Topics in New Media (JAMS 855)
What is the Internet?
Fall 2015 Thursdays, 12:30-3:10 pm CRT 227
Michael Newman mznewman@uwm.edu @mznewman
Office hours Wednesdays 1-3 pm or by appointment

This course will take a wide and curious view of the internet. We will assume that however much the internet is woven into our everyday lives, we may not know it that well. As Albert Einstein said, “What does a fish know about the water in which he swims all his life?” Our understanding of the internet will be improved by reading about its history and prehistory, its materiality, its functions as a medium of communication, its social and cultural value, its commercial applications with their political-economic implications, and its regulation by the state.

We often hear about the internet’s power to transform society, and much of the rhetoric of the tech industry promises that innovations in networked media can “change the world.” We will approach the idea of the internet as a causal force of change in the world critically and skeptically. We will not just ask “what is the internet doing to us?” but also, “what are we doing with the internet?” -- and how, and why, and to whose benefit, in whose interest?

We will also pay special attention to what the internet is and is not. The internet is not the web or the browser window. It is not social media. It is not the information superhighway or cyberspace. It is not the repository of all of the world’s information. The internet is not by nature anything: open or closed, utopian or dystopian, a force for freedom or oppression. These are ways of using or understanding computer networks for some purposes and by some people.

Assignments:
➢ film review of 1000-1200 words due 9/28 10%
➢ paper proposal of minimum 500 words plus annotated bibliography due 11/5 10%
➢ podcast review of 1000-1200 words due 11/23 10%
➢ final paper of minimum 3500 words due 12/16 50%
➢ participation 20%

Many students find it helpful to visit The Writing Center.

Policies:
Assignments are due on the dates given below by 11:59 pm. They are to be submitted to D2L Dropbox in the format to be specified.

Students with disabilities should notify the instructor so that every possible accommodation may be made. The sooner the better. For more see http://uwm.edu/arc/.

Students whose religious observance conflicts with class requirements should do the same. For more see http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm.
Academic misconduct may result in severe sanctions. For more see http://www4.uwm.edu/acad_aff/policy/academicmisconduct.cfm.

These and many other UWM policies are detailed in this document: http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf.

---

### Course introduction and online anticipations

**September 3**

- Vannevar Bush, *As We May Think* (1945)

### The history of the internet as the history of technology

**September 10**

- Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (MIT, 1999)

### How did people think about the web when it was new?

**September 17**

- W. Joseph Campbell, "Recalling the quaint early struggles to describe the web," 1995blog (2015)

### The internet goes to the movies

**September 24**

*Watch these movies:*

- *WarGames* (1983)
- *You’ve Got Mail* (1998)

*Recommended reading:*

- Stephanie Ricker Schulte, *Cached: Decoding the Internet in Global Popular Culture* (NYU, 2013), chapter “The ‘WarGames Scenario’: Regulating Teenagers and Teenaged Technology,” 21-54
- Chris Sims, "What We Learned about Technology from 1995’s *The Net*" (2013)

---

**Due Monday, September 28:** a review of one of the three films from week 4 that focuses on its representation of technology.
Intellectual history of the internet
October 1
➢ Fred Turner, From Counterculture to Cyberculture (U of Chicago, 2006)

Information age, network society, digital labor
October 8
➢ Darin Barney, “Network Society” (chapter 1 of book of same name) read this second
➢ Adrian Chen, “The Laborers Who Keep Dick Pics and Beheadings Out of Your Facebook Feed,” Wired (2014) read this last
➢ Frank Webster, "Making Sense of the Information Age," Information, Communication & Society 8.4 (2005) read this first
➢ Workers Leaving the Googleplex (video, 2009-2011)

The internet as a culture: memes
October 15
➢ Journal of Visual Culture issue 13.3 on Internet Memes (2014)

The internet as material infrastructure
October 22
➢ Andrew Blum, Tubes (Ecco, 2012)
➢ Bundled, Buried and Behind Closed Doors (video, 2012)

Regulating the internet: corporate and state power
October 29
➢ Susan Crawford, Captive Audience: The Telecom Industry and Monopoly Power in the New Gilded Age (Yale, 2014)

Due Wednesday, November 4: research paper proposal of a minimum 500 word project description an an annotated bibliography containing minimum 5 sources not from course readings.

(no class meeting November 5; time to be applied augmenting final day)

Is the internet to blame for the internet?
November 12
➢ Whitney Phillips, This is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture (MIT, 2015)

How the internet represents the internet
November 19
➢ Reply All (2014-15) podcast episodes: everyone should listen to episodes #1 (“An App Sends a Stranger to Say ‘I Love You’”), #3 (“We Know What You Did”), #5 (“Jennicam”), #9 (“The Writing on the Wall”), #21 (“Hack the Police”), and as many more of your own choosing as you can.

Due Monday, November 23: a review of Reply All that focuses on its representation of the internet as a technology.

(no class meeting November 26, Thanksgiving)

Algorithmic culture
December 3

Grand finale
December 10
   presentations!! (overtime available from week 10)

Due Wednesday, December 16: Final Paper