

Book 7, Episode 5 | New Media

SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)

Hannah McGregor 00:10

Hello and welcome to Witch, Please, a fortnightly podcast about the Harry Potter world. I'm Hannah McGregor.

Marcelle Kosman 00:17

And I'm Marcelle Kosman. And much to my surprise, I am the one that is responsible for coming up with topics for this episode's sorting chat, something I definitely knew. I suggest we talk about Fall treats, seasonal treats, seasonal treats we enjoy in the Fall.

Hannah McGregor 00:42

(laughs) Okay, can I tell you, Marcelle, that last week I tried a new genre of seasonal treat, which is the apple crisp flavored syrup at Starbucks.

Marcelle Kosman 00:58

Mhm. I saw that on the menu.

Hannah McGregor 01:00

Uh huh. Yeah, I had an iced latte, because last week we were still having that like, you know, very warm late summer weather in Vancouver and I didn't want anything hot yet. But you know, new seasonal drinks. Whoo, got to try a new seasonal drink. And the PSL syrup is not vegan. From what I understand. It's got condensed milk in it.

Marcelle Kosman 01:20

Interesting. I mean, that makes sense. Because pumpkin pie often involves-

Hannah McGregor 01:25

Has condensed milk in it. Sure.

Marcelle Kosman 01:27

Still sucks. But, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 01:28

Yeah, it's okay. So not the biggest problem I have. *(both laugh)*

Marcelle Kosman 01:32

Touche!

Hannah McGregor 01:33

So they had this like oat milk macchiato apple crisp something, something and I was like, yeah, yeah, let's give it a try. And I gotta say, no! *(Marcelle laughs)* Coffee should not taste like apple crisp. It's weird and bad. I mean, I drank the whole Venti iced latte. Obviously, I'm not a monster.

Marcelle Kosman 01:56

So that doesn't surprise me because I find artificial apple flavor very unreliable. Especially, and I know that this is a different seasonal treat, but especially green apple. Right up there with banana flavored shit for me where I would rather throw up in my mouth and drink that as a coffee. *(Soundbite of someone saying ew)*

Hannah McGregor 02:23

(laughs) Wow, I have to say. I am personally offended by the existence of apple flavored Bubbly. Shouldn't exist.

Marcelle Kosman 02:31

Sorry. Wait, bubbly? What's?

Hannah McGregor 02:33

Buble?

Marcelle Kosman 02:34

Oh, Michael Buble.

Hannah McGregor 02:35

Apple flavored Michael Buble? Yeah. And so it was, I think, brave of me to try an apple flavor at Starbucks. I'm a hero for the ages. And I say no thank you to that.

Marcelle Kosman 02:48

Hannah. I want to personally on behalf of everyone who loves a gimmick. I want to personally thank you for falling on your sword for us. Because now we know.

Hannah McGregor 02:59

Yeah, you're welcome. Marcelle, what's your favorite Fall seasonal treat?

Marcelle Kosman 03:01

This episode is sponsored by Starbucks. I had a-

Hannah McGregor 03:05

(laughs) Yeah, can we get a Starbucks sponsorship?

Marcelle Kosman 03:06

I know. Right? Like we might as fucking well, I got a pumpkin cream cold brew.

Hannah McGregor 03:12

It's the cream that's flavored, right?

Marcelle Kosman 03:14

Yes. Yes. It's just a regular old cold brew. And then they've got this like floofy marshmallowy cream on top.

Hannah McGregor 03:23

I want a floofy flavor cream!

Marcelle Kosman 03:25

Yeah, I would be shocked if they didn't do a vegan version of the floofy cream. You should definitely ask.

Hannah McGregor 03:32

No, they definitely don't. (*Soundbite of crowd booing*)

Marcelle Kosman 03:39

Are you sure?

Hannah McGregor 03:40

Starbucks is so vegan unfriendly. They don't have a single vegan food.

Marcelle Kosman 03:43

They also don't have any gluten free food. So I hear you.

Hannah McGregor 03:47

Fuck Starbucks. Thank God we're not sponsored by them.

Marcelle Kosman 03:50

The moral of the story? Fuck Starbucks! More like Star-Fucks. Am I right?

Hannah McGregor 03:58

(*laughs*) This is good. This is the energy. This is the energy we're bringing in Fall Seasonal Treats. Love a PSL, but honestly guys? Fuck Starbucks.

Marcelle Kosman 04:08

(*laughs*) Ah...

(*Witch, Please Theme Music plays*)

Hannah McGregor 04:24

We're talking about new media today. But before we can engage with the new, we need to take a closer look at the old in Revision.

Marcelle Kosman 04:32

Hey Hannah, we should probably start with our episode on boooooooks?

Hannah McGregor 04:39

But Marcelle, books aren't media. She said straw man-ishly.

Marcelle Kosman 04:43

Clutching my pearls, I must disagree, Hannah! (*Hannah laughs*) They absolutely are. And you might remember that in our conversation about books, also known as our conversation about print culture, which you did the episode for, we talked about why we tend to treat books as though they're special and rare rather than one part of a larger media landscape. We looked at the history of the 18th century book trade working to specifically anthropomorphize books, so that we would think of them as special, even living things largely in order to encourage the practice of amassing personal libraries. Imbuing books with livingness became a way of distracting us from the fact that books are mass produced commodities, arguably the original mass produced commodity, and instead giving them a special status, leading to what we might consider a bookish culture invested in conspicuous consumption.

Hannah McGregor 05:54

Like tote bags that say "it's not hoarding if it's books". (*Soundbite of man saying "Ohhhh, yeaaaah"*) We continued our conversation about media and its intersections with capitalism. In our discussion of famed Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who taught us that in order to understand a society, you need to understand its technologies, and to understand technology, you need to look at them in context. That is to say you need to always historicize them.

Marcelle Kosman 06:24

Always historicize! Do we have a sound effect for Always historicize? We should.

Hannah McGregor 06:29

Do it, do it now.

Coach singing:

Historicize, historicize, it's always time to historicize!
(Soundbite of crowd clapping)

Hannah McGregor 06:46

So we learned from you, Marcelle, about the ideas of figure and ground. Listeners may recall a convoluted analogy about Thor's hammer. ***(Both laugh)*** With the ground being the background context, and the figure being the medium, we concluded that we can't understand one without understanding the other. And we might say for today's episode, that McLuhan's work is the ground, and we're introducing a new figure. New scholarly ideas like new media don't come out of nowhere, but emerge out of and in conversation with what came before. That's why we do a revision segment.

Marcelle Kosman 07:26

You know, that discussion also helped us look beyond the fixation on written texts in Harry Potter to look at the larger media landscape, including wands, prophecies, portraits, and even talking mannequins. I get shivers just thinking about it. So creepy. ***(Hannah laughs)*** And so did our episode on critical archival studies, where we considered whether memories and prophecies might be their own kinds of archives in the wizarding world.

Hannah McGregor 07:56

And Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows adds even more new wizarding media, like pirate radio, dilluminators, broken mirror shards all join our media system. We also get new genres of writing, like the celebrity bio, and we're going to talk about at least some of them, probably not all, but some of them, probably just some of them. As soon as we get a little more media theory under our belts.

Marcelle Kosman 08:28

Ooooh, belts! Let's do it.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Where does New Media come from? And how does New Media turn into old media? Let's wrap our heads around these transformations in transfiguration class.

Hannah McGregor 08:52

Huzzah. So, Marcelle, I'm going to do that thing today where I just focus on one particular theorist and one particular book. And honestly, the introduction to one particular theorist in one particular book, because most of this book is the history of phonographs, which is fascinating, but maybe a bit more granular than we need for our purposes.

Marcelle Kosman 09:14

So fair, and you know what, I am a big advocate for honesty in academic practice. So like just being honest about the fact that sometimes the introduction is all you need, I think it is a really valuable lesson.

Hannah McGregor 09:30

Okay, so the book in question is Lisa Gitelman's book *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. I love this book, particularly for one concept that Gitelman has given me that has become one of the most important tools in my media scholar tool belt. And so I'm going to walk us through- actually we're going to end at that tool.

Marcelle Kosman 09:57

(Fake screams) Anticipation! I love it.

Hannah McGregor 09:59

So, I'm gonna walk us through some of her key critical interventions in Media Studies, and then get us to the concept

that I find really useful. So Gitelman is really interested in this kind of challenge we encounter as media scholars, which is that we always want to think about mediation as a process. And the idea that we can't ever encounter information in the world that isn't mediated in some way, we never get the raw stuff of information, we get it through a medium, always. And then when we write about it, we are also mediating it because we are not only writing within particular genres, but we're also writing using particular technologies. So the way we produce scholarship on computers is different than the way people produced scholarship on typewriters, which is different from the way people produce scholarship by hand.

Marcelle Kosman 10:53

I am dizzy with these incredible insights, tell me more.

Hannah McGregor 10:59

I love her. She's a very like, postmodern media scholar, you can tell by the always already in the title of the book, that she's like, there is no outside to media, there is no outside to mediation, kind of like there's no outside to ideology. So she says we can't think of media outside of mediation, both the mediation of that media, so like, I want to learn about the history of phonographs, I have to read newspaper articles about the history of phonographs, right, all of my historical evidence about the phonograph is itself in a medium from the period.

Marcelle Kosman 11:29

Oh, my gosh, and I bet sometimes you have to access archives.

Hannah McGregor 11:32

All the time, constantly. And then we also are embedded in our own media contexts. So for example, we are speaking these words into microphones to record a podcast, which is fundamentally mediating the way that we are doing our scholarly thinking right now.

Marcelle Kosman 11:48

Holy moly, that's true, because some things are better presented in audio format than in visual format, and vice versa. It's why my charts are not actually very useful. *(both laugh)*

Hannah McGregor 12:02

Well, they're useful for you, they're just maybe not useful for our listeners all the time. So one of the tricky things about this reality that mediation is constant, is that media is also constantly moving towards invisibility, which is to say, media is most opaque or most evident to us when it is new or strange. But as we become accustomed to a medium, we think less and less about its presence. You know, so when we first all started using zoom all the time, we were all very, very conscious of its zoomi-ness, of like, where are the buttons? How is it interfering? How do I audio, what's the mute, I'm looking at you on a screen, it's weird. And now two and a half years into it, we're less and less conscious of the way in which Zoom is mediating our interactions, they feel more and more natural.

Marcelle Kosman 12:56

That's true, so much so that when somebody forgets to unmute themselves, they inevitably make a joke about how they do this every day. And, Haha, I still forgot to unmute myself, which is an example from my own personal life. *(Hannah laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 13:11

So, for Gitelman, the success of media comes when we stop seeing it as media, when it becomes common sense or transparent to us. And then we can only really see things when they break down in some way. So she writes, quote, "when one uses antique media, like stereo scopes, when one encounters unfamiliar protocols, like using a paid telephone abroad, or when media breakdown, like the Hubble Space Telescope, there was a problem with the lenses at some point out, it's fine, forgotten questions about whether and how media do the job can bubble to

the surface,” end quote, you know, like, you forget, you're wearing your glasses, and then they get dirty. And you become aware of the glasses mediating between your eyes and the world because there's something wrong with them?

Marcelle Kosman 13:58

Totally. Or, like, I'm looking at my phone, and I need my phone to do something. So I'm holding my phone in one hand while looking around for my phone so that I can do the thing on my phone with my phone.

Hannah McGregor 14:09

Yes, with my 100%. That's such a good example. Because you're so used to your phone just being like an extension of your own mind that you'll be doing something on your phone and then be like, oh, I need to make a phone call. Where the fuck did I leave my phone? Yeah. Okay. So Gitelman's central question. She's a media historian. So her central question is, how do we do media history, particularly when we are always encountering our archival evidence of the history of media, via media? So like, wow can you possibly understand it when it's always already mediated? And she argues that historical media doesn't just show us what people used to do, be like, use. It doesn't just show us the past. It also shows us how the historical media itself is constructing meaning.

One of the examples she uses is black and white photographs. So like when we look at a black and white photograph, unless we are a small and confused child, we understand that the past was not black and white. So we know we are both looking at a piece of archival evidence, something that shows us something that existed in the past. But we are also looking at the mediation of that evidence that shows us things about the technology of mediation, that might include the fact that photography was black and white, but would also include like everybody's posed weird. No one's smiling, like that gives us all kinds of evidence about how the very idea of the photograph was different.

Marcelle Kosman 15:44

Definitely, definitely.

Hannah McGregor 15:47

So, kind of her point about, you know, the black and white photograph is that it's apparent for us how mediated things are when they're antiquated. And then we can think about the fact that like, we're encountering information through its mediation in a way that is less obvious to us than say, like a contemporary high res video, which we're more likely to just mistake for reality. Because that media is invisible to us. So part of the reason why Gitelman wants us to understand, you know, the process by which media becomes invisible to us is that she wants us to recognize that it is a process and that media, when they emerge, are always emerging. I mean, this is McLuhan all over again, right? They're always emerging out of a context. And then they in turn become the context that other media emerge out of.

And so one of her points is that we need to think of new media, not as what she calls epistemic ruptures, like this new thing that totally blows your mind, but rather as, quote, "socially embedded sites for the ongoing negotiation of meaning," end quote. So what's interesting about media, her example is the phonograph where she's like, the early exhibitions of the phonograph were not very popular. It wasn't really taken up. And some media historians are like, Oh, it must be because the technology wasn't very good yet. So it wasn't impressing people. And her argument is that the problem was that it didn't make sense to people in terms of how they understood the public sphere, the act of inscription, the act of public speech, like it couldn't fit into the existing media landscape in any way that made sense to people yet. And so people sort of looked at it and were like, Oh, a weird novelty. But that doesn't help me navigate the world in any meaningful way.

Marcelle Kosman 17:45

Like, why would I want to just put recorded music on in my home?

Hannah McGregor 17:49

The original phonograph was understood as being primarily used for personal recording rather than personal music playing.

Marcelle Kosman 17:55

Woahhh. Oh, no.

Hannah McGregor 17:58

Yeah, so it was primarily being advertised as like a dictaphone. And it actually wasn't until women figured out that you could use it to listen to music at home, that it became popular. Because men were understanding it as being part of public speech. And women were like, oh, no, actually, I want to bring this into the domestic sphere into the realm of entertainment. And that's where it took off.

Marcelle Kosman 18:21

You're saying that women invented the home stereo?

Hannah McGregor 18:25

Yes. So this is key to how Gitelman wants us to be thinking about media history, she always wants us embedding them in their social and cultural contexts, and in the specific kinds of relationships that they were facilitating, rather than isolating it from its context or fixating on what she calls quote, "isolated to geniuses working their magic on the world," end quote. (**Marcelle laughs**) Which is a quote that really stood out to me as I was thinking about, like, we'll come back to this but like, how much of the communication media in Harry Potter is just a weird thing Dumbledore thought of. So much isolated genius working his magic on the world.

Marcelle Kosman 19:04

Totally, totally. It also feels like the way that we even tell stories about, you know, us in our muggle world, the way that we tell stories about the developments in media.

Hannah McGregor 19:16

100%. So her argument is that we don't want to think about Edison, this genius inventing the phonograph, and wow, he's just done this magical transformative thing. But instead, we need to think about how the phonograph is interacting with the media landscape of the moment, how it challenged understandings of the public sphere, the division between consumer and producer, all of this kind of stuff. So Gitelman is interested in and I'm gonna quote her at the most length here. This is the longest Gitelman quote we're gonna get. She's interested in, quote, "the social experience of meaning as a material fact, Edison's phonograph inscribed in a new way, one that many of its first users evidently found mysterious. The inscriptions that Edison's phonograph made are tangible, portable, and immutable: records. But unlike more familiar inscriptions, they were also illegible. No person could read recordings the way a person reads handwritten scrawls, printed pages, or musical notes, or even the way a person examines a photograph or drawing to glean its meaning; only machines could read, that is play those delicately insized grooves."

So she goes on to ask "how did these new inscriptions become gradually less mysterious as inscriptions, and more transparent as forms of or aids to cultural memory," end quote. So the whole idea that you would have a physically inscribed record of something that a human eye couldn't read? That was the groundbreaking thing. It wasn't hearing stuff out loud, it was this idea of like, what's this physical object? But that physical object very quickly fades back into the background, as we develop uses for it. Right? So it's so strange at the moment, and yet, very quickly, as a sort of social and cultural context builds around it, it ceases to become strange.

Marcelle Kosman 21:21

Oh, boy, okay, I'm guessing that there's a word, there's a word for those processes?

Hannah McGregor 21:28

For all of the stuff that surrounds the actual technology. And this is the term that I've been leading us to. The term is protocols. One last quote, she writes, quote, "If media include what I am calling protocols, they include a vast clutter of normative rules and default conditions, which gather and adhere like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus," end quote. So you've got, you know, the technology at the center. And then you've got all of these rules and conditions and relationships. So she gives the example of the use of a telephone, we've got the idea that when you pick it up, you say, Hello?

Marcelle Kosman 22:10

(gasps) Oh, my God, and people didn't say "hello" before they had telephones!

Hannah McGregor 22:14

Yeah, you've got the idea of a monthly billing cycle, you've got the material wires and cables that connect our phones. So all of this surrounding context makes up the protocols. So arguably, it's the protocols around media that make media make sense. So like, many of us have no idea how the actual technology of a particular medium works. But we're familiar enough with the protocols that then let that medium fit into our lives in increasingly natural ways until the strangeness of the medium all but disappears.

Marcelle Kosman 22:50

Do you think that that's true for things like toasters, as much as it is for things like Tik Tok, you know, like, I know that the protocols would be different, for sure. And that the learning curves are fundamentally different. A toaster eventually you figure out that, like the slots are where you put the bread. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 23:17

Yes, so there is a learning curve with all technology. But toasters are not mediating information. What's key here about protocols is that we get into these habits of relating to meaning making, that are organized around a particular technology, but that become naturalized as that technology becomes increasingly invisible to us, until we lose sight of the way in which the very meaning making we are engaged with is informed by all of these protocols that have developed around this technology. So let's look at some examples. This will be easier with probably an example other than a phonograph. *(Hannah laughs) (Soundbite of old timey music playing through a phonograph)* So I have three, from sort of different historical periods that I want us to try to wrap our heads around, sort of an old one, a relatively recent-ish one, and then a contemporary one.

Marcelle Kosman 24:32

Cool, cool, cool, cool. Okay. Okay, old one first.

Hannah McGregor 24:34

So let's start with the novel. We know that in its moment, the reason why the novel was called "the novel" was because it was-

Marcelle Kosman 24:44

New?

Hannah McGregor 24:45

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 24:46

So you're telling me that using the word novel to mean something new precedes the novel?

Hannah McGregor 24:54

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 24:55

Do you know what? One of the things that I've really enjoyed the most about this episode in particular, is the way that like all of the terms keep getting de-familiarized for me, right? So novel, which I know is a homonym, all of a sudden, I'm thinking about the fact that it's a homonym. And one had to come first.

Hannah McGregor 25:15

Yeah. And then you're overwhelmed by the desire to pull up the Oxford English Dictionary online and really dig into the historical use of the novel. So the novel was new, at some point. So let's talk about, now, some of the protocols that exist around the novel. So let's start with economic protocols.

Marcelle Kosman 25:45

Okay, well, people need to want to buy books, and people want to buy fictional books, because they want stories, and hardcover books are for rich people and collectors. And paperback books are for the rest of us, and also people who are like, I don't know, stuck at a bus station or something and their iPad ran out of batteries.

Hannah McGregor 26:12

We need a reading public. Right? Like the novel is a commodity. And so you need people to sell it to. Why do you need people to sell it to?

Marcelle Kosman 26:23

Because if people don't buy it, then the producers won't produce it. Because it's a commodity.

Hannah McGregor 26:29

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And who gets money? Who does that money go to?

Marcelle Kosman 26:35

The publisher gets money, and the publisher uses that money to pay the authors and the illustrators, and the printers and the pulp and paper mills, and sometimes the people of a small town in the lawsuits? No, that's not, no.

Hannah McGregor 26:54

(laughs) So we know that part of the sort of protocols around novels is the idea of a publisher, a publisher who is getting the money for the book, who signed a contract with an author, the idea of the author goes hand in hand with the idea of the novel. So we've got now this sort of arrangement of author, publisher, reader, so new sort of identities emerge and sort of coalesce around this new technology. Then we've got new kinds of relationships. So the rise of literary criticism.

Marcelle Kosman 27:32

Oh, yeah, reverberate. Right, right.

Hannah McGregor 27:35

Book clubs. English classes, right? All of these ways of engaging with the thing that is the novel. The rise of film adaptation, right, so all of these practices that coalesce around the novel, such that it ceases to be strange to us.

Marcelle Kosman 27:53

Right. So like media tie-ins. So even if a book came out 30 years ago, when there's a new film or television adaptation, it is not unusual for us to see the book reappear on a best seller list, with a shiny new cover that has a picture of some sexy teens on it.

Hannah McGregor 28:15

Absolutely, absolutely. And so, you know, this idea of multiple different editions and our relationship to different editions, the fact that we understand that I can own the hardcover, the softcover, the movie tie-in, and the eBook, and I understand that that's going to be the same text. Like I expect that the text will be the same across those different editions, I have expectations around how

much those different editions will cost, around how I will access them. So let's move on to a more recent example, the pager.

Marcelle Kosman 28:49

(laughing) I love that this is the more recent example.

Hannah McGregor 28:53

I wanted to use this one because it's kind of contemporary, but it's old enough to feel strange.

Marcelle Kosman 29:00

Like, in the context of the novel and the invention of the novel. It's definitely contemporary.

Hannah McGregor 29:07

It was used during our lifetimes. That's contemporary. It was literally contemporary to us.

Marcelle Kosman 29:12

But neither you nor I would have had pagers.

Hannah McGregor 29:19

I had a pager.

Marcelle Kosman 29:20

You had a pager?

Hannah McGregor 29:21

I had a pager.

Marcelle Kosman 29:22

I mean, I guess your drug running business was very successful. *(Hannah laughs)* Either that or you were a surgeon. These are the only two people I'm familiar with who used pagers, drug dealers and surgeons.

Hannah McGregor 29:36

Here are some protocols emerging around the pager, right? Maybe we should tell the young people what a pager is.

Marcelle Kosman 29:44

Okay, so when we were youths cell phones didn't exist yet. And indeed, few people had more than one telephone line in their home. So there was one telephone that was shared by everybody who lived in the household. And if you were on the phone, nobody could call. If somebody was on the phone and you tried calling the person whose phone is occupied, you would get a Doot Doot Doot Doot sound, which means that you can't get through.

So, pagers were a tool that predated cell phones, which sent messages in code. So the different numbers meant different things. And so the reason why I was making jokes about surgeons and drug dealers is because people who needed to be on call for emergencies would have pagers, so that they would get a like Beep Beep Beep or whatever sound with a number code that meant like, get to the hospital now to do surgery, or come to the corner because somebody wants to buy a bag of weed.

Hannah McGregor 30:58

Yeah, so every pager had a phone number. And so you would call the pager from a phone, and then type in whatever message you wanted to send, but the message that you sent had to be numbers, because you were just using a keypad. And so you would, you know, send somebody the number you wanted them to call or a code, you know, 911 or that kind of thing. And then you would get the beep on your pager and then you would have to go and respond, like go find a payphone-

Marcelle Kosman 31:26

You would have to go find a phone.

Hannah McGregor 30:28

Yeah, Yeah, exactly. You couldn't do anything from your pager, I only received the information. So it was really only useful for

people who would be doing their jobs away from a phone, but needed to be reached in an emergency.

Soundbite from Friends, the show:

Rachel:

What are you playing with?

Ross:

Oh, it's my new beeper.

Joey:

What the hell does a paleontologist need a beeper for?

Monica:

Is it like for dinosaur emergencies? How come quick, they're still extinct.

Ross:

No, it's for when Carol goes into labor. She can get me wherever I am. All she has to do is dial 55 Jimbo.

Chandler:

A cool phone number and possible name for the kid!

Hannah McGregor 32:03

So what are some of the protocols around the pager?

Marcelle Kosman 32:09

So only people in certain circumstances have them. And as you were just describing the protocol is that you call the pager, and you have a number that you will enter so that the person receiving the page will understand what the code is based on the number. So if it's a phone number, they're like, I call this number. I go find a phone and call number. Or it might just be a little message like, whatever the code is for I love you.

Hannah McGregor 32:43

Yeah. So that number speak was part of the protocols. You know, the act of phoning the pager was part of the protocols, but also the larger sense of the relationships of who's likely to have a pager? Who can I now expect to reach in this other more urgent

way? Versus who is it still normal to expect that unless they are at home I can't find them? Which is still weird to wrap your head around. Okay, let's end with a contemporary example; TikTok.

Marcelle Kosman 33:16

Okay. TikTok is a great example. Because the first time I ever saw TikTok, I saw it on a laptop and I was like, What the fuck is this? *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 33:27

TikTok is absolutely one of those apps that was built for a demographic younger than me. And the first time I opened it, I was like, how am I supposed to interact with this? Why are there no instructions? Because apps built for old people like us, the first time you open them, a bunch of little instructions pop up. And they're like, Hey, old lady, here's how you use this. But TikTok was just like, this is for teens and teens know what to do. But I was like, I don't! Why don't I?

Marcelle Kosman 34:00

You just keep swiping and your algorithm is like, okay, she likes Carebears. She likes donkeys. She likes science.

Hannah McGregor 34:08

Okay, so you just said a whole bunch about the protocols of TikTokrighthere.

Marcelle Kosman 34:11

I will say that TikTok, I think, has brought the word algorithm into common parlance in a way that, like nothing I've ever seen before has.

Hannah McGregor 34:22

Why? What's the algorithm? Tell us about it.

Marcelle Kosman 34:25

I think an algorithm is the information management system that controls what content you as the user receive.

Hannah McGregor 34:37

I mean, kind of. Not really, but kind of. I mean, an algorithm is basically a computer program, like a piece of code that says if x then y. So the Google search engine is kind of what first popularized the idea of a proprietary algorithm that was valuable in its sophistication because it could drive more desirable search results higher in the search engine and the Google algorithm is calculating all kinds of things based both on data that Google is storing about you and your usage. But also things like how many times a particular web page is linked to. That's why Wikipedia shows up so often at the top, because a lot of other web pages link to Wikipedia. So TikTok also has a proprietary corporate algorithm, and they are saving tons of your data all the time that they are using to feed into the algorithm to try to produce content that keeps you on the platform for longer, but that they are also obviously selling.

You know, one of the protocols of TikTok like a lot of other social media is that we are in the habit of encountering content for free and exchanging our private data to corporations in order to interact with that content. You know, other things will be, you know, stuff like swiping, double tapping to like.

Marcelle Kosman 35:57

Watching things more than once.

Hannah McGregor 35:59

Watching things more than once. The idea of, do I download a video? Do I send a video? Do I download the video and then upload it to Instagram? If so, why? Like, you know, so how are our habits of sharing? But TikTok has also generated a whole new culture of content creation, and like a new language of Tik Tok creators and new vocabularies of gestures, and of camera use,

and of comedy and of dance. So like, all of this new stuff has emerged out of this new technology that at the heart, we might have some sense of how it's operating. But actually, by definition, TikTok is not telling us what it's doing. For the most part, we understand, you know, a lot of the technological infrastructure, but the algorithm that drives that we're not allowed to see.

Marcelle Kosman 36:50

Right, and because we don't see it, and because the information that we exchange as users is largely invisible to us, the users, we can use TikTok without realizing how much of our personal information it's gathering, right? Like, if instead, like, every time you change the channel when you're watching TV, somebody sits down and does like, tell me why you didn't like that. How long did you watch before you decided you didn't like that? Also, how many bowel movements have you had today? Also, you know, like, just all kinds of stuff that you're like, wait, what?

Hannah McGregor 37:31

Yeah, I don't want to tell you that. That's very, very private. But I'll tell, I'll tell my phone because as previously established, my phone is just an extension of me. *(Marcelle fake screams)* So what we get is these technologies that at the heart, are pretty mysterious to us, and that we never really learn how they work. What we learn is how to use them.

Marcelle Kosman 38:01

Is that the protocols?

Hannah McGregor 37:03

That's the protocols, right, all of the interaction around the edges. And why I wanted to talk about protocols is because I think that the idea of a mysterious technology that makes sense to us only via use-context sounds an awful lot like magic.

Marcelle Kosman 38:20

Oh, what a good transition, Hannah.

Hannah McGregor 38:23

So let's go talk about some of the technology in Harry Potter.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

No matter how many new media we discuss, I remain a traditionalist who believes real letters are delivered by birds. So let's dig a little deeper into the magic of new media, in OWL's *(Soundbite of an owl hooting)*. So what I'm really interested in is the way that this book series is constantly placing side by side made up nonsense and antiquated historical media with almost no presence of contemporary media of any sort. We get like, maybe TV in the background when Harry's at the Dursleys, like maybe a reference to video games, but we never see anybody play them.

Marcelle Kosman 39:23

And like way less of that as the novel's go on. Right? So like, I think in the first one, or the second one, we learned that Dudley has broken one of his computers.

Hannah McGregor 39:34

Yeah, exactly. So like there's this passing reference, like, oh computers exist, but we will never see anybody interact with them. Instead, we've got quills, phonographs, and very little print. Most of the texts we interact with are handwritten texts, pamphlets, letters, like all of this radio, right, but still sort of positioned as like an old timey version of audio alongside a whole bunch of like, magic nonsense, like owls delivering letters, like the flu powder network. And those media are kind of treated similarly, in the sense that I think one of the points of them is that they seem odd, because both historical media and fictional media are strange. They're opaque to us. They aren't transparent.

Marcelle Kosman 40:30

Yeah. And they're opaque in a kind of charming, nostalgic way. Like a phonograph seems charming. I don't want one. And I don't want to use one. But I like to read about somebody cranking it up before, you know, doing a class about how to defeat a Boggart.

Hannah McGregor 40:51

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So I really, really think that part of the work that this media landscape is doing in the books is reminding us constantly of the strangeness of the wizarding world. But even more specifically, I think they force us constantly to think about, and be aware of the process of mediation. So we never, we can't take it for granted that a letter just appears, because a bird always brings it in. We can't take it for granted that you just hop on the phone with somebody because you have to throw a fistful of green powder into a fireplace.

Marcelle Kosman 41:35

And then stick your head in it. And they need to be on the other side.

Hannah McGregor 41:40

And they need to be on the other side. So we never forget, right? These things don't become naturalized. We never forget that there are these magical technologies intervening in any information that becomes available to us. So the process of gaining access to information is always this really material and challenging process. And I think this book is the one that shows us that the most that as soon as they leave Hogwarts, or at least some of this infrastructure, they've started to be able to take for granted, right, there's an owl, there's fireplaces all over the dang place. There's portraits on the walls that you can talk to. And those things were all so strange in book one, but by book six, they're kind of background noise.

Marcelle Kosman 42:36

Yeah, they're like narrative convenience.

Hannah McGregor 42:39

But then in book seven, everything that we've been taking for granted, we lose, right? So they're not at Hogwarts anymore. And so for the most part, we don't have portraits, right, we do get one portrait, but it's used in a very odd way. That makes the portrait weird. We don't have access to the flu powder network, we don't have access to owls anymore, because it would make them too traceable. So all of that regular infrastructure falls away. And all of a sudden, all kinds of other things are being used for communication that weren't before.

Marcelle Kosman 43:16

Like what, Hannah?

Hannah McGregor 43:17

Like pirate radio. Like Ron's little radio set that you have to tap and say a magic word. And he's just randomly saying words, which is a terrible system, or the deluminator, which we've only encountered previously as "make light go out". Now all of a sudden also is a walkie talkie. We've got Patronus' is being used for communication. I don't know if we see that before Book Seven.

Marcelle Kosman 43:48

I think that we hear about it. But I don't think that we see it. Like I know that in book six Tonks sends a message using her Patronus. But we only find out because Snape said something mean to her about it.

Hannah McGregor 44:04

Oh, yes, yes, yes. Yes, of course. We see a lot of it in this book, we see that the Horcrux can talk to you. We have like a major piece of information communication happening through a broken mirror shard. So Marcelle, I want us to think a little bit. I mean, we can dig into some of these particular media, if you'd like. But I kind of am more interested in the larger effect of a book in which

all of our communication media are made strange to us. And we have to watch in real time, the development of new protocols for managing these media. So there's three that come to mind immediately. The one is the taboo on Voldemort's name. Yes. So there was an old protocol, there was an old understanding of what it meant to speak Voldemort's name. And the meaning of speaking, the old understanding being that it was a sign that you weren't afraid of him. And that fear of the name only increases fear of the thing itself.

And now all of a sudden, you actually shouldn't say it, because they can track you when you say, so the whole meaning of that has transformed. The horcrux, and the way they have to figure out protocols of use, like trading off who wears it, and how long you wear it for, and learning to sort of interpret one another's behavior via the mediation of the Horcrux on their capacity to communicate with one another. And then the portrait, right, the fact that they steal this portrait of Phineas Nigellus and keep it in the purse, and then pull it out to question him, but blindfold him? Which is totally like, make sense as a thing you could do with a portrait, but it's absolutely not anything we've seen done with it before. And all of a sudden the "there's a guy in this portrait" becomes so much weirder.

Marcelle Kosman 46:16

Mhm. Definitely. So if we're thinking about this on a macro level, what do you make of the fact that there's a whole other knowledge, I don't want to say knowledge system, but like, there's a whole other level of awareness that we the reader are not privy to, until we find out that Snape is actually a good guy, right? So, as the reader, we are sort of on board with Harry, Ron, and Hermione as they're figuring all this stuff out. And so the blindfolding of Phineas Nigellus Black is like, of course, you would have to do that. But then later on, we're like, oh, but Snape was always a good guy, Phineas Nigellus, if he was feeding Snape

information was doing it for their benefit. Does that change how these new media function “newly”?

Hannah McGregor 47:17

Yeah, I think it does. And what this just made me think of is the genre of the spy thriller. And the way that spy thrillers, you know, spy movies are movies about information and about the movement of information and about people's desire to access information. And so they are obsessed with the question of how information can be encoded or mediated in ways that protect it. And like, second guessing communication, you've got codes, you've got people listening on on phones, you've got microfilm, right? They've always got a microfilm in something, there's always a-

Marcelle Kosman 48:00

There's always someone at the library just going, dudududuhduh.

Hannah McGregor 48:08

(laughs) Like it's in a microfiche! *(laughs)* Yes, so because it's a genre that's about information, and because part of the pleasure of the genre is you not quite knowing, right? Who's on the inside? Who's on the outside? Who's the mole? Who's going to betray who? You know, what can I know for sure, and what can't I know? Then it becomes sort of obsessed with the question of how we know what we think we know. And with the sort of surprising narrative pleasure of finding out we were wrong.

And so I don't think I've ever thought of this book as being in part, a spy thriller, but it kind of is, in that sense, that like, there's a mole, it's all about codes and communication, and hiding your identity and like, right? Like, it's got a little bit of a quest narrative, but it's also got a little bit of a spy narrative, particularly around that obsession with communication. And that becomes, I think, all the more clear, when we get to the moment where they find Aberforth. And we find out there's a secret tunnel to get back into

Hogwarts. And Neville has been leading this underground, and they've been using the Room of Requirement and suddenly it becomes much more sort of in that genre.

Marcelle Kosman 49:28

Yeah. And I think too, the side by side mysteries that they're trying to unfold. So like, on the one hand, they're trying to track down and destroy horcruxes and then on the other side, they're trying to understand, one, what the Deathly Hallows are, two, how important they are and then, three, what Voldemort knows about them. And this book just is really quite packed with information. And with genres and with mysteries.

Hannah McGregor 50:04

It's both fun and a hot mess.

Marcelle Kosman 50:07

Oh, yeah, yeah. And I really feel like this last read-through was the first time that from start to finish, I understood where all the pieces fell, because I think the moment where Harry asks Ollivander what he knows about the Deathly Hallows and Ollivander is like, what are those? And Harry's like, That was the answer I was looking for. Peace. I did not understand the function of that until this read-through.

Hannah McGregor 50:36

What's the function?

Marcelle Kosman 50:37

The function is because Voldemort has been torturing Ollivander to get information about the Elder Wand. And so the fact that Ollivander doesn't know what the Deathly Hallows are, means that Voldemort doesn't know that the Elder Wand is one of three, and that he's not searching for the other two. But Harry is already in possession of the other two. And so that's why he needs to make a decision between who he's going to talk to first.

Hannah McGregor 51:10

About which he's going to pursue. Hallows or Horcruxes. And he chooses horcruxes, because a big part of what he's trying to get to the bottom of in that conversation is, he needs to know what other people know. And that, you know, is made tricky by a whole number of things, including that, like, he doesn't know what he's trying to find out if other people know, like, he doesn't know what the Horcruxes are, like, he doesn't know how many horcruxes there are left. But he is trying to find out if Voldemort knows what has happened to the Horcruxes. Like, so much of what is happening in this book is about access to information, and the challenges of access to information. I mean, even that scene right at the beginning, where Hermione is going through the books, and deciding what books are going to come with them. And which ones they're not going to bring because she's having to make these decisions about how are we going to access information? How are we going to know what we need to know? That's a constant challenge.

Marcelle Kosman 52:12

And then the book that she does end up getting, or at least for us, the reader, the book that becomes the most useful is Rita Skeeter's tabloid biography about Dumbledore.

Hannah McGregor 52:25

Which itself is a book that we watched them having to work through the reality of its mediation in order to actually get useful information out of it. Right? That they can't interpret that book as transparent, they have to be aware of the genre of the celebrity biography, mediating the information, and differentiate between what we can actually take to be information and what we have to set aside.

Marcelle Kosman 52:56

Right. Which is itself, in a lot of ways, a lesson that Hermione has been teaching us book after book, right?

Hannah McGregor 53:05

And has been learning herself, right? Part of her process of becoming a critical reader and learning to think a little bit more about the context of production. But she just learned it first and then taught everybody. But it becomes then this whole sort of mess of opaque denaturalized communication media. And they're sort of fumbling attempts to develop protocols to interact with them, when they very frequently have no idea what the thing itself is doing. They don't know what that mirror is, they don't understand how the Horcrux works. They don't know how the deluminator works. And we never find out. It's just some weird thing that Dumbledore made.

Marcelle Kosman 53:53

So like when they're in the dungeons at Malfoy Manor, because all rich people have dungeons. And they are in trouble because they can hear Hermione being tortured, Harry finally just asks the mirror for help. And then Dobby shows up.

Hannah McGregor 54:13

Yeah. And we still have to do some interpretation to understand that those things are related. It's like somebody's talking into a phone and hearing a voice and being like, is that voice answering me or is it a coincidence that a noise happened just now, after I spoke, because the technology is so strange. The one other sort of effect of the way that this book narrows our communication down to weird one offs, is that it becomes a really powerful avocation of the fragmentation of the wizarding society in the story.

One of the defining characteristics of a functioning society is that it has communication systems, and communication systems that are naturalized and incorporated meaningfully into your society, such that they have become transparent. So the protocols have become embedded in the way that we communicate with each

other. And that's what we see in the earlier books in the series. Harry has to encounter them and learn to understand them. But once he's learned to understand them, we see that there is this functioning infrastructure, there's a system of Port keys, there's, you know, a way to get to Diagon Alley, there's systems and those systems exist because everybody in the wizarding world consents to and agrees to them existing.

Marcelle Kosman 55:40

And when we, the reader, begin to see those systems breaking down, like in book five, we get the introduction of new alternative systems, right? So, once the Daily Profit becomes, for us, unreliable, we get the introduction of the Quibbler. And then, in this book, The Quibbler experiences censorship in a very real way, not like in a way that people like to say censorship exists when you tweet out something racist, and people are like, fuck you. Censorship!

Hannah McGregor 56:20

Very real, actual state censorship happened. So even our alternate forms of communication start to break down because what we've got in this book is functionally a total breakdown of wizarding society, so that all of the communication methods become weird one offs, weird workarounds, secret codes, secret messages, hidden radio stations, and the weirdness of all of these ways of communicating become a way for us to really experience what it means to be cut off, right? We're so cut off from so much that's happening in this book, because we're with Harry and Harry's in the fucking woods. And he's got a piece of glass and not much else to go on, and eventually a broken wand and like some books to close read, like, he has so little to go on. And because we're with him, we alongside him experience the breakdown of access to information in a way that I think really reproduces textually the experience of social crumbling.

Marcelle Kosman 57:29

Mm hmm. I know, we're not talking about the movies, but one thing that I found really interesting about watching these seventh and eighth movies recently, for a trivia night that I may have done last night, I was watching them with subtitles on. And when I have the subtitles on, or when one has the subtitles on, all of a sudden, you get access to information that you may have missed before, such as the things that the radio in the movies is saying. And so I all of a sudden was seeing a lot more of how the radio is providing for the viewer information that I think when you don't have the subtitles on unless you have like super, super, super hearing, you can't always catch it. But like in the books, we hear things when our heroes are hidden from the people around them. So they overhear information. But the movie has to do that a little bit differently for the purposes of the cinematic experience, if you will.

(Soundbite from radio in The Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows movie:

“however, Hagrid was not taken into testing and is, we believe, on the run.”)

Marcelle Kosman 58:51

So the radio, as this constant buzz in the background, once that is made sufficiently unusual, such that you get subtitles that tell you what it's saying. And it's not just background noise, is doing all of that work of naming and identifying the people who are going missing or whether they are irrelevant to our story or not. And so what that's doing is reminding us, the viewer, that things are not okay outside of our realm of vision, right, like we know that Harry, Ron and Hermione are not okay, but we don't have any visual evidence that the rest of the wizarding world is not okay, except for when we get this constant listing of the dead and the missing through the radio. But you can only notice that when you've got your subtitles on because otherwise it's just like this ***(Marcelle makes unintelligible noises, mimicking speech that is***

muffled, like you can't quite understand is being said) Dean Thomas. ***(More muffled speech)***

Hannah McGregor 59:54

I love the way that you are talking about your personal mediation of the film via subtitles, where the film is itself a remediation of the book. So we've got mediations on mediations on mediations. And in one of those classic moments, adding the new medium of subtitles, suddenly makes opaque something, you know, you see it now in a way that you didn't see it before. And I think in turn thinking about the presence of the radio in the movies can then bring us back to the books and help us to see something that we didn't necessarily see before, which is how difficult it is to gain access to information from beyond our poor three heroes in a tent. Anyway, Harry Potter: Spy Thriller, tell your friends,

Marcelle Kosman 1:00:44

This episode is brought to you by Starbucks,

Hannah McGregor 1:00:47

And spy thrillers

Marcelle Kosman 1:00:48

And Harry Potter.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Thank you, witches, for joining us for another episode of *Witch, Please*. If you want to hang out with us some more, we're on Twitter and Instagram at @ohwitchplease. And if you want to hang out with us EVEN MORE you should go to patreon.com/ohwitchplease, where you can get all kinds of amazing perks like exclusive merch, movie watchalongs, blooper reels, and truly, without a doubt, the most beautiful comics that, I mean, I don't even, if you I was literally thinking about them last night as I was trying to sleep I was just thinking about how like I don't have physical copies and I want physical copies. They're so beautiful.

Hannah McGregor 1:01:44

They're really good. You're missing out, and we're moving them down a tier. So now everybody who gives 13 US dollars a month or more gets, I mean, with like 100 other things access to beautiful monthly comics. *Witch, Please* is produced in partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University Press and distributed by Acast. You can find the rest of our episodes at ohwitchplease.ca. Special thanks AS ALWAYS to our producer, Hannah Rehak, aka COACH! (***Soundbite of a sports whistle plays***) and to our Witch, Please apprentice Zoe Mix. (***Soundbite of a record player reversing***)

Marcelle Kosman 1:02:20

And now, the moment you're always waiting for at the end of every episode, we will shout out everyone who left us a five star review on Apple podcasts. So you've got to review us if you want to hear me (***singing***) do the next right thank you this week to:

CWD<3

We'll be back next episode to continue our discussion of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. But until then...

Hannah McGregor 1:02:51

Later witches!