt., 2 and 3 |

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<tr>
<th>II</th>
<th>HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE</th>
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<td>THE FIRST REVOLUTION: AGE OF THE SPOKEN WORD</td>
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| IV (Sept. 28) | What makes humans human? (Part I) — Evolution and the miracle of “thought”  
The Oral Greeks — and “The Judgment of Thamus” and “The Psychodynamics of Orality”  
Screening: from “The Gods Must Be Crazy”  
Readings for Oct. 5: Yule, “The Development of Writing |

| THE SECOND REVOLUTION: AGE OF THE PRINTED WORD |
| V (Oct. 5) | Introduction to writing systems: From Pictographs to the Alphabet  
Screening: The Printing Press  
Reading for Oct. 12: Carr, from *The Shallows*, pgs. 58-77; Postman, chapt. 4, |

**OCTOBER 12 – NO CLASS**
VI (Oct. 19)
From scribal culture to the printing press as an agent of change
Early history of the American newspaper; birth of the People’s Press
In-Class: New York Times Analysis
Assignment for March 11: Group A – Communication Revolution Journal (CRJ)
Reading for Oct. 19; Postman chapt. 7, 8

THE THIRD REVOLUTION: AGE OF ELECTRICITY
VII (Oct. 26)
The telegraph-wireless-radio
Photography and the decontextualization of meaning
Group A Discussion—CRJ
Assignment for Oct. 26: Group B - CRJ
Reading for Oct. 26: Postman chapt. 10

THE FOURTH REVOLUTION: AGE OF THE IMAGE
VIII (Nov. 2)
Movie history and the moving image revolution
The language of film
Screening: from Edison-Muybridge early film; “On the Waterfront,” “Modern Times”
Group B Discussion — CRJ

IX (Nov. 9)
The film author: Hitchcock as auteur
Screening: from “Psycho” and “The Birds”
Social propaganda: Modern Advertising and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
Screening: Mike Tyson commercial
Reading: Postman chapt. 11

X (Nov. 16)
Television and the Farnsworth story; the medium’s social-political impact
Screenings: The Sixties; Nixon-Kennedy debate
Assignment for Nov. 16: Critical Imagination Essay
Reading for Nov. 16: Chronicle of Higher Education, “Is Artificial Intelligence a Threat?”

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY - NO CLASS NOVEMBER 23

THE FIFTH REVOLUTION: AGE OF THE DIGITAL WORLD
XI (Nov. 30)
Discussion: Critical Imagination Essay
Handout: Memo for The Future World Conference
In-class reading, Turkle’s “Julia”
Assignment for Nov. 30: Project titles/abstracts

XII (Dec. 7) What Makes Humans Human (II)—from Turing to Turkle
Screening: from “Blade Runner”
Handout: “It Started Digital Wheels Turning”

III THE FUTURE WORLD CONFERENCE

XIII (Dec. 14)
Groups 1-2

XIV (Dec. 21 finals week)
Groups 3-4 and final thoughts from your professor . . .