

AK2203 Media, technology and culture, 7,5 hp, Advanced level, Spring 2023

Introduction

How revolutionary is the ongoing digitalization, really? Can we just forget the old stuff or could there be something to pay attention to, and learn from? Hopefully, the course will answer the second question with a strong yes when we move between issues of present importance and media technologies and cultures of the past and look at both continuity and change.

The course contains lectures and seminars with a focus on technological change in the area of media technology, both historically and contemporary. The lectures are thematic with concrete examples. During the seminars there are active discussions based on the reading and text reflections, which are handed in before the seminar. These reflections are preparations for the essay which is the second part of the course. The essay is discussed during an opposition seminar in groups of four before the last version is handed in.

The course is given in English and the readings are in English. However, you are allowed to write your assignments in Swedish if you wish.

This is the preliminary course memo. A few readings will be added before the course starts.

Course aims in relation to grades

To get an E you must:

- be able to define and explain the theoretical terms presented in the course, like social construction and technological determinism
- be able to make comparisons between media technology today and historically
- be present at the compulsory parts of the course
- have handed in compulsory assignment.

To get a D you must also be able to:

- use the theoretical terms presented in the course, like social construction and technological determinism.
- give examples of the historical development of some media technology and their cultural and social effects.
- ask a relevant question within the media area in connection to the course, plan an assignment, look for material and write an essay where the question corresponds to the presented work.

To get a C you must also be able to:

- critically analyse statements about technology or technological change with the aid of the tools learned in the course

To get a B you must also be able to:

- constructively critique the text of others and suggest alternative interpretations.
- critique terms presented in the course.

To get an A you must also be able to:

- interpret your own results
- critique both written and oral sources.

Every grade is not possible to achieve in every assignment.

Practical things and course requirements

Course coordinator and examiner is associate professor Nina Wormbs. She will answer general questions in relation to course meetings and on Canvas. Course TA is Klara Müller, PhD candidate in history of science, technology and environment.

Prior knowledge: DH1608 Kommunikation och information or similar is a required course.

The course is on advanced level, comprising literature, eight seminars, six text reflections and a final essay. To pass you need to be present and active at seven out of eight seminars and hand in the assignments in time. You shall also comment on the assignments of others, peer-feedback.

If you are late with your text reflections more than twice during the course, it will affect your grade. If you are late more than three times, you will not pass the seminar part and

have to take the course again. If you miss more than one seminar you can do an extra assignment to compensate. If you miss more than two seminars you will have to take the course again.

It is not allowed to use text from other peoples' writing without declaring the source. The writing must be your own and use of other peoples' texts must be in quotation marks and references clearly noted.

If you have any disabilities and special needs, (e.g. dyslexia, hearing impairment) contact Monica Barsch who is the coordinator for disabled students: funka@kth.se.

Seminars

The course contains eight seminars. Except for the opposition seminar, each seminar will begin with an introduction putting the main aim of that particular seminar into context. We call this introduction a lecture, but you can always ask questions during the introduction. A central aim of the seminars is to give you the possibility to actively discuss and reflect on the contents of the course, both in terms of the concrete examples and the theoretical terms. In the discussion, you train your ability to analyse and argue and also to communicate with the group. For the six seminars with pre-assigned texts you are to read carefully according to the schedule. At four of these you will also hand in a text reflection (see below under Text reflections).

The seminars are compulsory and you need to take an active part in the discussions. Your participation is not graded, but if you are between two grades, the quality of your participation might be accredited

The eighth seminar is an opposition seminar, which is also compulsory (see below under Essay).

You are allowed to miss one seminar, but you still need to hand in the text reflection for that seminar. If you are ill or miss another seminar for any other reason, you can compensate with an extra assignment. If you miss a seminar always tell the course leader in advance. If you miss three seminars you cannot pass the course this time but will have to take it next year.

Text reflections

The reflections are part of the examination of the course and a central aim is to stimulate continuous reading. In order to get as much as possible out of the seminar discussions, you are expected to have read the text. **As an aid in that reading you are asked to hand in reflections in Canvas the day before the seminar in a dedicated assignment.**

A course goal is to train critical reading and analytical skills. The reflections should *not only* be an account or a summary of the texts, but *also* discuss their weaknesses and strengths. Here are some short questions to think about while reading and writing: What purpose does the author claim to have? Which are the questions to be answered? Is the author using any specific terms? What do they mean? What is the most important empirical result? Does it answer the questions asked? Or would other questions have been more fruitful? How is the argument made out and is it viable? The reflection cannot be more than two pages (ca 800 words) and should finish with a question that can be discussed during the seminar. You must treat every text, albeit not equally.

You will not only work with your own reflection, but also read and comment a reflection by another student. **This will take place before the seminar in Canvas where we will assign reading. That is another reason why you need to hand in**

your reflection in time. This trains your ability to analyse and deconstruct a text and thereby identify its strengths and weaknesses. In turn, you will be able to look with fresh eyes on your own text and improve your own writing. At the seminar, you will get a change to discuss your comments with your commentator.

To pass you need to define and explain the theoretical terms in the text. If there are several, you need to pick the most important ones. The lectures can be a help in identifying the most central themes of the course. You also need to give a summary of the text. For a higher grade, an analysis is also necessary.

NOTE! You must hand in all the reflections before you hand in the essay.

Essay

The essay will train you in writing a longer argumentative text on a subject connecting to the course. You can choose your topic rather freely. We have differentiated between two types of assignments: one is a *classic essay* and the other is a *review essay*. To pass it must be apparent that the essay is written in connection to the course. You must relate to the themes, the literature and the terms. What material you choose to relate to depends on your choice of subject. It is important that the essay has a clear aim and a clear structure.

A review essay normally treats several books within a specific theme, but in this case you only need to read one longer book on a topic of your choice. We still call this a review essay to underline the length and to stress that not only the book should be part of the review. You also need to refer to the literature or the lectures that connect to your topic. A review essay that does not refer to the course literature will not pass.

In a classic essay you choose a topic and a question that interests you. You then look for material that enables you to write an essay on that subject. Also, in this assignment you need to refer to the course material and the terms that we have used and discussed.

The essay should be about 3 000 words and written on a computer. On the title page the course number and name, year, your name and email, group and seminar leader should be written as well as the title of your essay. Please make sure you follow these instructions.

On Tuesday **April 17th** you will upload a plan for your essay. The plan should contain a general aim with the essay, a question that you would like to pursue, a preliminary layout and a list of the sources and the literature that you intend to use. You will get feedback on your plan in connection to the following seminar. If the plan is incomplete or if the book is not suitable for a review essay, your seminar leader will ask you to resubmit or change books.

NOTE! You must have an accepted plan to be able to hand in your essay.

At the last seminar all essays are discussed in groups of four in which each and every essay gets an opponent. You will receive separate instructions for this assignment. The essays are to be circulated in the small groups through Canvas at the latest **May 17th** 12:00. A revised version of the essay should be posted in Canvas the **Monday May 31st**.

NOTE! You must have handed in all your reflections before you hand in your essay.

Readings

The readings are articles and chapters from scholars of different disciplines that we make available to you. Sometimes these are journal articles and you will need your library card

to access. Sometimes they are chapters from books and if they are not open access we pay for your use through a copyright service.

Schedule, readings and assignments

Seminar 1 March 27th

Introduction. Preparation: Write half a page answering the following two questions.
Why are you taking this course? What is your idea of the relation between technology, media and culture?

Lecture Nina Wormbs: How can we analyse the relation between technology and culture.

Seminar 2 March 29th

Readings: David E. Nye, *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), Chapters 1-4, pp. 1-66.

Susan J. Douglas, “Some Thoughts on the Question ‘How Do New Things Happen?’”, *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 51, No 2, April 2010, pp. 293-304.
(<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tech/summary/v051/51.2.douglas.html>)

Lecture Nina Wormbs: Perspectives on Technological Change Over Time

Seminar 3 April 3rd

Readings:

Yochai Benkler, (2020). “From Utopia to Practice and Back”, In *Wikipedia @ 20. Stories of an Incomplete Revolution*, ed. Joseph Reagle and Jackie Koerner (MIT Press). Retrieved from <https://wikipedia20.pubpub.org/pub/3wt2fy6i>

Benjamin Mako Hill and Aaron & Shaw, (2020). “The Most Important Laboratory for Social Scientific and Computing Research in History”, In *Wikipedia @ 20. Stories of an Incomplete Revolution*, ed. Joseph Reagle and Jackie Koerner (MIT Press). Retrieved from <https://wikipedia20.pubpub.org/pub/fgas2h4l>

Stefan Larsson and Jonas Andersson Schwarz, (2018). “Introduction”, In *Developing Platform Economies: A European Policy Landscape*, ed. Larsson and Andersson Schwarz (Stockholm/Brussels: Fores/ELF) (Retrieved from https://fores.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Developing-Platform-Economies_WEB.pdf)

Lecture Jonas Andersson Schwarz: Plattformen – what are they and how they came about

Seminar 4 April 19th

Readings:

Arne Kaijser, "The helping hand: In Search of a Swedish Institutional Regime for Infrastructural Systems", in Lena Andersson-Skog and Olle Krantz (eds.), *Institutions in the Transport and Communications Industries* (1999)

Nina Wormbs, "Negotiating the Radio Spectrum: The Incessant Labor of Maintaining Space for European Broadcasting," in Nil Disco & Eda Kranakis (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Commons: Sharing Resources and Risks across Borders* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013) 97-122.

Laura DeNardis and A.M. Hackl. "Internet Governance by Social Media Platforms", Telecommunications Policy. Special Issue on the Governance of Social Media, 39, no. 9 (1 October 2015): 761–70. doi:[10.1016/j.telpol.2015.04.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2015.04.003).

Lecture: Nina Wormbs: Infrastructure as sociotechnical systems

Seminar 5 April 24th

Readings:

Steven Gonzalez Monserrate, *The Cloud is Material: On the Environmental Impacts of Computation and Data Storage*, MIT Case Studies in Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing, Jan 27, 2022

Lisa Gitelman, "Near Print and Beyond Paper: Knowing by *.pdf", in Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 111-135.

Susan Leigh Star, "Power, technologies and the phenomenology of conventions: On being allergic to onions", John Law (ed.), *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays of Power, Technology and Domination* (London: Routledge, 1991), 26-56.

Lecture Charlie Järpval: Information history: Materiality and archeology

Seminar 6 May 2nd

Readings:

Lennart Weibull, "New Media Between Technology and Content: The introduction of radio and television in Sweden", in Mats Ekström and Monika Djerf-Pierre (eds.), *Swedish Broadcasting: Communicative ethos, genres and institutional change* (Gothenburg: Nordicom/Stiftelsen Etermedierna i Sverige, 2013), 31-54.

Alexander Badenoch, "Between Rock and Roll and a Hard Place: 'Pirate' Radio and the Problems of Territory in Cold War Europe", in Christian Henrich-Franke, Andreas Fickers and Alexander Badenoch (eds) *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War*, Nomos

Lecture Nina Wormbs: Broadcasting from AM to streamed, or from Radio Luxembourg to Netflix

Extra reading

Mats Ekström and Monika Djerf-Pierre, (eds.), *Swedish Broadcasting: Communicative ethos, genres and institutional change* (Gothenburg: Nordicom/Stiftelsen Etermedierna i Sverige, 2013).

Seminar 7 May 5th

Malte Rödl and Jutta Haider, "Internet search results could be increasing your carbon emissions", *The Conversation*, 20221207 <https://theconversation.com/internet-search-results-could-be-increasing-your-carbon-emissions-194334>

Janet Abbate (2017) What and where is the Internet? (Re)defining Internet histories, *Internet Histories*, 1:1-2, 8-14, DOI: [10.1080/24701475.2017.1305836](https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2017.1305836)

Rasmus Fleischer, "If the Song has no Price, is it Still a Commodity? Rethinking the Commodification of Digital Music", *Culture Unbound*, Volume 9, issue 2, 2017:146–162. Published by Linköping University Electronic Press: <http://www.culture-unbound.ep.liu.se>

Lecture Klara Müller, *Historicising the Internet: From hacker culture to consumerism*

Extra reading

Nathan Ensmenger and Rebecca Slayton. "Computing and the Environment: Introducing a Special Issue of 'Information & Culture.'" *Information & Culture*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2017, pp. 295–303. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44667559. Accessed 2 Mar. 2021.

Nina Wormbs, *Digital materiality*, in *After Digitalisation* (Stockholm: Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, 2022) <https://rj.se/en/collaboration/yearbooks/after-digitalisation/>