

Ryerson & York University – Communication and Culture

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

Tuesdays, 6 – 9 PM, SHE Building (Gerrard, East of Church), Room 651.

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

CALENDAR 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.

Weekly Readings will be made available. Many will be available through library databases.

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:

Component	Format	Value	Due Dates
Participation and leading Seminar on Summary of Text	Active weekly participation is expected, and you will once each lead discussion on a text	15%	Lead Seminar once each, Weeks 3 to 8
Interpretive Summary of Text	Synthesis Reflection on seminar text, 4-5 pages	20%	Due Friday after leading seminar
Essay Proposal Statement	"Abstract" of Final Essay and brief bibliography	15%	Due Friday, Nov 12 Strictly by 5PM
Seminar on essay-in-progress	Presentation of Essay Research in progress	(15%)	Week 11 or at all-day "conference" Dec 4
Research Essay	10-12 page final essay, developing an idea from readings applied to a case study	(35%) 50%	Due Wed., Dec 15 Strictly by 5PM

Participation, including Leading Seminar Discussion once 15%
 Weekly attendance and participation is expected. Also, you will present briefly in class a reflective summary of a theoretical text, connected to an example from historical media. You will also facilitate seminar discussion of the text your summarizing. A few methods and sources to browse historical media will be suggested and explained in class.

Reflective Summary on Text (submitted Friday after leading seminar) 20%
 4-5 page synthesis of theoretical text, the same as you led seminar discussion on. Should be an accurate, careful summary of the author’s main point, 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: Friday, Nov. 12 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. These will be graded and responded to at least a week in advance of your presentation.

Presentation of Essay-in-progress 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.

Option A: Up to Six students may present on Nov. 23 during class time.

Option B: Up to 16 students may present Saturday, Dec. 4 from 9:30AM to 6PM, at an informal “conference”. Everyone is welcome, even if not presenting. More details to follow.

Research Essay (DUE: Wednesday, Dec. 15 via e-mail by 5PM) 35%
 A 10-12 page (3500-4500 words) essay should develop an argument based primarily on the readings in the course with other references as appropriate, aiming to theoretically interpret your choice of media examples.

Option C: You may choose to skip the presentation interim step. The essay is then worth: ... 50%.

Schedule of Readings

Suggested General Background Reading / Reference in Social and Cultural History:

- Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (Vintage, 1989).
- Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of City Culture in 19th Century America* (Oxford, 1980).

Week 1 – September 14 – Introduction and the problem of Periodization

- Fredric Jameson, excerpt “The Four Maxims of Modernity,” *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (2002).
- Couze Venn & Mike Featherstone, “Modernity,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* (2006).
Very brief “encyclopedia” style essay, to be distributed in advance of class.

Week 2 – September 21 – Historicizing Theory in Media

- Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry* (2000).
- John Nerone, “The Future of Communications History” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2006).
- Lisa Gitelman, “Media as Historical Subjects,” in *Always Already New* (2006)

Week 3 – September 28 – Modernity Then and Now

- Marshall Berman, “Introduction,” to *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1988)
- Zygmunt Bauman, “Hurried Life, or Liquid-Modern Challenges to Education” from *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (2008)

Week 4 – October 5 – Foundations of Modernity

- Walter Benjamin, “Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” (orig. 1935), any version.
- Susan Buck-Morss, “Dreamworld of Mass Culture,” from Levin, ed. *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (1993)
- Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” in Modleski, *Studies in Entertainment* (1986) Also in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*.

Week 5 – October 12 – Critical Theory as Transition

- Excerpt, F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1933)
 - Excerpt, Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957)
 - Excerpt, Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961)
- Short excerpts of the above all from Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.
- Stuart Hall, “Encoding / Decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language* (1980).
 - Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry,” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (orig. 1947)

Week 6 – October 19 – 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* (1983)

Week 7 – October 26 – Intermediality and Media History

NOTE time and location: 5:30PM to 7:30PM in Heaslip House, 7th Floor: “Will Cinema Disappear?” André Gaudreault, Université de Montréal. Professor Schreyer’s Core Issues in Communications will end at 5PM so that you can all attend Prof. Gaudreault’s lecture.

- Gaudreault & Marion, “A Media is Always Born Twice,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* (2005).

EVENT if you want to further hear and discuss Prof. Gaudreault’s work:

Wednesday, October 27, 4PM to 6PM, location t.b.a., meeting of the Toronto Film Seminar

Week 8 – November 2 – Poststructuralism and the Contemporary Self

- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1.* (1981), excerpt from Storey

- Judith Butler, “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire,” Chapter 1 from *Gender Trouble* (1990)

- Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* (2002).

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

Week 9 – November 9 – Technology as a Social Actor

- Bruno Latour, “Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts,” in Bijker and Law, eds., *Shaping Technology—Building Society* (1992)

- Friedrich Kittler, “Typewriter,” from *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999).

- James Carey, “Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph” from *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (1989).

- Runciman, Review of Lih, *The Wikipedia Revolution.* *London Review of Books* (2009)

Week 10 – November 16 – Room for Play in Theorizing Media

- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (orig. 1936), any edition

- Miriam Hansen, “Room for Play: Walter Benjamin’s Gamble with Cinema,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (2004), or another version in *October* (2004).

Week 11 – November 23 – Presentations of Essays-in-progress (up to 5 students)

Week 12 – November 30 – Class is Cancelled

- I will be available over e-mail and by appointment December 2nd and 3rd.

All-day “Conference” – Saturday, Dec 4 – Presentations of Essays-in-progress

- further details t.b.a.