

CMS 240: Writing in Cinema and Media Studies
YouTube Criticism, or How We Write about Social Media

MTWTH 9:10-11:20am, ARC 160

Summer A-term 2025

Instructor: Anna Parkhurst, alp1994@uw.edu

Office hours by appointment

Course description:

Despite their ubiquity, we often fail to see beyond the surface of social media platforms. Perhaps we see them as a natural part of twenty-first century life, or perhaps we do not want to jeopardize the immediate comfort they sometimes offer us in our chaotic world. Today, it is more important than ever to challenge our assumptions about the digital networks that structure our lives, and to learn how to clearly articulate our ideas and beliefs about them. This course will challenge you to both take seriously your own personal experiences with social media and push you to think beyond them. We will engage a range of methodologies from Production Studies to Media Philosophy to explore questions such as, *what are different ways to study and understand social media? How are platforms structured and regulated and by whom?* and *how do social media figure into beliefs about the power of digital communications technologies more broadly?* By the end of this course, you will be able to integrate a variety of approaches to the study social media in a piece of critical, argumentative writing about a research topic of your choice. Although we will examine several platforms and associated technologies, we will always return to YouTube as our primary object of focus for our analyses. Drawing upon contemporary scholarship and YouTube content itself, we will nuance our understanding of the intersections between media, technology, and society.

Our shared learning objectives for this course are to...

- Develop familiarity with different methodologies that can be used to study social media.
- Craft a strong, argumentative claim about the relationship between media, technology and society in the form of a thesis statement.
- Organize a piece of writing that supports your claim about media, technology and society through a critical analysis of specific evidence.
- Discern what constitutes meaningful evidence from a variety of sources— including academic scholarship, ethnographic interviews, news articles, and social media content—that can be used to support a critical analysis.

- Foster a curiosity for the field of media studies that you can take with you outside of class.

Grading Overview

<i>Participation</i>	40%
<i>Assignments</i>	60%

Participation (40%)— This is a discussion-based course designed as a writing workshop and therefore your active participation in class is essential. I recognize, however, that participation can look different for different people. As such, I will assess your participation based upon a variety of different factors:

- Completion of in class writing exercises (if you are taking this course remotely, this looks like thoughtful and honest engagement with online versions of the exercises)
- Posts to reading discussion boards
- Contributions to in-class discussions
- Your engagement with your peers during group work
- Your attentiveness and preparedness for class
- The completion of any class preparation (listed as “Class Preps”)

Please complete all of the assigned readings and viewings before class so that we are prepared to discuss together. If I find that the majority of you are not prepared for class, then I reserve the right to institute reading and viewing quizzes. Please come prepared so that neither you have to spend your time taking these quizzes, nor I have to spend my time grading them.

Assignments (60%)—Each week, you will be asked to complete a part of what will culminate into a research paper on a topic of your choice in the form of a 5 paragraph (minimum) essay of 1500-2000 words. These assignments are designed to walk you through the research process and build upon one another. If you keep up with the assignments, you will be on track to completing the final paper with ease. Assignments are typically due on Canvas **on Sundays by 11:59pm** unless otherwise specified. Note that there is one week (week 4) during which you will be asked to complete 2 assignments.

Late work policy:

Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Please ask for an extension **before** the deadline, rather than submitting late work and asking for one retroactively. Any unexcused late work will receive a penalty of 5% per day.

Please refer to Canvas for information on Academic Honesty, Access and Disability Resources, and Religious Accommodations.

Class Schedule

Week 1: Networked Communication

June 23 — Introductions; [Why critical writing matters](#)

June 24 — **Read** Carolyn Marvin, “Introduction” from *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electronic Communication in the Nineteenth Century* (1988)
[What is evidence? Primary v. Secondary sources](#)

June 25 — **Read** Alexander Galloway, excerpt from “Chapter 1: Physical Media,” from *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (2004), 29-38

June 26 — ***Writing Workshop***
[Choosing a research topic and making a speculative claim](#)
[Using the library’s resources; Zotero](#)

Topic Proposal due Sunday, June 29

Week 2: Historiography and Aesthetics

June 30 — **Read** John Perry Barlow, *A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace* (1996)
[Situating primary sources](#)

July 1 — **Class Prep 1**, YouTube Timeline
[What evidence can we use to tell a history of technology?](#)

July 2 — **Read** Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, “Introduction” from *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999)

July 3 — **Read** Carol Vernallis, excerpt from “Chapter 7: YouTube Aesthetics” from *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (2013), 127-135
Watch YouTube video selection, see Canvas
[What is an annotated bibliography? How is it related to a literature review?](#)

Bibliography + Reflection due Sunday, July 6

Week 3: Industry Studies and Digital Economy

July 7 — **Read** John Caldwell, excerpt from “Introduction” from *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (2008), 1-14
[How to use an academic article as evidence](#)

July 8 — **Read** Tiziana Terranova, excerpt from “Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy” (2000), 33-43

Class Prep 2, Critical Annotation

July 9 — **Read** “YouTube Channel Monetization Policies”

Watch Jenna Julien Podcast episode 107, “The Censorship/Demonetization of YouTube” (2016)

[Example: How I conduct my research!](#)

July 10 — ***Writing Workshop***

[How to write a strong thesis](#)

[Turning your claim into a thesis statement](#)

Annotated Bibliography due Sunday July 13

Week 4: Algorithmic Ethics and Platform Politics

July 14 — **Read** Ruha Benjamin, excerpt from “Introduction” from *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (2019)

Watch Shalini Kantayya, *Coded Bias* (2020)

[Seeing the bigger picture: building an argument through body paragraphs](#)

[What does a good outline look like?](#)

July 15 — **Read** Safiya Noble, “Missed Connections: What Search Engines Say About Women” (2012)

Watch Jenna Julien Podcast episode 134, “YouTube Restricted Mode” (2017)

Outline due EOD Wednesday, July 15

July 16 — **Read** Mary Gray and Siddharth Suri, excerpt from “Introduction: Ghosts in the Machine” from *Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass* (2019), ix-xviii

[How to couple evidence and analysis](#)

July 17 — **Watch** Jenna Julien Podcast episode 169, “Logan Paul” (2018)

[Body paragraph bootcamp: making a mini argument and topic sentences](#)

Body Paragraph(s) due Sunday, July 20

Week 5: Media Materiality and Philosophy

July 21 — **Read** Armond Towns, “Towards a Black Media Philosophy” (2020), 851-873

[In text citations and footnotes](#)

July 22 — **Watch** short documentaries selection, see Canvas

What makes a compelling introduction and what is a hook?

July 23 — **Read** Francisco Mejia Uribe, “Existence Precedes Likes: How Online Behavior Defines Us” from *Social Media and the Self: An Open Reader* (2021)

Watch Ted-Ed “Who Am I? A philosophical inquiry – Amy Adkins” (2015)

Conclusions—you did all this research, “so what?”

Final Paper due Sunday August 3