

ENGL 561-001: Topics in Science and Technology Studies
Kavita Philip and Richard Cavell

Media & Misinformation: The History of Truth from Pseudoscience to Propaganda

Information and propaganda, science and truth, planetary crises and democratic responses are inter-dependent. The future of education is interdisciplinary, because our crises are inter-connected, and because transdisciplinary citizens are needed to address planetary and political challenges. This course seeks to create a set of tools that will enable critique at the intersection of the history of truth and the future of citizenship.

This course offers a design for a new kind of literacy. The lives of people and the planet will depend on our ability to communicate accurately and effectively. Media Studies, traditionally the locus for the study of communication technologies, has, by necessity, expanded its field to engage with disciplines such as Science and Technology Studies, Information Studies, Infrastructure and Network analysis, as well as with established disciplines such as History, Geography, and English.

The course draws on topics and sub-fields that have gained compelling relevance in the last decade:

- New Media Studies and Network Cultures
- Media Archeology and Infrastructure Studies
- Science and Technology Studies
- Digital Geographies
- Informatics
- Feminist, Indigenous, and Decolonial Media Studies

The seminar asks the central question: in what ways does the digital “disrupt” former modes of representation and communication, and how should we address the global crisis in communication? Examining the rise of digital media and its consequences, we examine the ways in which the late twentieth century’s global, near-instantaneous circulation of popular interventions brought past issues of race, gender, Orientalism, and post-colonial geopolitics into new political configurations. How do new circulations of digital media disrupt, resist, and rewrite earlier forms of media theory? To understand the broader social meanings of mediated forms of political practice, our case studies will not remain at the purely theoretical level, but will put media studies into conversation with Indigenous studies, Feminist informatics, anti-racist technical practice, and decolonial politics.

The weekly readings for this seminar are interdisciplinary, and the lectures will expose students to different styles of argument, forms of representation, diverse cultural contexts, and varied modes of analysis.

Proposed readings:

- Sarah Sharma, ed., *Re-Understanding Media: Feminist Extensions of Marshall McLuhan* (2022)
- Kenneth Cmiel and John Durham Peters, *Promiscuous Knowledge: Information, Image, and Other Truth Games in History* (2020)
- Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019)
- Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (2014)
- Armond R. Towns, *On Black Media Philosophy* (2022)
- Lisa Gitelman, *Raw Data is an Oxymoron* (2013)
- Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015)
- Joan Donovan et al *The Media Manipulation Casebook* <https://mediamanipulation.org/>
- Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. and expanded ed. (1996)
- Alondra Nelson, "Troy Duster." *Public Culture*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2012, 283–302 <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-1535507>.
- Lisa Blackman, *Haunted Data : Affect, Transmedia, Weird Science* (2019)
- H. Rose and S. Rose (eds.), *The Radicalisation of Science* (1976)
- D. Noble, *America by Design* (1979)
- Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth, Civility and Science in Seventeenth-century England* (1994)
- Max Fisher, *The Chaos Machine: The Inside Story of How Social Media Rewired Our Minds and Our World* (2022)
- Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart, *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics and Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.