

## Media Literacy

We consume media in a constant and casual flow for seven hours a day on average. This sensory overload can create addictive, impulsive habits that prioritize instant gratification over long-term fulfillment and encourage us to accept what we see at face value instead of questioning why or how it was made— or whether it's even real.

This course challenges the assumption that media is neutral or self-evident. Instead, it will examine how media is constructed, circulated, and how it organizes the world. It will also consider how media shapes our sense of truth in an era of AI-generation and algorithmic filters.

We will put classical art and so-called “brainrot” on the same plane, because that’s how we now encounter them, and because they employ more similar perceptual strategies than we might think. We will read a wide-ranging group of thinkers who have long been concerned about the power of representation, and trace their concerns through early cinema, advertising, news, literature, memes, AI-generated media, and the avant-garde.

Throughout the semester, students will analyze perceptual techniques— how media directs attention and constructs meaning. Students will learn to approach media inquisitively and critically, and create original work that applies media theory. The goal is not only to interpret media, but to better understand how it shapes our perception of reality— and how we might participate in that process more consciously.

Class involves discussion and analysis, creative experimentation, and opportunities for students to help determine the direction of inquiry. Students will examine media from their own lives, and engage course concepts in writing and across different mediums.

This course is offered in both the fall and spring semesters to juniors and seniors as an English S/elective, and may only be taken for one term.

### Some Course Essential Questions:

- How do we communicate through media?
- How does media activate our senses?
- How does the societal shift towards private media consumption change how we experience it?
- How have different types of media developed and influenced each other?
- How does media shape perception and identity?
- How does media shape reality?
- When does media engage our humanity, and when does it exploit it?
- How can we detect bias?
- How do the “attention economy” and algorithms impact us?
- What happens when media is generated faster than it can be processed and understood?

- How do we determine veracity in the age of AI (and why might we feel instinctually driven to)?
- What ethical concerns arise around AI-generated media?
- How does the unprecedented cultural circulation of media disrupt paradigms of authorship and creativity?
- How does literature use perceptual techniques?
- How do text and image (or text and theory) interact?
- What kinds of media do we want to live with?
- How can we reclaim attention?
- How can we resist dominant media patterns?
- How can we apply media theory to interpretation and creation?
- How can we create work that feels authentic to our own experiences?

### **Sample Assignments:**

- Annotate a media artifact and analyze its meaning
- Create an original work that reflects your perspective on a topic that isn't always fairly represented in mainstream media or entertainment
- Plan and teach an English class lesson that applies an aspect of media theory

### **Core texts:**

*On Photography* (Sontag)  
*The Medium Is the Message* (McLuhan)  
*Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Postman)  
*Ways of Seeing* (Berger)  
*Understanding Comics* (McCloud)

Additional readings may include:

Benjamin, Baudrillard, Mulvey, hooks, Steyerl, Barthes, Morrison, Borges, and others.

### **Fiction + Films:**

Fiction may include:

*White Noise*, *Interior Chinatown*, *The Crying Lot of 49*, and others.

Films may include:

*Sherlock Jr.*, *A Trip to the Moon*, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, *Vertigo*, *HyperNormalisation*, and others.