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Course title:	Media Studies in Berlin
Track:	A-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS-Credits:	4

Course description

The notions of 'media', 'medium', 'mediation' or 'mediatization' have occupied authors in the humanities for decades and have led to the emergence of new university programs as much as they initiated debates about the boundaries of already existing disciplines. Recently, different authors from the Anglo-American branch of the field have spoken of a newer brand of "German media theory". In this course, we will scrutinize this labelling by discussing different historical and contemporary examples where cultural critics, philologists, philosophers, and artists have undertaken research about media and communication in Germany and, more specifically, in Berlin.

We will focus on the period from the 1920s onwards and increasingly move towards the present. As we go along, we will build bridges between historical positions and contemporary ones, providing a sense for continuities and discontinuities in media theoretical positions and formats of media critique. Through the collective experience and critical discussion of texts, films and field trips, students will gain a wide understanding of the problems and objects of media-theoretical inquiry and of its historical and geographical context.

The overarching questions this course seeks to answer are: "What are common themes and issues in media theory and media critique?", "How did they develop in or refer to the particular context of Berlin?"

Altogether, this course has three intents: It serves as an introduction to problems in media studies for newcomers; it particularly focuses on media studies in Germany and Berlin for those already more familiar with questions in the field; it enquires about Berlin as both production site and object of media research.

Student profile

This course is suitable as an introductory course for everyone who is interested in (cultural) theories about media and communication. For those who already have a background in media studies or related disciplines, the course might provide additional information about the German and Berlin context of the discipline. For all others, the course might serve as a general albeit selective introduction into repeating themes of media studies. The course is interdisciplinary in nature and particularly suited for undergraduate students from the fields of cultural studies, social theory, communication studies, comparative literature, art history, anthropology, and philosophy.

Prerequisites

A general openness towards the engagement with conceptual abstractions and artistic practices is expected, but no prior knowledge is required.

Course Requirements

You are required to attend and actively participate during the sessions, to introduce into one of the readings and organize its discussion, and to write an essay at the end of the course.

Text presentation and discussion organization

Texts are provided in the course reader and we will discuss the allocation of the texts in the first session. Depending on the size of the group, each text will be introduced by one or two students. The introduction should include a general summary of the text as well as additional biographical information about the author. In addition, you are asked to identify key concepts that are relevant in the text and to select paragraphs that provide information about those concepts. After the introduction, we will split into groups, read the paragraphs you provided and collectively gather what those concepts are about. You are asked to channel and store our discussion, for example by writing down our ideas in a pad and guide us if we have not recovered all necessary information from the paragraph.

Term paper

On the last day of the course, you will be given short text fragments that describe recent developments in media culture. You will be asked to analyse and interpret those fragments in relation to the authors or theories we discussed during the course. Details about the length and form of the essay will be given in class.

Grading

Attendance and participation: 20%
 Text presentation and moderation: 40%
 Final course paper: 40%

Reading

A course reader will be provided at the orientation meeting.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Monday, July 23, 2018	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Because media is a ubiquitous term in our everyday language as well as in the engagement with technology, the first session seeks to undo our presuppositions about what media is. In a number of reading exercises, we will collectively problematize notions such as “the media”, “social media” and “representation”, and aim at preparing for the rest of the seminar with a more transdisciplinary understanding of mediation. In addition, through keyword mapping exercises we will outline some of the ‘terms’ that have become more popular in an academic realm in the recent decade.</p> <p><i>Readings: short text fragments will be provided during the session</i></p>

<p>Thursday, July 26, 2018</p>	<p>Early critique of mass media (1920s)</p> <p>How did our critical assumptions about the agency of ‘the mass media’ take shape?</p> <p>Even though there are multiple genealogies of mass media studies, cultural critics of the 1920s have been particularly influential in shaping the discourse in Germany about an emerging “entertainment industry” for many authors there-after. This session will provide an introduction to those accounts and on how the authors related their theories to the context of media production and consumption in Berlin.</p> <p><i>Readings: selected texts by Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer</i></p>
<p>Monday, July 30, 2018</p>	<p>Broadcast and feedback (1920s/1990s)</p> <p>As we get accustomed nowadays to rating, liking, sharing, and maybe even participating in online media productions, we should pause for a moment and look back to earlier forms of broadcasting. How did media critics in the past think about the authorship and communicative form of broadcasting? In particular, we will discuss the theory of Bertolt Brecht about the German radio system in the 1920s, and Vilem Flusser’s distinction between discourse and dialogue from the early 1990s. In so doing, we will reconstruct the opposition between centralized broadcast systems and communication models that involve feedback and dialogue as a repeating theme in media studies, spanning radio, television, and networked forms of communication.</p> <p><i>Readings: selected texts by Bertolt Brecht (Radiotheorie), Vilem Flusser</i></p> <p><i>Field trip: tba</i></p>
<p>Thursday, August 2, 2018</p>	<p>Essay film (1970s/2010s)</p> <p>How did filmmakers influence the scope of media studies? Was it possible to work both within the German ‘program industry’ and to produce critique?</p> <p>This session will revolve around a particular type of documentary film-making that is invested in ‘doing’ media studies and critique with the help of film and television. Those ‘essay films’ or ‘video essays’ roughly date back to the 1970s but have again become more popular in the recent decades in the field of art. We will discuss, for example, the work of Berlin-based filmmaker and artist Harun Farocki, and the institutional</p>

	<p>contexts that shaped the display of his work.</p> <p><i>Readings: selected texts by/about Harun Farocki and other film essayists (Alexander Kluge, Hito Steyerl, Ursula Biemann)</i></p> <p><i>Film screening or Field Trip to the Harun Farocki Archive</i></p>
<p>Monday, August 6, 2018</p>	<p>Philosophical foundations of mediation (1980s/2000s)</p> <p>Besides media studies' interest in the dynamics of mass media and communication infrastructure, many theoretical debates revolved around the philosophical foundations of mediation. Those debates have gained popularity in the 1980s and even more in the 2000s. Such foundational inquiries in media studies ask for example how we can define the reality of media: by its material hardware or through its operations? And how do either layers effect our knowledge and action? Even though many authors have shaped and still shape this discourse, we will focus on two exemplary authors who have taught or are still teaching and researching at universities in Berlin.</p> <p><i>Readings: selected texts by Friedrich Kittler and Sybille Krämer</i></p> <p><i>Field Trip: Medienarchäologischer Fundus (HU Berlin) or Museum für Kommunikation</i></p>
<p>Thursday, August 9, 2018</p>	<p>Cultural techniques, media aesthetics, and beyond (2010s-)</p> <p>Continuing the previous session, we will discuss how the philosophical inquiries into mediation have moved towards the study of 'cultural techniques', which in turn has led Anglo-American authors to speak of a new brand of German media theory. In order to attenuate such a claim, we will cursorily touch upon alternative theoretical developments in recent German media theory. The overall question of this session is: What are the recent boundaries in the field of academic media theory?</p> <p><i>Readings: selected texts by Cornelia Vismann, Liam Cole Young, Siegfried Zielinski, Marie-Luise Angerer</i></p>
<p>Monday, August 13, 2018</p>	<p>Media theory events</p> <p>For the last session, we will look at the production and distribution of media studies outside the traditional academic realm. Having in mind that Berlin played a</p>

	<p>particular role for the critics of the 1920s, we will now ask about Berlin's role for media criticism in the more recent years. For example, we will discuss how public events that bridge between theory and (artistic) practice work as discursive forums for the publication of media theory and practice in Berlin. Examples include events and forums such as transmediale, re:publica, events by the Chaos Computer Club, and smaller initiatives.</p> <p><i>Readings: tba</i> <i>Field Trip: tba</i></p>
<p>Thursday, August 16, 2018</p>	<p>Final examination</p> <p>Students are asked to choose from a set of questions relating to the themes of the previous sessions and reflect upon them in a written essay.</p> <p>Course wrap-up</p>

*Dates and subjects for field trips may be adjusted due to the availability and confirmation of the appointments. On field trip days, adaptation of class times is possible.