Aims and Objectives of Seminar
This course provides an introduction to the field of theoretical writing addressing the nature of digital media and the role of technology in modern and contemporary culture from a humanistic perspective. In doing so, this course will consider a range of critical pressure points that have been central to media studies, technology studies, digital humanities, art and performance, cinema studies, and archival studies. How have developments in digital culture and theory impacted the critical commonplaces of analogy, time, space, sound, motion, network, body, and narrative, to name only a few? Do digital networks, databases and data modeling, algorithmic mediation, hyperlinks, and ever-accumulating indexes alter the conditions of knowledge, artistic practice, subjectivity, and the place of ideology critique?

In dialogue with critical paradigms that have been fundamental to the discourse of critical theory, including affect, power, constructionism, archives, colonialism, nationalism, and the politics of race, gender, and sexuality, we will reflect on the parameters of a deeply significant archeological shift from the conceptual apparatus of “perspective” to the elastic platforms of “fold” that are emphasized, if not wholly embodied, by the digital condition. Such a shift turns around the paradoxical inscription of novel procedures of archivization, accumulation, divergence, and fractal simultaneity in past paradigms of projection, the baroque, dialectics, surveillance, and philosophical teleology. This course will provide students with the opportunity to scrutinize the work of a wide spectrum of thinkers central to critical theory in digital discourse, including Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, Jacques Rancière, Jussi Parikka, Don Idhe, Katherine Hayles, Lisa Nakamura, Arjun Appadurai, Alan Liu, Lev Manovich, Timothy Murray, Donna Haraway, Mark Poster, Gilles Deleuze, Mark
B. N. Hansen, Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, and David Rodowick. We will examine how these different approaches to digital media and technology inflect what Karl Marx called the history of the sense, or the relation of political and aesthetic experience.

In order to foreground the intellectual trajectories that surround digital media, it is important to examine pre-digital media theories before moving into writing on digital new media. The syllabus thus follows the reception of media theory in North America starting with the work of University of Toronto English professor Marshall McLuhan in the 1950s and 1960s. It then moves backward in time to examine several German critics writing in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the bulk of the syllabus focuses on the work of digital theories in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries, which mark the dawn of networked personal computing.

Students’ individual understandings and interests are at the center of my pedagogy. As such, the course will be heavily discussion-based and it will, at times, have an informal feel. The main objective of this course is to transform students from passive receivers of knowledge into active and autonomous cultural critics. In order to do so, students will develop critical-thinking skills and the ability to communicate their ideas effectively in the form of an analytic argument. The assignments will ask students to demonstrate both written and oral skills in this regard.

The course presumes no prior experience in digital discourse, only a basic familiarity with analytic writing at the graduate level. The course is open to both Master’s and Doctoral students.

**Relation to MI Learning Outcomes**
This course aligns with various Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) of the MI. The issues covered in the course will allow students to become “conversant with fundamental concepts, theories, practices, and the diverse horizons of information disciplines”, so that they “can respond to changing information practices and needs of society” (SLO 1); the course will allow them to develop social responsibility as information professionals through the development of

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* This course is only an introductory course to theoretical writing on digital media. It is by no means comprehensive. Due to the limitations of time, I have been forced to omit major digital topics – such as video games or critical making – which are given ample attention in other courses in the Faculty of Information.
“knowledge and values appropriate to their future exercise of economic, cultural, and/or social leadership” (SLO 2). Assignments will allow “students [to] develop the ability to contribute through research and publication, to the continuous expansion and critical assessment of the body of knowledge underlying the information” (SLO 3); “develop an understanding of the development of theory concerning information, where it is found, and how it is used” (SLO 4), and provide students the ability to “continue in life-long intellectual growth beyond graduation” (SLO 5).

Assessment
Assessment is based upon participation in class discussions, group presentations, weekly one-page writing responses, and a 2,000-word paper on a topic that relates to the readings and reflects the individual interests of the student.

Presentations: In groups of two or three, students will prepare a presentation that a) makes connections between readings, b) critically engages the readings by challenging the readings’ assumptions and arguments, and c) provides two questions that provoke class discussion. Presentations should not summarize the readings for that week. Groups will present for 20 minutes (not to exceed 30 minutes) each week at the beginning of class, including time for questions. Students will sign-up through doodle at the beginning of the semester. So long as groups accomplish the above requirements, the group as a whole receives full credit for the presentation.

Weekly responses: Starting in Week Two, students will submit a one-page response to the readings assigned for that week. Responses should include two elements: first, a fully developed thesis statement or paragraph that directly engages the readings for that week, and second, a brief response to the readings that supports that thesis. A thesis is an argument or claim with which one can reasonably disagree. Weekly responses should not summarize the readings for that week. I will provide constructive comments, but students will not receive a letter grade for weekly responses. The purpose of these responses is to improve one’s written and analytic skills, and to think critically about the readings in advance of class; it is not simply to achieve a certain letter grade. Students receive full credit for submitting the assignment at the start of each class.

Final paper: Papers should demonstrate graduate-level writing skills, a fully developed thesis, the ability to form an analytic argument, and a firm comprehension of and critical engagement with the subject. (These are all skills necessary for any profession.) It is not enough for students simply to summarize
the readings; this course expects students to engage the course literature in sophisticated, meaningful ways that reflect their individual interests. Please refer to the Grading Rubric on Blackboard. Papers should be 2,000 words in length, relate to the readings, and reflect the individual interests of the student.

I invite and encourage students to submit rough drafts of the final paper at least two weeks prior to the due date (so that I have time to offer suggestions and you have time to make any necessary changes). Students may submit drafts earlier, and students may submit as many drafts as time allows. The final paper is due Monday, December 1, 2014 at the beginning of class.

Students receive a final letter grade, weighted as follows: 60% final paper, 10% group presentation, and 30% weekly responses.

Texts
Most of the readings are available for download on our course website through Blackboard. However, it is worth purchasing the following two books, as we will read substantial sections from them:


Late Assignments
I will not accept late assignments (defined as an assignment submitted after the deadline). Extensions will only be granted in the event of illness or emergency. Students will not receive credit for unexcused late assignments. Please let me know of your extenuating circumstance as soon as possible so that we can make reasonable accommodations.

Writing Support
The SGS Office of English Language and Writing Support provides writing support for graduate students. The services target the needs of both native and non-native English speakers and include non-credit courses, single-session workshops, individual writing consultations, and website resources. I strongly encourage all students to avail themselves of these free services.

Academic Integrity
Please consult the University’s website on Academic Integrity, located at http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/. The University has a zero-tolerance
policy on plagiarism as defined in section B.I. 1. (d) of the University’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, located at http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm. You should acquaint yourself with the Code.

Accessibility Services
If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodation, please feel free to approach me and/or the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations.

Schedule of Readings

Week One: McLuhan

Week Two: Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer

Week Three: Questing after Technology

Week Four: Information Theory and Cybernetics

Week Five: Cyborgs

Break: Thanksgiving: October 13, 2014

Week Six: Virtual Folds and Digital Networks

Week Seven: Embodiment and New Media’s Interface
Katherine Hayles “Materiality of Informatics” In How We Became Posthuman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 192-221


Break: Reading Week: November 3, 2014

Week Eight: Archival Fever

Week Nine: Database Aesthetics


**Week Ten: Control and Freedom**

**Week Eleven: Performance**

**Week Twelve: Concluding Thoughts**

The final paper is due Monday, December 1, 2014 at the beginning of class.