Ryerson & York University – Communication and Culture

CC 8836 / CMCT 6135: Special Topics in Media & Culture: Weekend Editions
(Cultural Circulation and the Intermediality of Popular Culture)

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-5 PM, June 26-Aug 2, 2012. Kerr East 118A

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays after class, or by appointment

Course Description
With the weekend newspaper in the 1890s, readers became spectators and readerships became audiences. Sunday editions (in the U.S.) and Saturday papers (in Canada) animated modernity’s unprecedented social, technological, and political changes. The Sunday paper was a visual medium that transformed journalism’s written texts into a distinct media supplement to weekday news. Inherently intermedial, weekend editions openly adapted aesthetic forms and publicity techniques from newer media between 1889 and 1922—first magazines, later moving pictures, then radio—even as illustrated features and advertising stewarded these novelties’ cultural currency. By analyzing the visual organization and marketplace identities of this conduit of secular, weekend leisure, a history of the Sunday paper makes the newspaper itself central to the creation of a North American mass public in popular culture—not least by allowing individual readers to understand themselves as such.

Why this course now?
The digitization of news and newspapers has transformed not just the profession of journalism but the status of the newspaper as a cultural object—something both ephemeral and tossed away daily, but carefully archived and preserved as a document of historical events and everyday life, even as its participates in shaping culture. Newspaper heritage risks deterioration and deterritorialization even more complete than the notorious earlier transition to microfilming, the subject of Nicholson Baker’s notorious public condemnation in The Double Fold (2001). The course reviews the history of a specific media form, but at a moment when media histories converge with theoretical and methodological studies of the cultural status of communications technologies. Historical perspectives are not merely nostalgic and entertaining for their look back at popular culture—they are analytically urgent as the archive itself is enveloped within “new media” platforms.

The lectured content of the first half of the course will be a history of the particularities of the weekend newspaper form, but we will also be considering the document and the archive now mediated by digital interface. Students are encouraged to pursue any aspect or example from media and culture, historic or current, and theorize how the history of the newspaper, as cultural aggregator, helps conceptualize the intermedial networks of the case. I am confident this is possible for almost any initial interest, and I will spend some time consulting on methodology and the conceptualization of student projects.

Readings will be made available. Many will be available through library databases.
The Argument:

What’s in The Weekend Edition? A color comic supplement; a glossy, pictorial magazine; sensational, illustrated features; a serial novel; a collectible poster; a cut-out toy; ads for department stores; sports, theatre, film & radio program listings; a prize to guess how many want ads are in the classified section...

Weekend Editions traces the origins of popular culture and media society to the addition of leisure reading supplements in weekend newspapers. The course reviews how newspaper publishing borrowed and collaborated with other media between 1888 and 1922—first magazines, later moving pictures and radio—to transform news reading into media consumption. Under this single media form, American journalism steward the mass practices of consumer society and found its own economic engine, appealing to mass readerships and mass market advertisers alike. Weekend supplements made readers hold and savor the newspaper, pull it apart, cut it open, to save and collect such inserts as posters and coupons. Engaging fully with the materiality of the paper, readers made the commitment of subscribing and including themselves in the mass public encapsulated by the circulation figure.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation and Leading Seminar</td>
<td>Participation is expected, and you will once lead discussion</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Lead Seminar once each, Classes 3 through 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretive Summary of Text</td>
<td>Synthesis Reflection on seminar text, 4-5 pages</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Due 48 hours after leading seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay Proposal Statement</td>
<td>“Abstract” of Final Essay and brief bibliography</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Due Sunday, July 15, Strictly by 5PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar on essay-in-progress</td>
<td>Presentation of Essay Research in progress</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Classes 11 or 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Essay</td>
<td>3500-4500 word final essay</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Due Friday, August 10 Strictly by 5PM</td>
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Participation, including Leading Seminar Discussion once .......................................................... 15%

Attendance and participation is expected. Also, you will lead seminar discussion by presenting in class a reflective summary and preparing discussion questions, connected to an example from historical media.

Reflective Summary on Text (submitted 48 hours after leading seminar) .............................................. 20%

4-5 page synthesis of an analytical point, related to the seminar discussion you led. Should be an accurate, careful summary of a theoretical point or analysis of an example, but also introduced and interpreted with a reflective point of your own (ideally incorporating elements of class discussion).

Proposal Statement, Abstract of Final Essay (DUE: Sunday, July 15 by 5PM) ............................................. 15%

One-page, approximately 300 word abstract proposal of your final essay, and a brief annotated bibliography of relevant course readings and other references as appropriate.

Presentation of Essay-in-progress (Last two classes) .................................................................................. 15%

15 minutes maximum. If reading a composed text, this is about 5 pages maximum. I will share my own note-taking from your presentation, but you do not submit anything for grading.

Research Essay (DUE: Friday, August 10, via e-mail by 5PM) ....................................................................... 35%

A 10-12 page (3500-4500 words) essay argument based primarily on course material with other examples as appropriate, aiming to theoretically interpret your choice of media examples.
Schedule of Lectures and Reading

Class 1 – June 26 – Introduction: What’s In The Sunday Paper?
Introductory Lecture on the Argument and Methodologies
Local and Online Resources, and a first, casual assignment

Class 2 – June 28 – Your First Thoughts, first browsing results, your initial research interests

Class 3 – July 3 – Subscription: the Constitution of Sunday Subjects

Class 4 – July 5 – Syndication: the Corporeal Character of Circulation

Class 5 – July 10 – Appreciation: the Materiality of Aesthetic Forms
Class 6 – July 12 – Animation: the Intermedial Ideals of Modernity

Class 7 – July 17 – Distinctions with Television and Broadcast Publics

Class 8 – July 19 – Dematerialization of the News Feed

Class 9 – July 24 – Dematerialization of the Archive and the Document

Class 10 – July 26 – Mass Reading Publics today?

Class 11 – July 31 – Presentations of Essays-in-progress (up to 10 students)

Class 12 – August 2 – Presentations of Essays-in-progress (up to 10 students)

Essays are due the following week, strictly by 5 PM, via e-mail, on Friday August 10.