

MEDIATECHNOLOGY

German 179C and Comparative Literature 179C¹

Spring 2022

Wolf Kittler

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Syllabus

Enrollment Code 55483

Time Monday/Wednesday 03:30-04:45 p.m.

Room Webb Hall Room 1100

Office hours Wednesday 01:30-02:30 p.m.
Phelps Hall Room 6315

Grading

1. Midterm Exam	30%
2. Final Exam	35%
3. Paper	35%

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The Midterm and the Final Exams will cover the materials taught in the first and in the second halves of the quarter respectively. In other words, the Final Exam is not inclusive. Questions will be closely related to both careful study of the source material, i.e., homework, and the content of the lecture, i.e., class attendance.

The Midterm and the Final Exams will be given online via Gauchospace. Students will have a twenty-four hour window to log into these exams. The Midterm will be limited to 75 minutes, the Final will be limited to three hours.

The paper should consist of about 1,800 words, approximately five or six pages. A list of topics will be handed out. Alternative topics must be discussed with the teacher of the course.

Readings²

Author	Title	Additional Information
Franz Kafka	“An Imperial Message”	Story
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>	Excerpts
Polybius	<i>The Histories</i>	Book X, 42-46
Lakanal	<i>Rapport on the Telegraph</i>	Rapport
Samuel Thomas Sömmerring	“On an Electrical Telegraph”	Article
Heinrich von Kleist	“Project for a Bombing Post”	Article
Charles Dickens	“The Signalman”	Story
Charles Dickens	“Wings of Wire”	Article
Rudyard Kipling	“Wireless”	Story
William Michael Rossetti	<i>The Life of Keats</i>	Chapter III
John Keats	“The Eve of St. Agnes”	Poem
John Keats	“Ode to a Nightingale”	Poem
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	“Kubla Khan”	Poem
Peter Galison	“Einstein’s Clocks”	Article
Alan Mathison Turing	“Computing Machinery and Intelligence”	Article

²All the texts can be downloaded from GauchoSpace.

Timetable

Note:

Dates in this table are preliminary, hence, subject to change.

Week 1

Monday, 03/28

Introduction

Opening Remarks

Structure of Course

Overview over Readings

Homework:

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, Excerpts

Questions:

Do you know Agamemnon's story? Do you think the telecommunication system described in Aeschylus' tragedy was really and successfully used? Do you think that this system can, in fact, work? Do you know who the god Hephaistos is? Why is he quoted within this context? Are there any other techniques mentioned in Aeschylus' text?

Wednesday, 03/30

Discussion of Homework:

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, Excerpts

Homework:

Polybius *Histories*, Book X, 42-46

Questions:

What is the occasion Polybius uses in order to discuss problems of telecommunication. Compare the two telecommunication systems described by Polybius to Aeschylus' system. What is similar, what is different?

Week 2

Monday, 04/04

Discussion of Homework:

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, Excerpts

Polybius *Histories*, Book X, 42-46

Homework:

Polybius *Histories*, Book X, 42-46

Questions:

Do you think one of the two system, or perhaps even both of them can work in reality? Can you compare the systems described by Polybius to modern telecommunication machines?

Wednesday, 04/06

Discussion of Homework:

Polybius *Histories*, Book X, 42-46

Homework:

Lakanal, "Rapport on the Telegraph"

Questions:

Who was Montgolfier? Without going into all of the details, try to understand the working of Chappe's telegraph. Do you think it was a very effective system? And why did Chappe not pursue his first idea, the idea to use electricity for speedy messaging?

Week 3

Monday, 04/11

Discussion of Homework:

Lakanal, "Rapport on the Telegraph"

Homework:

Lakanal, "Rapport on the Telegraph"

Questions:

What is the political and historical context of Lakanal's rapport? Compare the Chappe telegraph to the systems described in Aeschylus and Polybius. What is similar, what is different?

Wednesday, 04/13

Discussion of Homework:

Lakanal, "Rapport on the Telegraph"

Homework:

Samuel Thomas Sömmerring, "On an Electrical Telegraph"

Questions:

Try to understand the working of Sömmerring's telegraph. Once again, compare this system to all the other system discussed, so far. What is similar, what is different? Do you think this a decisive step not only in the history of technology, but in human history, in general?

Week 4

Monday, 04/18

Discussion of Homework:

Samuel Thomas Sömmerring, "On an Electrical Telegraph"

Homework:

Samuel Thomas Sömmerring, "On an Electrical Telegraph"

Questions:

How fast is electricity, how fast is light? Why does Sömmerring say that one would have to measure the speed of the lightning bolt in order to determine the speed of the signals transmitted by the electrical telegraph?

Wednesday, 04/20

Discussion of Homework:

Samuel Thomas Sömmerring, "On an Electrical Telegraph"

Homework:

Heinrich von Kleist, "Project of a Bombing Post"

Questions:

How realistic is Kleist's project? And what does he have to say about Sömmerring's telegraph? What is the origin of his claim that message transmitted over the electrical telegraph are "riding on wings of the thunderbolt"? How would you judge Kleist's attitude towards the new medium that had just been invented, but was, of course, far from being widely available to the public?

Week 5

Monday, 04/25

Discussion of Homework:

Samuel Thomas Sömmerring, "On an Electrical Telegraph"

Heinrich von Kleist, "Project of a Bombing Post"

Homework:

Preparation of Midterm Exam

Wednesday, 04/27

Midterm Exam**Homework:**

Charles Dickens, "The Signalman"

Questions:

What is the signalman's job? Is it a dangerous and a challenging job? What skills are need for this job? What role does the narrator play in this story?

Week 6

Monday, 05/02

Discussion of Homework:

Charles Dickens, "The Signalman"

Homework:

Charles Dickens, "The Signalman"

Charles Dickens, "Wings of Wire"

Questions:

Try to understand the telegraph described in Dickens' report "Wings of Wire." How do you understand the title of this article? What kind of a telegraph does the signalman use? Does that have anything to do with the ghost that are haunting the signalman? What exactly are these ghosts doing?

Wednesday, 05/04

Discussion of Homework:

Charles Dickens, "The Signalman"

Homework:

Rudyard Kipling, "Wireless"

William Michael Rossetti, *The Life of Keats*, chapter III

Questions:

What is Mr. Cashell trying to achieve. What kind of machine is he operating? And what is Mr. Shaynor's problem? What about "arterial blood," and what about Fanny Brand?

Week 7

Monday, 05/09

Discussion of Homework:

Rudyard Kipling, "Wireless"

William Michael Rossetti, *The Life of Keats*, chapter III

Homework:

Rudyard Kipling, "Wireless"

John Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes"

John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan"

Questions:

Is there any relation between Mr. Cashell's experiment, on the one hand, and Mr. Shaynor's trance-like writing, on the other? How do the various poems relate to Kipling's story? And, most importantly, why does not only Mr. Shaynor quote poetry, but the narrator as well? Any idea why he, the narrator, does that? Which author does he quote? And which author does Mr. Shaynor quote, or shall we say, channel?

Wednesday, 05/11

Discussion of Homework:

Rudyard Kipling, "Wireless"

John Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes"

John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan"

Homework:

Peter Galison, "Einstein's Clocks"

Questions:

Think about the historical change described in Galison's article. Compare the systems described in this piece to the other systems discussed, so far. Do you see any connections, any recurring themes?

Week 8

Monday, 05/16

Discussion of Homework:

Peter Galison, "Einstein's Clocks"

Homework:

Peter Galison, "Einstein's Clocks"

Questions:

What could theoretical physicist learn at the patent office? How is the question of synchronicity related to our understanding of the universe? Could the situation described in Galison's article be described as a kind of summary of the history of telecommunication up to Einstein's time?

Wednesday, 05/18

Discussion of Homework:

Peter Galison, "Einstein's Clocks"

Homework:

Alan Mathison Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

Questions:

What is the purpose of the "Imitation Game"? And how does it relate to Turing's question about computers? Why does Turing use the words "to mimic," "to parrot," "to imitate," and "to simulate"? Are these words all synonyms? Or is there a difference between them?

Week 9

Monday, 05/23

Discussion of Homework:

Alan Mathison Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

Homework:

Alan Mathison Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

Questions:

What is a "discrete state machine"? And why does Turing define such machines as "universal machines"? Does that have anything to do with the "Imitation Game"?

Wednesday, 05/25

Discussion of Homework:

Alan Mathison Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

Homework:

Alan Mathison Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

Questions:

Think about the various objections Turing lists against his own argument.
Think about any questions you might have at the end of the quarter.
What kind of machine is Turing suggesting to build?

Week 10

Monday, 05/30

Memorial Day

Wednesday, 06/01

Concluding Discussion

Alan Mathison Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"
Floor open to general questions and remarks

Papers due!

Homework:

Preparation of Final Exam

Questions:

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Week 11

Thursday, 06/09

– Friday, 06/10

Final Exam