

VSTUD 502:
Tacit Media and Digital Culture
Fall 2018
Burrowes 132
Mon 2:30 - 5:30

Professor Grant Wythoff
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Office Hours by appointment

Course site:
<https://gwijthoff.github.io/tacitmedia>



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Skip to the schedule...

Description

The luddites, the philosophers, even the tech evangelists all seem to be in agreement that living in a digitally networked world has changed something about the way we understand ourselves as both individuals and members of a public. In a moment when digital media are complicating some of our foundational assumptions about everything from democratic consensus to the nature of privacy, we need to take stock of the kinds of humanistic research that can put these developments into perspective.

This seminar will introduce a range of frameworks useful for thinking through the history, ethics, and aesthetics of digital media. Units on emerging approaches to contemporary digital infrastructures (questions of the public, selfhood, privacy, algorithms and inequality) will be paired with an overview of the most influential paradigms in media studies to guide us through these more contemporary issues. Concepts from our readings will be operationalized with weekly exercises that will include tactics for or protecting personal data, blocking unwarranted surveillance, and leaving filter bubbles. Students will leave with the basic computational literacy necessary for informed scholarship that both critiques and utilizes digital media.

Guiding us through these wide-ranging subjects will be our structuring theme: “tacit media,” or the background, habitual operation of our networked devices that we take for granted and that take us for granted in turn. How can something celebrated by prior media theorists: boredom and distraction, what Susan Sontag called “embodied intelligence” and Walter Benjamin referred to as “tactile appropriation”—how can these states continue to be celebrated in our current media and political environment?

Workshop Series: Data Privacy, Democracy, and The Humanities

As part of our seminar, we will lead three workshops open to the undergraduate community on privacy, surveillance, and social media practices. Each workshop will pair hands-on exercises using students’ own devices with concepts from our seminar readings. Undergrads will be given new perspectives on and tactics for issues that are vital to the health of the networked public sphere today.

Each event will involve 1) a brief presentation on the issue, 2) a visiting technologist from the Philadelphia area, and 3) a hands-on lesson. Together, we will determine together the way to best teach the importance of each issue to undergrads.

- **November 5:** Jessa Lingel, University of Pennsylvania
- Rachel Greenstadt, Drexel University
- Hannah Sassaman, Media Mobilizing Project and 2017 Soros Justice Fellow

Schedule

Week 1 | Aug 20 | intro

- Sara M. Watson, “[Toward a Constructive Technology Criticism](#),” Tow Center for Digital Journalism (October 2016)
- Primo Levi, “The Mirror Maker” (1985)
- a media theory piece?
- Resources:
 - [Logic](#) magazine
 - [Real Life](#) magazine
 - [Data and Society](#) research center in NYC
 - [AI Now Institute](#) research center at NYU
 - [Open Technology Fund](#) in DC, supporting global Internet freedom projects
 - [My Data](#) international org with local hubs that “empower individuals with their personal data”
 - [Tech Workers Coalition](#), based in SF and Seattle
 - [Tactical Technology Collective](#), Berlin-based nonprofit. See esp. “Our Data Our Selves” project
 - [Data Transparency Lab](#), in Barcelona, working to “define new standards and guidelines for how our personal data is owned, accessed and used”

Week 2 | Aug 27 | keywords 1

technology • technics • media

Eric Schatzberg, “Technik Comes to America: Changing Meanings of Technology before 1930,” *Technology and Culture* 47, no. 3 (2006): 486–512.

John Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (January 1, 2010): 321–62.

John Durham Peters, “Understanding Media,” in *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 13–52.

Jacob Bigelow, [Elements of Technology](#) (1829)

Week 3 | Sep 10 | keywords 2

data • information • digital

John Haugeland, “[Analog and Analog](#),” *Philosophical Topics* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 213–25.

Luciano Floridi, “Against Digital Ontology,” *Synthese* 168, no. 1 (2009): 151–78.

Ralph W. Gerard, “Some of the Problems Concerning Digital Notions in the Central Nervous System,” in *Cybernetics: The Macy Conferences 1946-1953. The Complete Transactions*, ed. Claus Pias (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2016 [1950]), 171–202.

Jonathan Gray, Carolin Gerlitz, Liliana Bounegru, “Data Infrastructure Literacy,” *Big Data and Society* 5, no. 2 (July 2018)

John Durham Peters, “Information: Notes Toward a Critical History”

Geoffrey Nunberg, “Farewell to the Information Age”

Daniel Rosenberg, “Data Before the Fact”

Kittler, “There is no Software”

Week x | infrastructure and organizing

Bertolt Brecht, “Radio as an Apparatus of Communication: A Talk on the Function of Radio,” *Screen* 20, no. 3–4 (December 1979 [1932]): 24–28.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media,” *New Left Review* I 64 (December 1970): 13–36.

Jean Baudrillard, “Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign,” *SubStance* 5, no. 15 (1976): 111–16.

Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (2017)

Week x | apparatus / stack

Frank Kessler, “Notes on *Dispositif*” (2007)

Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” in Philip Rosen, ed. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (1986)

Baudry, “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema,” in *Ibid.*

Jean-Louis Comolli, “Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field,” in *Ibid.*

Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (2015)

connection at erdaiip mountain?

Week x | determinism and affordances

John Durham Peters, “‘You Mean My Whole Fallacy Is Wrong’: On Technological Determinism,” *Representations* 140 (Fall 2017): 10–26.

Matthew Fuller, “The Forbidden Pleasures of Media Determining,” in *Media After Kittler*, ed. Eleni Ikoniadou and Scott Wilson (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 95–110.

introduction to *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*

James J. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” in *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing*, ed. Robert Shaw and John Bransford (University of Michigan Press, 1977)

Jenny L. Davis and James B. Chouinard, “Theorizing Affordances: From Request to Refuse,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, June 2017

B.P. Bloomfield, Y. Latham, and T. Vurdubakis, “Bodies, Technologies and Action Possibilities: When Is an Affordance?,” *Sociology* 44, no. 3 (June 18, 2010): 415–33.

Ian Hutchby, “Technologies, Texts and Affordances,” *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (May 1, 2001): 441–56.

Ian Hutchby, “Affordances and the Analysis of Technologically Mediated Interaction: A Response to Brian Rappert,” *Sociology* 37, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 581–89.

Brian Rappert, “Technologies, Texts and Possibilities: A Reply to Hutchby,” *Sociology* 37, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 565–80

Week x | habit 1

Felix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (Bloomsbury, 2009).

Wendy Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press: 2016).

Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

Week x | habit 2

Taina Bucher, “Affective Landscapes: Everyday Encounters with Algorithms,” in *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (2018), 93–117.

Alexandra Schwartz, “[Improving Ourselves to Death](#),” *New Yorker*, Jan 15, 2008.

Carl Cederström and André Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome* (Polity, 2015).

Svend Brinkmann, *Stand Firm: Resisting the Self-Improvement Craze*, (Polity, 2017).

Week x | algorithms and inequality

Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (2018)

Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018)

Week x | silicon valley

Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Claire L. Evans, *Broad Band: The Untold Story of the Women who Made the Internet*

Week x | privacy

Sarah E. Igo, *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America* (2018)

Woodrow Hartzog, *Privacy’s Blueprint: The Battle to Control the Design of New Technologies* (2018)

Jonathan Gray, “[Three Aspects of Data Worlds](#),” *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* (2018)

Sarah Jeong, “[You Can’t Escape Data Surveillance In America](#)”

Week x | the public

Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002)

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962/1989)

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983)

Week x | technology and the humanities

Chad Wellmon, draft essay on history of technical and humanistic education

Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology: Technics Out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought* (1977)

Andrew Pilsch, *Transhumanism: Evolutionary Futurism and the Human Technologies of Utopia*

Week x | technology and democracy

tech feudalism and info economics. . .

Nick Srncek, *Platform Capitalism*

Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex*

Acknowledgments

Thanks to . . . whose syllabi and pedagogy influenced the design and content of this course.