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# 1 Overview

## 1.1 Course Structure

This course is an introduction to media theory – a subcategory of philosophy that emerged in the mid 20th century as an attempt to understand the impact that new technologies were having on the individual and, in a broader sense, society. The general tone used to convey the ideas contained throughout the notes and lectures will be an informal one, you refers to you the reader, listener and student. We refers to the teachers, authors and students that have been consulted in developing the material for this course. Us refers to the group that we happen to find ourselves in at any particular moment in time. And I refers to me, the teacher, Adam McCartney. This course is intended to introduce undergraduate level music students to the broader disciplines relevant for professional work in the arts and humanities. There are those who would consider it absurd that now, in the 21st century, investing in anything but a science related degree is simply a waste. In the face of such beliefs, it is worth pausing briefly to remember a simple point made by John Henry Newman, that a solid education in the liberal arts equips a student with tools that will ultimately lead them to become better engineers, scientists, doctors, artists, lawyers and etc.

## 1.2 Philosophy of Teaching



The satisfaction that can be gained through learning, teaching and generally sharing information and can be immense. My more positive experiences over the years as a student and teacher have tended to come from courses, books, tutorials, videos, discussions that were clear enough to allow enable an understanding of the topic from first principles – that is to say that the material related to the topic was assembled in such a way as to reveal its most fundamental ideas. Its virtually always beneficial to ask rudimentary questions about whatever it is that we are trying to understand, as such

questions will quickly reveal whether or not the topic under discussion has a basis in fact. This course also aims to introduce some of the core methods that are useful anywhere that it becomes necessary to think about something:

- Discourse
- Reason
- Logic
- Debate
- Reference

### 1.2.1 7 Liberal Arts of the medieval university

- Grammar
- Rhetoric
- Logic
- Geometry
- Arithmetic
- Music
- Astronomy

## 1.3 Where and how to access material

The primary source of information for topics presented in this course can be found in the VMI digital library, which is labelled *Academic Resources For Students* and will appear as a link on the homepage of your Moodle eLearning profile. Please take the time to do the readings, this will prepare you for the discussions that will take place during class. Thinking about things is a practical exercise, it's the same as riding a bicycle or learning to play an instrument. That means that the only way that you are going to learn how to think is by engaging with the readings and exercises. Much the same as any activity that is worth learning, thinking is difficult and takes a lot of patience to get right. The texts that were chosen to be part of the course are all written in an accessible style and are not overtly academic or technical. Nevertheless, they do contain ideas and arguments that you

might not get on the first reading. My two favorite reading disciplines from when I was an undergraduate were the practice of reading for a pre-allocated amount of time and also reading each text at least three times in preparation for a class.

#### **1.4 Portability and how to apply course content**

Should you try and tell your piano tuner about Ludwig Wittgenstein's ideas on the formation of knowledge? Definitely not! In fact, they would be more likely to charge you extra fees just to get your piano tuned if you chose to do so. So where exactly can this knowledge be applied? A friend of mine is a hobby programmer and he recently told me his principle approach to work. He called it „eat your own dogfood“. Now obviously the idea of eating any kind of dogfood does not sound particularly appetizing, but it is worth considering that dogs can also eat cake. The simple idea here is that whatever type of idea or discipline you develop, it is better first practiced on yourself before inflicting it upon the rest of us; when properly cultivated a discipline is a way to nourish, develop and sustain.

### **2 A brief history of society, thought and ideas in the post industrial world**

#### **2.1 The long 19th century (1789 - 1914)**

#### **2.2 The short 20th century (1914 - 1996)**

#### **2.3 Walther Benjamin**

##### **2.3.1 The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction**

### **3 Historical context for media theory**

#### **3.1 Marshall McLuhan**

##### **3.1.1 The Medium is the message**

<https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf>

## 4 Hackers and the open source movement

### 4.1 Eric Raymond

#### 4.1.1 How to become a hacker

<http://www.catb.org/esr/faqs/hacker-howto.html>

#### 4.1.2 The new hacker's dictionary

<http://hackersdictionary.com/html/index.html>

## 5 Navigating the digital world in the time of soul sucking mega corporations

### 5.1 Douglas Rushkoff and Team Human

#### 5.1.1 Program or be Programmed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imV3pPIUy1k&feature=youtu.be>

#### 5.1.2 Team Human Podcast

<https://teamhuman.fm>

## **6 A brief history of epistemology**

### **6.1 A few short points on the formation of knowledge**

#### **6.1.1 Ancient**

#### **6.1.2 Early Modern**

#### **6.1.3 National States Period**

#### **6.1.4 Contemporary Perspectives**

## **7 Adaptation and Adoption**

### **7.1 Features of Intagibles**

### **7.2 Shared Strategies – the automaton blues**

## **8 Course Work**

Semester requirements are to do the readings, and submit two essays, one short (ca. 1000 words) and one longer (ca. 2500 words). Actually, the medium that you present these works is flexible - in the past students have produced podcasts, written essays, made lesson plans. The important thing is that you work on forming an idea and presenting it in a coherent way.

### **8.1 Where are the best places to borrow ideas?**

### **8.2 Can we please make music theory a little less boring?**