

INLS 690 Oral Culture in Modern Times  
1.5 Credits  
Fall 2016  
October 17-December 7  
Monday/Wednesday, 12:20-1:35pm, Manning Hall Room 014

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### **Course Description**

This course will examine the place of the spoken word in our contemporary, text-heavy culture. We will cover a brief history of orality, discuss modern unmediated oral transmission (such as face-to-face conversations), modern mediated oral transmission (such as YouTube), and oral communications that have been rendered obsolete by text. We will ask questions such as: How has the spoken word changed over time? What do we lose when oral communication becomes mediated? What do we gain? What motivates us to keep talking to each other?

### **Purpose**

In this course we will immerse ourselves in the information context of modern oral transmission. A great deal of attention is paid to print and digital media. This course offers us a rare opportunity to consider the medium of oral communication. Furthermore, theories of media and theories of information are often studied separately. In practice, information, and the media through which it travels, coexist. This course is also meant to provide a space for us to consider both oral media and orally transmitted information together.

### **Goals:**

- Develop a nuanced understanding oral transmission as an information context.
- Allow oral media and information to comingle in our minds and discussions.

### **Objectives (Students will be able to...)**

- Appreciate mediated and unmediated oral performance.

- Describe the historical origins of orality.
- Apply McLuhan's media tetrad to oral communication and various media in which oral communication travels.
- Explain the relationship between information and modern oral communication media.
- Articulate in an informed way the place of orality in modern society.
- Produce an oral performance that is informed by an understanding of orality and the media that aid in its transmission.
- Be motivated to consider the relationship between media and information in contexts beyond oral transmission.

## Materials

We will be reading from the following sources throughout this course. The readings are referenced in the schedule by author and year. All readings are available in the "Resources" section of our class Sakai site. We will not be using a text book.

- Berger, J. (2014). Word of mouth and interpersonal communication: A review and directions for future research. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24(4), 586–607. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.05.002>
- Harvey, H. B. (2008). On the edge of the storytelling world: The festival circuit and the fringe. *Storytelling, Self, Society*, 4(2), 134–151.
- Kahl, D. H., & Venette, S. (2010). To lecture or let go: A comparative analysis of student speech outlines from teacher-centered and learner-centered classrooms. *Communication Teacher*, 24(3), 178–186.
- Kurzban, D. (2007). Towards a typology of silence. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, 1673–1688. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2007.07.003>
- Leverette, M. (2003). Towards an ecology of understanding: Semiotics, medium theory, and the uses of meaning. *Image & Narrative*, 6. Retrieved from: <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/mediumtheory/marclleverette.htm>
- Linett, P. (2013). Interview: Ben Lillie on science and the storytelling revival. *The Museum Journal*, 56(1), 15–19.
- Luger, E., & Sellen, A. (2016). "Like having a really bad PA": The gulf between user expectation and experience of conversational agents. In *CHI '16* (pp. 5286–5297). San Jose, California: ACM. <http://doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858288>
- Maina, C. K. (2012). Traditional knowledge management and preservation: Intersections with library and information science. *The International Information & Library Review*, 44(1), 13–27. <http://doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.iilr.2012.01.004>
- McLuhan, M. (2003). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. (W. T. Gordon, Ed.). Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press.
- McLuhan, M., & McLuhan, E. (1988). *Laws of media: The new science*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Mithen, S. (2006). *The singing neanderthals: The origins of music, language, mind, and body*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Norman, B., & Bennett, D. (2014). Are mobile phone conversations always so annoying? The "need-to-listen" effect re-visited. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 33(12), 1295–1305. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2013.876098>
- Ong, W. J. (2008). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. New York: Routledge.
- Owston, R., Lupshenyuk, D., & Widman, H. (2011). Lecture capture in large undergraduate classes: Student perceptions and academic performance. *Internet and Higher Education*, 14(4), 262–268. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.05.006>
- Peoples, B., & Tilley, C. (2011). Podcasts as an emerging information resource. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 18, 45–47. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2010.550529>
- Pritchard, B., Fels, S., d'Alessandro, N., Witvoet, M., Wang, J., Hassall, C., ... Cadell, M. (2011). Performance: What does a body know? In *CHI EA '11* (pp. 2403–2407). Vancouver, BC, Canada: ACM. <http://doi.org/10.1145/1979742.1979547>
- Sachs, J. (2012). *Winning the story wars: Why those who tell - and live - the best stories will rule the future*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Saul, R. (2014). Adolescence and the narrative complexities of online life: On the making and unmaking of YouTube's AnonyGirl1. *Digital Culture & Education*, 6, 66–81.
- Sobol, J. D. (1999). *The storyteller's journey: An American revival*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (1953). The game rhymes of New Zealand children. *Western Folklore*, 12(1), 14–24. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1496118>
- Thomas, J. B. (1997). Dumb blondes, Dan Quayle, and Hillary Clinton: Gender, sexuality, and stupidity in jokes. *Journal of American Folklore*, 110(437), 277–313. Retrieved from <http://www.afsnet.org>
- Thompson, R. C. (2010). "Am I going to see a ghost tonight?": Gettysburg ghost tours and the performance of belief. *The Journal of American Culture*, 33(2), 79–91.
- Whatley, M. H., & Henken, E. R. (2001). Yes, we are folk and we do have folklore. In *Did You Hear About the Girl Who...?: Contemporary Legends, Folklore, and Human Sexuality* (pp. 1–16). New York: NYU Press.

## Conduct of the Course

We will explore the topics in this course primarily through class discussion. There are articles and selections from books (all of which can be found in Sakai) that are meant to

be read before each class meeting so we can all make informed contributions to the discussions.

I will also ask you to experience various forms of modern orality and I look forward to hearing about a wide variety of experiences. Please look ahead and do not wait until the last second. Some of these experiences will require advance planning.

Your weekly posts to Sakai will help me ensure we get to the points and questions that are most meaningful to you.

During our time together we are learning from each other. Please consider that not only will you get out of the course what you put into it, but also other students are counting on your input to make this a rich experience for us all.

## **Attendance**

I will not take attendance, but I will be taking note of class participation, as you will read below. If you are not in class, you can not participate. Should you have to miss multiple class sessions and feel concerned about your participation grade please make an appointment to talk with me about this.

## **Assignments**

### **Participation**

20% of your grade will come from in-class participation. Adequate participation would be making meaningful contributions to class discussions without dominating the conversation.

20% of your grade will come from posting to Sakai. You should post to Sakai at least once per week with comments or questions about the readings, thoughts on your orality experiences, and reactions to McLuhan's tetrads.

### **Oral Performance and Paper**

60% of your grade will come from a combination of an oral performance and accompanying paper. One of these assignments will be 40% of your final grade and the other 20%, but I will allow you to decide, individually, how your assignments will be

weighted. If you excel at performance, give that the higher percentage. But if you are more comfortable with writing, choose that assignment to have the greater weight.

You will present the oral performance during our final exam period. For this performance you may use any type of mediated or unmediated orality. This means you can give a live performance or you can create a podcast, YouTube video, etc. Please be creative. If you need help with audio or video production, I suggest the Media Lab in the Undergraduate Library: <http://library.unc.edu/house/mrc/media-lab/>

You may choose the topic of your presentation. Please be aware that fit between the content and medium are important, so consider how they go together as you construct your performance.

A good performance will deliver its message without the distraction of too many errors or glitches. I do not expect professional quality, but do expect to see that you put some effort into polishing your final product.

You will write a paper to go with your presentation. In this paper, explain how you chose your topic, why you chose your medium (or media), and how you put the performance together. Please use APA style. A good paper will make a clear connection between the medium and the information covered in the performance, will include thoughtful insights about creating the performance, and will include references to some of the materials we read in class.

## **Grading**

Most students should expect to receive a P (pass) in this class (equivalent to B- to A-). H (high pass) is reserved for students who go above and beyond expectations (equivalent to A). L (low pass) and F (fail) indicate inadequate and/or incomplete work (equivalent to C, D, and F). If a student is heading down this path we will work together to try and correct it before the end of the course.

## **UNC Honor Code and Campus Code**

It shall be the responsibility of every student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to obey and to support the enforcement of the Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating, or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student, or academic personnel acting in an official capacity.

It shall be the further responsibility of every student to abide by the Campus Code; namely, to conduct oneself so as not to impair significantly the welfare or the educational opportunities of others in the University community.

### **Schedule**

n.b. This schedule may change as we move through the course for reasons such as accommodating student interests that are not currently represented or working around cancellations due to weather.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings / Experiences</b>
October 17	Syllabus and introduction to class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mithen (2006) Ch16</li> </ul>
October 19	Primary Oral Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ong (2008) Ch3</li> <li>• Sachs (2012) "The Oral Tradition" pp. 17-20</li> </ul>
October 24	Information and media / Is all oral communication mediated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverette (2003)</li> <li>• McLuhan (2003) "The Spoken Word" chapter</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Tetrads" introduction to chapter AND "Spoken Word" tetrad</li> </ul>
October 26	Conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norman &amp; Bennett (2014)</li> <li>• Berger (2014)</li> <li>• Talk to people!</li> </ul>
October 31	Scary Storytelling, Festival Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sobol (1999) Ch2</li> <li>• Thompson (2010)</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Crowd" tetrad</li> <li>• Try to go to a live storytelling event or practice group, or swap stories with friends or family. Some events listed here: <a href="http://www.ncstoryguild.org/events.html">http://www.ncstoryguild.org/events.html</a></li> </ul>
November 2	Moth-style Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linett (2013)</li> <li>• Harvey (2008)</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Microphone" tetrad</li> <li>• Try to go to The Monti. If you</li> </ul>

		<p>can't make it, listen to some of their recorded stories:  <a href="http://www.themonti.org/">http://www.themonti.org/</a></p>
November 7	Nursery rhymes, put-downs, hand-claps etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sutton-Smith (1953)</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Slang" tetrad</li> <li>• Trade nursery rhymes with a child in your life or have a playful put down contest with friends</li> </ul>
November 9	Jokes and Urban Legends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thomas (1997)</li> <li>• Whatley &amp; Henken (2001)</li> <li>• Tell jokes with friends. If you are lucky enough to catch someone telling you an urban legend remember it.</li> <li>• <b>Turn in draft of the medium you will use for your performance and why you chose it</b></li> </ul>
November 14	Radio / Podcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McLuhan (2003) "Radio" chapter</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Radio" tetrad</li> <li>• Peoples &amp; Tilley (2011)</li> <li>• Listen to the radio or a podcast</li> </ul>
November 16	Online videos / TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McLuhan (2003) "Television" chapter</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "TV" tetrad</li> <li>• Saul (2014)</li> <li>• Watch some online videos or television</li> </ul>
November 21	Talking to technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Telephone" tetrad</li> <li>• Luger &amp; Sellen (2016)</li> <li>• Play with speech to text (Siri, Cortana, Alexa, Google can accept voice search on a computer with a mic)</li> </ul>
November 23	Thanksgiving Break - No Class	

November 28	Religion and Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ricke (2010)</li> <li>• Thomas (2016)</li> <li>• Watch a political statement (live, on tv, on the Internet) <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Attend a religious service or watch a televised (or YouTube) religious communication</li> </ul>
November 30	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owston, Lupshenyuk, &amp; Widman (2011)</li> <li>• Kahl &amp; Venette (2010)</li> <li>• Pay attention to orality in your classes</li> </ul>
December 5	Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maina (2012)</li> <li>• Kurzon (2007)</li> <li>• Go to the library and talk with a librarian about an information need or attend a library event</li> <li>• <b>Turn in draft of how performance is being put together</b></li> </ul>
December 7	Singing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mithen (2006) Ch6</li> <li>• McLuhan (1988) "Acoustic Space" tetrad</li> <li>• Pritchard et al. (2011)</li> <li>• Attend a live concert that includes singing or listen to music with lyrics on the radio, your ipod, etc.</li> </ul>
December 16 (noon)	Final Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performances</li> <li>• <b>Turn in paper</b></li> </ul>