

COMMRC 2226: Media and Cultural Studies
Popular Media between Political Economy and Representation
Th 5:30-8:30
Spring 2011

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Office Hours:
Tu 10:00 am-12:00 pm
Th 12:30 pm-2:30 pm
And By Appointment

This course explores a range of cultural studies approaches to media studies, giving special attention to the overlapping and competing paradigms of political economic studies stressing the industrial forces structuring the media and popular culture studies stressing the powers of texts and audiences. Moving through a set of foundational cultural studies theories—drawn from such areas as Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, postmodernism, and the Frankfurt school—we will seek to understand how a range of scholars have negotiated these tensions between the economic imperatives of the media industry and the representational practices of media texts and audiences themselves.

How did these earlier theorists understand the relationships between economic, cultural, and technological dimensions of mediated communication? To what extent do these theories help us to understand later developments within media culture and economics? How might they be extended or amended to better do so? In pursuing these questions, we will pair foundational readings with contemporary applications of and responses to these early theories. In the process, we will engage a number of debates that continue to haunt media and cultural studies theorists and situate these debates both against their historical backdrops and within our own presumably digital moment.

Texts & Materials:

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1973).

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Herman Gray. *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

Eileen R. Meehan and Ellen Riordan (ed.s). *Sex & Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication, 2nd Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

Additional readings listed below available through our course Blackboard site.

Reading Responses:

To help facilitate discussion of our various readings, you will each complete regular reading responses that address some issue raised within our readings and discussions. Your responses will address some assigned selection of the day's readings, working to place these readings in conversation with each other (as well as with other relevant readings we've completed) and to show

their relevance to contemporary media and culture. Be creative in terms of how you connect these readings, working to find important linkages, disagreements, etc.

Half of the class will write and present their readings responses each week. *You should bring copies of your response for each class participant, and be prepared to present and discuss your response in class.*

Your reading responses should be in the vicinity of one single spaced, typed page.

Participation and Attendance:

Participation in class discussions is an essential component of this course. Thus, you should make every effort to attend each class period and be prepared to contribute in insightful ways. If you must miss a class, be sure to notify me well in advance whenever possible. Additionally, daily participation factors heavily into your final grade, so your regular contributions will greatly influence your overall course evaluation. ***Both the quantity and quality of your contributions are important. The best students will attend every class session and make regular, daily contributions that are insightful, interesting, and that encourage discussion from fellow students—making efforts to engage, respond to, and converse with classmates in intelligent ways without monopolizing discussion or discouraging others from participating.***

Course Project

You will each complete a major course project over the course of the semester that helps to demonstrate your engagement with the cultural theory we explore within the class. This will include a brief proposal and a substantial seminar paper of approximately 20 pages. Please come and talk to me early in the semester, so we can begin brainstorming potential topics together.

Proposals

The proposals for your final papers are due on February 17th. Your proposals should help to open up a formal dialog about your project. In order to ensure that you get as much feedback as possible, you will each post your proposal to the discussion board on our Blackboard site. Your proposals should be posted by the beginning of our class on the 17th. We will use the following week to offer suggestions and comments for each others' projects.

In general, your proposal should do the following:

- 1) Offer a general overview of your project. What will you be discussing and why? What primary sources will you draw on? What secondary sources? Why have you selected these sources or this topic in particular?
- 2) Identify a journal that your study might fit within and explain the basic approach and perspective of this journal (include relevant information such as citation style, typical abstract length, etc.—which you can normally find by reading the guidelines for submitting essays). While this might be a journal focused explicitly on cultural studies (e.g. *Cultural Studies*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*), you should also consider non-Cultural Studies focused journals that might be interested in how a cultural studies approach could enhance their traditional subject matter. You should look over issues of the journal to get a sense of the kinds of essays they typically publish.
- 3) Explain the scholarly relevance of your project. Why should scholars be interested in your project? Use your selected journal as a way of framing this approach. What about your essay would readers of this journal find particularly interesting? What could your essay contribute to their typical areas of study? More generally, what will your essay bring to scholarly understandings of your specific topic itself?

4) Explain the cultural relevance of your project. Why should my mom care about your project? She's a smart woman, but despite the fact that she has a son studying communication, she has no real investment in media or cultural studies scholarship. How might your project be relevant to her, or to others outside the academy? What important cultural questions does will your project help to negotiate or explain?

5) List some potential resources for your project. What scholarly secondary sources might you draw on? A simple list of sources is fine.

Your proposal should be long enough to lay out your project in a clear, interesting way. I assume that 3-5 double spaced pages will be more than sufficient.

Papers

Your final papers are due by email no later than Thursday, April 21st. Your paper should be well-researched, carefully argued, and clearly written, and should satisfy and enhance the ideas you lay out in your proposal. It should use the citation style typical of the target journal you identify and include a clearly written abstract in the style and length called for in the journal's submission guidelines.

Grading

Reading Responses:	30%
Final Project:	40%
Participation:	30%

Plagiarism:

Using someone else's work as your own, or without proper citation, constitutes plagiarism, and as such is grounds for failure of this course, and disciplinary probation. If you have questions about properly citing an article, or what can be considered plagiarism, please feel free to speak with me. It is your responsibility to make sure that your work is original and contains the appropriate citations, references, etc.

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Weekly Syllabus

This schedule is subject to revision.

January 6^h, Thursday:

Course Introductions

January 13th, Thursday:

The Political Economy/Cultural Studies Tension

“Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms” by Stuart Hall

“Colloquy” edited by Oscar Gandy

“Commodity, Culture, Common Sense: Media Research and Paradigm Dialogue” by Eileen Meehan

“Popular Culture” by Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson

“Understanding how the Popular Becomes Popular” by Eileen Meehan

Group A: Reading Response #1 Due in Class

January 20th, Thursday:

The Political Economy of Media

The Political Economy of Communication by Vincent Mosco

Group B: Reading Response #2 Due in Class

January 27th, Thursday:

Media History and Political Economy

Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times by Robert McChesney

Group A: Reading Response #3 Due in Class

February 3rd, Thursday:

The Culture Industry & The Frankfurt School

“The Culture Industry” by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer

“Culture Industry Reconsidered” by Theodor Adorno

“The Curves of the Needle” by Theodor Adorno

“The form of the Phonograph Record” by Theodor Adorno

“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin

Group B: Reading Response #4 Due in Class

February 10th, Thursday:

Ideology and Hegemony

“Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses” by Louis Althusser

“State and Civil Society” by Antonio Gramsci

“Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” by Raymond Williams

“Socialist Ends” by Simon Durning

Group A: Reading Response #5 Due in Class

February 17th, Thursday:

Semiotics and the Politics of Identity

“Myth Today” by Roland Barthes

“Television: Polysemy and Popularity” by John Fiske

“Encoding/Decoding” by Stuart Hall

Group B: Reading Response #6 Due in Class

Paper Proposal Due in Class

February 24th, Thursday:

Post-structural Identities

The Pleasure of the Text by Roland Barthes

“Difference” by Jacques Derrida

“Relocating Pleasure in Media Studies: Towards an Erotics of Reading” by Brian Ott

“The Matrix and Critical Theory’s Desertion of the Real” by Dana Cloud

“Duel to the Death?” by Jennifer Daryl Slack

“On Dialectics and Duelism” by Dana Cloud

Group A: Reading Response #7 Due in Class

March 3rd, Thursday:

Psychoanalysis and Media Culture

“Freud and Lacan” by Louis Althusser

“Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan” by Frederick Jameson

“Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” by Frederick Jameson

“Welcome to the Desert of the Real” by Slavoj Zizek

Group B: Reading Response #8 Due in Class

March 7th-11th Spring Break

March 17th, Thursday:

Feminism, Post-Feminism and the Question of Agency

“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey

“Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women’s Cinema” by Teresa de Lauretis

“Theorizing the Bachelorette: ‘Waves’ and Feminist Media Studies” by Lynn Spigel

“Postfeminism and Popular Culture” by Angela McRobbie

“Sex and the City: Carrie Bradshaw’s Queer Postfeminism” by Jane Gerhard

“A Bit Much: Spectacle as Discursive Resistance” by Helen Shugart and Catherine

Waggoner

Group A: Reading Response #9 Due in Class

March 24th, Thursday:

Gender and Economics

“*Sex & Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media*” edited by Eileen R. Meehan and

Ellen Riordan

Group B: Reading Response #10 Due in Class

March 31st, Thursday:

Racial Representation and Media Economies

Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness by Herman Gray

Group A: Reading Response #11 Due in Class

April 7th, Thursday:

Postmodernisms

Simulacra and Simulation by Jean Baudrillard

“The Spirit of Terrorism” by Jean Baudrillard

“War Porn” by Jean Baudrillard

“Postmodernism and Popular Culture” by Angela McRobbie

Group B: Reading Response #12 Due in Class

April 14th, Thursday:

New Economies, Technologies, and Textualities

“Critical Industrial Practice” by John Caldwell

“Cultural Studies and the Global Political Economies of Television” by John Caldwell et al.

“The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence” by Henry Jenkins

“Critical Media Studies 2.0: An Interactive Upgrade” by Mark Andrejevic

April 21st, Thursday:

Final Essay Presentations

Date and Location to be Determined:

Final Essay Presentations

Final Essays due Thursday April 21st by 5:00 pm