

## Ryerson & York University – Communication and Culture

### CC 8920 / CMCT 6100: Theoretical Approaches to Media and Culture

*Wednesdays, 6 – 9 PM, Kerr Hall East 118A.*

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 4 - 5PM, or by appointment

I will normally reply to E-mail or phone messages within 48 hours. E-mail is best used as business communications. Stick to administrative details or “course business” for e-mail. To discuss ideas and the substance of readings, assignments, or activities, it is best to meet with me in person during office hours or by appointment.

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course reviews central issues in the study of media and culture through an examination of the ways in which mediations of social identity (e.g. class, gender, race, sexuality, nationality) act as highly selective and ideologically shaped portrayals of the social order. The course is built around a number of current and "classical" theories which allow particular insight into the articulations of representation (discursive, imagistic, visual) with human identity, subjectivity and selfhood. These theoretical frames of reference are also applied in the analysis of various media forms and genres, including text, photography, television, film and the built environment.

#### **BOOKS (available at Ryerson Bookstore)**

Walter Benjamin (eds. Jennings, Doherty, Levin). *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2008).

Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on the Postmodern* (New York: New Press, 2002 or earlier printings)

Other Readings weekly. Most will have PDFs available through the libraries, or a compiled package will be available on course reserve.

#### **COURSE INTRODUCTION**

Communications Theory is amidst a historical turn, with a prevailing assumption that we need to know the origins of our new media environments to understanding how communications work. Regardless of whether theory should necessarily be grounded in historical research, theoretical moments or “zeitgeists” are clear in hindsight, and theory is written within those contexts. *Fin-de-siècle* metropolitan modernity from around 1890 to 1914 can be somewhat isolated as the

origins of contemporary society: when communications became electric and a global mass market took shape; when the colonial “Age of Empire” was at its peak as American cities became multicultural melting pots; when faith in progress, technology, and science was paramount. Another temporal rupture comes with the ironic pastiche and cultural relativism of postmodernity from 1973 to 1989: authenticity is abandoned as a goal; minority social movements within the West make strides towards a pluralist sensitivity; national Fordist production gives way to global free-trade as the basis of the economy even as nationalisms and subcultures proliferate and become legitimate. The course will consider modernity and postmodernity as historical moments in order to allow us to begin theorizing the particularity of communications today. Reading, interpreting, and writing about theories of media and communication will be combined with brief looks back at historical media—verifying what the theories propose by seeing the past in context.

**REQUIRED WORK AND GRADING STRUCTURE:**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Due Dates</b>
Historical Media Research Reports	Reports shared with class of Individual Historical Research	5% x 3 = 15%	Week 3, 5, 7
Readings & Research Summaries	Synthesis & Reflection Paper of readings in relation to class historical findings	15% x 2 = 30%	Weeks 4, 6
Abstract: Essay Proposal Statement	“Abstract” of Final Essay	10%	Draft: Week 8 Optional Revision for re-grade due at Presentation
Presentation & Response	Presentation of Draft Essays, and response to another’s draft	10% 5%	Weeks 9 to 12
Research Essay	10-12 page final essay, developing an idea from readings and historical research	30%	Friday, Dec. 5, Strictly by 5PM

**Historical Media Research Reports**.....3 x 5% = 15%  
 A 1-2 page summary report of a small collection of 5-10 examples from historical media illustrating theoretical problems in “modernity,” “postmodernity,” and then contemporary times. Each student will be assigned a different year to browse, and we will collect these in class to discuss. A few methods and sources to browse will be suggested and explained in class.

**Reading Summaries, in relation to Historical Media** .....2 x 15% = 30%  
 5-6 page synthesis of the readings for “modernity” and then “postmodernity,” each in relation to the class’s compiled historical media research from the previous week.

**Proposal Statement, Abstract of Final Essay (DUE: In class, October 29)**..... 10%  
 A 1-paragraph, approximately 250 word abstract proposal of your final essay, and an annotated bibliography relating the abstract to particular course readings (and/or other readings). These will be graded and responded to at least a week in advance of your presentation in class. You may revise and resubmit the abstract on the day of your presentation to be re-graded.

**Presentation of Proposal Statement & Response to Another Student's .....** 10% + 5% = 15%

Each week for the final month, five students will present their essay-in-progress for a maximum of 10 minutes (if reading text, this is only about 3-4 pages!) A draft will be due 24 hours in advance, and based on this draft another student will respond to the presentation for a maximum of 5 minutes (if reading text, this is only about 1-2 pages!), and lead a brief discussion.

[For the final hour each of these weeks, Prof. Moore will synthesize an emergent theme from the presentations, in relation to a new assigned reading weekly.]

**Research Essay (DUE: Friday, December 5, Strictly by 5PM).....** 30%

A 10-12 page (3000-3500 words) essay should develop an argument based primarily on the readings in the course, and supplemented with some of the examples from the compiled historic media research done by yourself or others early in the semester. In particular, you must incorporate an analysis of Benjamin's *Work of Art* essay and at least one of the readings from the final four weeks of class.

## **Schedule of Readings**

Attendance each Wednesday is mandatory. If you must be absent please excuse yourself in advance, for example during the Jewish Holidays when I have opted to hold class.

### **Week 1 – Sep 10: Introductions**

- Couze Venn & Mike Featherstone, "Modernity," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 2 (2006).  
*Very brief "encyclopedia" style essay, to be distributed in advance of class.*

### **Week 2 – Sep 17: What is Modern about Modernity?**

- Walter Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," and several shorter pieces, "The Ruin," "Dream Kitsch," "These Surfaces for Rent," "The Newspaper," and "The Telephone."  
- Gunther Barth, "Metropolitan Press," in *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (1980).  
- Marshall Berman, "Introduction," to *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1981).

### **Week 3 – Sep 24: Modernity and Identity**

- F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*  
- Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*  
- Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*  
Short excerpts of the above all from Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.  
- Jacqueline Stewart, "Negroes Laughing at Themselves: Black Spectatorship and the Performance of Modernity," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003): 650-677.  
- Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in Modleski, *Studies in Entertainment* (1985).

### **Week 4 – Oct 1: What is Post about Postmodernity?**

- Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity – an Incomplete Project"  
- Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"  
- Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication"

all in Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*  
also Foster's Preface, and note other chapters as of possible interest.

- Mike Featherstone, "The Fate of Modernity," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 1 (1985)

### **Week 5 – Oct 8: Postmodernity and Identity**

- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.

- Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

Excerpts from above in Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.

- Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in Foster.

- Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language* (1980)

- Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flaneuse," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 1 (1985)

### **Week 6 – Oct 15: Contemporary Society: Beyond Identity?**

- Anthony D'Andrea, "Neo-Nomadism: A Theory of Post-Identitarian Mobility in the Global Age," *Mobilities*, 1, no. 1 (2006).

- David Graeber, "On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets: Broken Windows, Imaginary Jars of Urine, and the Cosmological Role of the Police in American Culture," from *Possibilities* (2007).

### **Week 7 – Oct 22: Contemporary Society: No Longer Mass Society?**

- Jürgen Habermas, "On Religion in the Public Sphere," in *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (2008).

- Ali Hassan Zaidi, "Muslim Reconstructions of Knowledge and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 5 (2006).

- Slavoj Žižek, "Against Populism," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006).

### **Week 8 – Oct 29: Room for Play in Theorizing Media**

- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility."

- Miriam Hansen, "Room for Play: Walter Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 13, no. 1 (2004).

### **\*Week 9 – Nov 5**

Benedict Anderson, "The Origins of National Consciousness," and "Creole Pioneers," in *Imagined Communities* (1983 or any newer edition).

### **\*Week 10 – Nov 12**

Freidrich Kittler, "Typewriter," from *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999).

### **\*Week 11 – Nov 19**

Mary Poovey, "Figures of Arithmetic, Figures of Speech," in *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (1998).

### **\*Week 12 – Nov 26**

Bill Brown, "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006).

\* Readings these final weeks may change to better accommodate students' actual essay projects once articulated.