Course Description

As part of the larger environmental turn within humanities, scholars in media studies and area studies have turned to “environmental media” and “elemental media” approaches in order to rethink the material and ecological conditions of technologies of communication, storage, and processing of data, sounds, and images. Media and environment are articulated in myriad ways, from the ecological footprint and environmental toxicity of producing, shipping, and disposing consumer electronics, to the energy-intensive networks of undersea cables and wireless signals that connect our smartphones, speakers, and laptops to satellites and local data centers. These environments also serve as the site of geopolitical and territorial conflicts and negotiations. Keeping in mind the legacies of imperialism and settler colonialism in Asia, North America, and elsewhere, this MA/PhD and advanced undergrad seminar explores this entangled relationship between media and environments with an emphasis on Asia.

Drawing on the approaches of media archaeology, environmental media studies, and critical area studies, the course approaches the nexus between technological media and the environment through a series of technological, geological, ecological, and infrastructural mediations. The questions this seminar will address include the following: How might we think historically and site-specifically about universalizing claims about “media” in relation to the geopolitical “area” called Asia? How does paying attention to the ambient, atmospheric, elemental, and ecological dimensions of our everyday media practice change the way we define media? How do media organize our perception of time and space? How do we account for the historical and ongoing violence (e.g. colonialism, imperialism, warfare, climate crisis) that have shaped and continue to affect the proliferation of media infrastructures which are supposed to make our life more comfortable and convenient? How might we decolonize knowledge production within and through Asian Media Studies?

Objectives

The seminar is designed to foster dialogues between Media Studies and Area Studies, and I invite you to be attentive to the methodological, theoretical, historical, and political resonances and dissonances across some of the readings. You will also have the opportunity to develop and hone your skills to act effectively across a range of academic genres of performance, thinking, planning, writing and presenting.

Readings

Readings will be available on myCourses.
Course Delivery Guideline
Our seminar will take place in person on Thursdays. If you must self-isolate and miss the seminar due to COVID-19 related conditions, I will discuss a make-up assignment with you for those days.

COVID-19 Health Guidelines
Procedural masks are required in all indoor spaces, including classrooms. For more information and protocols on campus, please see McGill’s general health and safety guidelines: https://www.mcgill.ca/coronavirus/health-guidelines

Assignments and Evaluation

1/ Participation 10 %
Please complete all assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to participate thoughtfully and actively in class discussion. The weight of your grade for participation will be determined holistically considering your synchronous and asynchronous participation in class discussions during the weekly class in person as well as conversations taking place online on myCourses. I understand that there are many types of challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic affecting each of us in a unique manner.

2/ Weekly Reading Responses 20 %
In preparation for class, please write a short one- or two-paragraph response (approx. 200-300 words) to the readings assigned for the given week, and posted on myCourses by 11:00pm on Wednesday, the night before our scheduled class meetings on Thursday. The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to both identify and articulate the main threads of arguments and/or key issues from the readings before you come to the seminar. You can also frame your responses around questions raised by the texts, or difficulties in reading them. For instance, you may point to passages in the text that you find difficult to understand and want to discuss in class. After each class session, I also encourage you to post a follow-up response to the issues discussed in class or respond to your classmates’ posts.

The seminar is a place of inclusivity and equity, where all of us can freely and respectfully express and share ideas and work together towards addressing the issues pertinent to the course materials, including systemic racism, institutionalized inequity, social injustice as well as the need and ongoing efforts to decolonize knowledge production. This entails discussing sensitive materials that deal with legacies of imperialism and colonialism, including those by the former Japanese empire. The seminar offers opportunities for you to explore new ways of thinking, expressing and exchanging your ideas with your fellow classmates. Never hesitate to ask a question, even if you think it’s basic or trivial!

3/ Research Paper Proposal: due on November 7 20%
Write a 6-7 pages (approx. 1500-2000 words) research proposal for your final seminar paper, including the following components: 1) an introduction that explains how your chosen example or topic relates to the issues of environmental media or a media technology associated with environmental ramifications; 2) a thesis statement that leads to the
hypothesized “argument” of your paper, organized in dialogue with at least 2 readings from the course (required or recommended); 3) a brief summary of each reading with which you want to engage in dialogue (including additional readings from outside the course materials).

- The notions of media and environment can be defined broadly (e.g. natural, ecological, technological, artificial, infrastructural, climatological, immersive, ambient, online/offline).
- If possible, pick an example or topic that relates to the political, economic, and sociocultural conditions in Asia and/or Asian diaspora, including the legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism.
- Make sure to briefly summarize the main arguments or analyses presented in the readings you chose to engage; you may build upon, supplement and/or critique their approaches. You can draw on your weekly reading responses for such summaries.
- As you summarize, analyze, or criticize ideas from other theorists, make sure to provide full citations, including page numbers either in the Chicago or MLA style. Failure to provide appropriate citations will affect your grade.
- After in-class presentation on November 4 you can finesse and incorporate suggestions and feedback from your classmates. Please upload your paper on myCourses by 10:00pm on Sunday November 7.

4/ In-Class Presentation of Your Proposal: November 4 10 %
Prepare a 5-7 minutes class presentation on your proposal for the final seminar paper. To facilitate this presentation, I suggest that you come up with a “pitch” and a preliminary “argument” that persuasively frame the relevance of your proposed topic/example to the course and put your paper in a generative dialogue with course readings (see above). If you’d like, you can share an audio-visual image (e.g. a screen capture from a video, a photograph, a map, a flow chart, etc.) or PowerPoint slides to aid your presentation. that captures the gist of your proposed research. Feedback from the class on your presentation may be included in your Research Paper Proposal.

5/ Final Research Paper & Workshop Presentation 40 %
Building on your midterm proposal presentation and the feedback you receive, you will write a final research paper on the topic of your choice. You can build on some of the ideas and topics you explored in the midterm proposal, but the final paper must engage with one new reading from the course material, which was not covered in your midterm proposal. The aim here is to develop your proposal with additional readings and sources. While you are encouraged to build on your midterm proposal, you also may switch your topic or example for the final paper. The final paper should engage with at least 3 readings from the course. For this paper, may conduct historical research, or write a purely theoretical essay focusing on one conceptual problem, or combine theoretical engagement and object analysis (e.g. film, visual artwork, music, architectural design, mass cultural form, social media phenomenon, political event, etc.). The total length of the paper should be 16-20 (approx. 4000-5000 words) pages.

- You will orally present your topic and preliminary argument for your paper during the workshop on the last day of class on December 2.
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- Please note that 5% out of 40% of the final grade allocated to this assignment will be based on the workshop presentation and the accompanying abstract. The remaining 35% will be based on your final paper itself.
- Please submit the final version of your paper via myCourses by 11:00pm on December 10. If you need more time, you can reach out and consult me about getting an extension.

NOTE: (1) McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). (2) In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. (3) In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. (4) If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 514-398-6009 before you do this.

McGill University (Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal) is situated on the traditional territory of the Kanien’kehà:ka, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst many First Nations including the Kanien’kehà:ka of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg. We recognize and respect the Kanien’kehà:ka as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today.
SCHEDULE

Sept. 2 Introduction: Media/Environment
- Introduction and overview of the course.

Sept. 9 Time-Keeping Media: Calendar, Astronomy, and Time Management

Recommended

Sept. 16 Spectral Mediations: X-Ray, Electromagnetism, and Electricity

Recommended

Sept. 23 Oceanic Mediations: Islands, Territories, and Undersea Cables
2007).

  https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.21392.

Recommended


Sept. 30 Ecological Mediations: The Earth, Race, and Metabolism


Oct. 7 Check-in/Grant Writing Workshop

Oct. 14 Fall break

Oct. 21 Geological Mediations: Settler Colonialism, Extraction, and Indigeneity


Oct. 28 Microscopic and Aerial Mediations: Military and Epistemic Targets


Watch at home
Age of Promise (Chas. Pfizer & Co., Inc. 1956, 9 mins)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIGhOvfWsTE

Nov. 4 In-Class Presentation of Your Research Paper Proposal

Nov. 7: Deadline to submit Your Research Paper Proposal

Nov. 11 Atmospheric Mediations: Air, Breathing, and Radiation
• Peter Sloterdijk, Terror From the Air, trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 1-70.

Nov. 18 Ambient Media: Music, Screens, and Waiting Bodies

Recommended

Nov. 25 Public Mediations: Loudspeakers, Street Protestors, and Platform Workers
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**Recommended**

**Dec. 2 Final Research Paper Workshop**

**Dec. 10 **Final Paper Due at 11:00pm**
Please upload your paper on myCourses and email it me.