Media and Cultural Analysis

MCC-UE 14-003
Fall 2017
Monday & Wednesday
12:30-1:45pm
Waverly Building,
24 Waverly Place
Room 369

Instructor
Kimberly Adams
English Department
244 Greene St.
Room 510
Office Hours
Wed. 11-12 and 2-3

Course Description

Media and Cultural Analysis is a methods course for MCC majors. It provides a broad overview the theories and methodologies of media critique, focusing on the dominant perspectives that have contributed to our contemporary understanding of mediated communication. This course will equip students with the basic vocabulary and fundamental concepts used in the criticism of different types of media. Throughout the course, students will engage objects of study through the forms of close reading, archival research, data analysis, and ethnography. At the end of the course, students will have developed a sense of the compass of media and cultural studies; they will be able select, remix, and apply different techniques and methods for analyzing media, culture, and communication.

Course Materials

• All reading materials will be made available on NYU Classes. You will be required to bring a print copy of each reading with you to class, to facilitate discussion. You can accomplish this by printing the PDFs from the NYU Classes site, finding the source text in a bookstore, or borrowing it from the NYU library or NYPL system. If you do seek out an alternate print copy, make sure to check the text you are reading against the PDF on NYU Classes. Bibliographic details are supplied on the syllabus for this purpose.
• Memory stick/portable external drive: You will need a digital storage device with a minimum of 16GB of memory. It will be used exclusively for this course, and you must be willing to part with it temporarily for grading purposes. You should use this device as a backup, for your course materials and assignments, including project files, old files, and scratch files. While the majority of your work will be submitted through NYU Classes, you will provide your final coursework to your professor on this drive.
• Adobe: You are not required to purchase this software package, but you will need to be able to access it through Bobst Library or other NYU computer labs. There are MCC workaround alternatives, including use of the MCC departmental lab (239 Greene Street, Room 703 - check in on 8th floor) during its specified hours. Any software that we make use for this class will be available through the NYU computer labs.
• Digital camera, camcorder, microphone/sound recording equipment (for Assignment 4): Equipment may be checked out from the MCC department office at 239 Greene, 8th floor. This is a first-come, first-serve provision. You will need to email mcc.medialab@nyu.edu (c.c. your professor) requesting specific equipment on specific days. Please do this well in advance. Check out is for one day or for the weekend. Equipment must be returned by 10 am on the following day/Monday.

This is your chance to learn to work with an actual video camera, if you haven't already. Make sure that whatever camera you use (especially if you borrow a video camera) you have the software to access the image files and to download them to your computer or memory key.

Access

You should feel comfortable accessing the classroom, the material, and the assignments. If you do not, talk to me. If you would like to request accommodations through the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, call 212-998- 4980 or email mosescsd@nyu.edu.
Please be aware that class may be recorded to accommodate students with disabilities.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is central to the structure of the university, as a concept and as a historical fact. You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without permission, receive help on a take-home exam that calls for independent work, or plagiarize. Plagiarism consists of presenting, in your own work, the words, thoughts, and ideas of others **without citation**. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism, get clarification. Be familiar with the full Statement of Academic Integrity from the Steinhardt School, available here: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity

Attendance

You are permitted two absences for the entire course. More than two absences will count against your grade. If you will be missing class for any reason, please email me in advance.

Grading

Attendance & Participation: 20%
Assignments (4 total): 20% each

Expectations

You are expected to read the text and participate in discussion.

You must bring the text with you to each class meeting.

The use of computers, tablets, e-readers, and cell phones is not permitted in the classroom.

If you must eat in class, please do so discreetly.

Please be respectful of your fellow students.

Assignments

Below is an overview of the assignments for the course. Each assignment will be discussed in class in advance of the due date, and more detailed prompts will be given at that time. All assignments are due at midnight on the due date, no exceptions. All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

1. Textual Analysis **DUE 10.6.17**

In this assignment, you will display your understanding of the theoretical methods and models of analysis we've encountered in the course readings. You will work in both a visual and written format, using a single text to ground your analysis. The written component will be no more than 700 words. The visual component will require the use of an image editing software, like Photoshop. We'll have a class tutorial on digital image editing before the assignment is due.

2. Political Economy **DUE 10.27.17**

This assignment asks you to use methodology of political economy to analyze an aspect of our contemporary media culture. There will be a visual and a verbal component to your analysis, and we will have in-class tutorials to help with both. You will create a visualization (graph, map, or chart) using publically available data about your object of analysis, and provide an oral presentation of your research to your classmates. For this assignment you will work in groups.

3. Archival Practice **DUE 11.17.17**

For this assignment you will make use of existing archives, both digital and physical, to consider the structure of the archive itself. The assignment will require you to spend time in the archives making detailed written observations of specific objects in the collections. We will visit one archive as a class, but you will need to spend additional time doing archival research outside of class. You will ultimately synthesize your observations into a larger written analysis of the archive, using the course readings as support. No more than 1,200 words.

4. Final Project – Media Ethnography **DUE 12.15.17**

For your final assignment you will work in groups to create a video project that documents, captures, observes, or participates in a cultural technique. Your project should engage with the city around you, using the theoretical frameworks and technical knowledge you have accumulated over the semester to inform your approach. You will submit a written proposal that will include your site, timeline for capturing media, storyboard, editing, and polishing; and then work together to complete the project you have designed. We will have an in-class workshop on video production, and you will present your projects to the class at the end of term.

Questions

You will be expected to bring three written questions about the reading material to each section meeting. Questions should be interesting and provocative, and written in full sentences. Each question should be more than one sentence. The questions will be collected and graded on a pass-fail basis (adequate completion). They will count towards your participation grade for the course.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1

Wed. 9.6.17

Introduction

Lisa Nakamura (2014), "Media" in Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (Eds) New York: NYU Press, 165-168.
http://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/media/

Week 2

Mon. 9.11.17

Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Objects," *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Culture of Data.* MIT Press, 2008. 1-24

Wed. 9.13.17

Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message"
Ch. 1, *Understanding Media*, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Week 3

Mon. 9.18.17

Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in This Class?"
Is There A Text in This Class? Harvard University Press, 1980. 303-321

Wed. 9.20.17

Stuart Hall (1993), "Encoding, Decoding"
The Cultural Studies Reader, Simon During (Ed), Routledge Press, 1999. 507-517.

Week 4

Mon. 9.25.17

Image Making and Manipulation Workshop

Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image"
Image – Music – Text, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977. 32-51

Wed. 9.27.17

Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*
Part 1, Ch. 1 & 2 (p.65-78) Part 2, Ch. 4 (p.111-122)
trans. Wade Baskin. Columbia University Press, 2011

Week 5

Mon. 10.2.17

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
Illuminations. trans. Harry Zohn. Schocken Books, 2007. p. 217-251.

Wed. 10.4.17

Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe, "The Migration of the Aura, or How to Explore the Original Through Its Fac Similes"
Switching Codes: Thinking Through Digital Technology in the Humanities and the Arts. University of Chicago Press, 2011. p. 275-297 http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/151

Fri. 10.6.17

Textual Analysis Assignment Due

Week 6

Mon. 10.9.17

NO CLASS

Wed. 10.11.17

Data Visualization Workshop

Helga Tawil Souri, "Cellular Borders: Dis/Connecting Phone Calls in Israel-Palestine," *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructure*, University of Illinois Press, 2015, 157-181

Week 7

Mon. 10.16.17

Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." *Capital,* Vol. 1, Chapter 1, Section 4. trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling.

Sigmund Freud "Fetishism" (1927) *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* vol. 21 Hogarth Press, 1953. 147-157

Wed. 10.18.17

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* trans. John Cuming. Continuum, 1999. 120-167

Week 8

Mon. 10.23.17

Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Balckwell Publishers Ltd., 2004. 693-702

Wed. 10.25.17

Thorstein Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption" *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* Oxford University Press, 2007

Fri. 10.27.17

Political Economy Assignment Due

Week 9

Mon. 10.30.17

Archives Visit

Michel Foucault, "The Historical *a priori* and the Archive" *The Archeology of Knowledge,* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, 1972. 126-131

Wed. 11.1.17

Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." p. 9-11 and "Foreword" p.26-52 *Diacritics,* Vol. 25 No. 2 (Summer 1995) trans. Eric Prenowitz. 9-63

Week 10

Mon. 11.6.17

Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." (1949) trans. Alan Sheridan. *Ecrits: A Selection*, Taylor and Francis, 2001.

Wed. 11.8.17

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" *Theatre Journal,* Vol. 40 No. 4 (Dec. 1988) 519-531.

Week 11

Mon. 11.13.17

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"
Visual and Other Pleasures. Indiana University Press, 1989

Wed. 11. 15. 17

bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators"
Black Looks: Race and Representation. South End Press, 1992. 115-131

Week 12

Mon. 11.20.17

Audio Editing Workshop
Bill Nichols, "Why are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?"
Introduction to Documentary, Indiana University Press, 2010

Wed. 11.22.17

NO CLASS. Happy Thanksgiving!

Fri. 11.24.17

Archival Practice Assignment Due

Week 13

Mon. 11.27.17

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Basic Books, 1973. 3-30.

Wed. 11.29.17

Janice Radway, "The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction." *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.* University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Week 14

Mon. 12.4.17

Franz Boas, "The Potlatch"
Kwakiutl Ethnography. University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Wed. 12.6.17

Zora Neale Hurston, "Introduction" and selections,
Mules and Men. Philadelphia: Lippincott Publishers, 1935.

Week 15

Mon. 12.11.17

Richard Dawkins, "Memes: the New Replicators"
The Selfish Gene, Oxford University Press, 1989.

Tues. 12.12.17 (legislative day)

Audre Lorde. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House" *Sister Outsider.* Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.

Wed. 12.14.17

Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" *Simulacra and Simulation,*
trans. Sheila Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994. 1-42

Week 16

Wed. 12.20.17

Final Projects Due

Assignment 1 **DUE 10.6.17**

Textual Analysis

In this assignment, you will display your understanding of the theoretical methods and models of analysis we've encountered in the course readings. This assignment includes a visual and a written component, which will be weighted 40% (visual) and 60% (written) of the total grade.

Step 1. Choose a text
Look back over the readings we have done so far, look forward if you are feeling bold. Any of the readings on the syllabus are fair game. You are looking for a text that interests you, and that you will be able to explain in images and writing.

Step 2. Choose a concept
Go through the text you have selected and find a concept you think will submit well to visual illustration. You will need to be able to support your chosen concept with citations from the essay. You are not looking for examples (e.g. McLuhan's chickens and eggs) but underlying concepts (e.g. the collapsing of sequential logic). You are looking for ideas.

Step 3. Make an image
Illustrate the concept you have chosen, using the image editing skills you learned in our class workshop. You can do this either by selecting an image from our contemporary media landscape and editing it to highlight how it exemplifies the concept you have chosen, or you can make your own image from scratch.

Step 4. Explain the concept
Write a short piece (600-700 words) explaining the concept you have chosen and how your image illustrates it. Make sure to include quotations from the essay you are working with, and cite them properly! You can use MLA or Chicago style, both of which are explained very clearly here: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/

Step 5. Share your work
Post your work in the forum titled "Textual Analysis" on our NYU Classes page. Put your written analysis in the body of the post and add the image as an attachment. I encourage you to put your work up well before the assignment is due. It doesn't have to be a final draft. Look at the work of your classmates for ideas and offer suggestions. The material from the forum will not be collected for a grade, but I will look to see that you have posted.

Step 6. Turn it in
Submit your completed assignment through NYU classes. There are separate assignments for the visual and written components under the assignments tab. Because we are using anti-plagiarism software for the written component, you must upload your writing as a Word Document or PDF. You can only submit it once, so make sure you've double checked your document, and picked the right one!
If you have questions or concerns please come talk to me in my office hours.
Submit all files by **midnight** on **Friday October 6th**.

Assignment 2

In class presentations on Monday, October 30th
Written response due online at 11:59pm on Friday, October 27th

Data Analysis

1. Pick a region
2. Look at available data for region (library website here http://guides.nyu.edu/gis/mccue14)
3. Formulate a hypothesis that could be addressed using that data
4. Visualize multiple ways and look for trends
5. Calculate regional and global averages
6. Compare individual countries to regional and global averages as your data permits
7. Prepare final visual presentation of data and oral presentation for class

Presentation

Your visual presentation should be appropriate to your data and your research questions. It should be clear and elegant. Make sure you are careful and critical in your choice of display mechanisms. Refer back to the data visualization slides you went over in the workshop to help inform your choice. There's a link on the library's website for the assignment, below the sample data visualizations. Or here: https://docs.google.com/a/nyu.edu/presentation/d/1a78g630TKuFOWhNrXdbOGZmuuMWW4kcnN6R0kvVxUyo/edit?usp=sharing

Your oral presentation should address your production process – how you made the visualization – and provide theoretical justifications for your statistical and aesthetic decisions – why you made this visualization, and why you made it look this way. Make a detailed outline that indicates who will talk and what they will say. Class presentations will occur on Monday, October 30th. You will have 5 minutes to present your visualization. Everyone in your group must speak.

Individual Responses

Write a 300-500 word response that connects data visualization, as a method, to one of the readings on the syllabus. This portion of the assignment asks you to consider data visualization in general, as an approach to media studies. This is not as much about data, as it is about its representation. What does a cartogram, a bar chart, or a scatter plot convey that might be lost in a simple table?

Working from one of the readings on the syllabus, consider how could you present data in a way that explains a concept, supports an argument, or questions an assumption that appears in the text? What method of representation would be best for addressing the specific question you identified from the reading? How, for example, could you use data visualization to support Lisa Gitelman's hypothesis regarding the social mechanisms of technological change in media? What sort of data would you need, and what kind of visualization would be best?

You should make use of the experiential knowledge you acquired working on the data visualization portion of this assignment in your analysis, but you need not refer to the specifics of your data set, or your group process. Make sure to include quotations from the text you choose, and cite your sources appropriately.

MCC -- Media and Cultural Analysis
Assignment 3

Due at 11:59pm 11.24.17
Please bring paper copy to class on Monday 11.27.17

Archival Practice

1. Choose an archive
There are many wonderful archives in this city, and as a student you are granted access to many, if not all of them. You can visit the archives at the NYPL Main Branch, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Historical Society, the Tamiment Labor Archives and Fales Special Collections at NYU, and many others. Spend some time researching what archives are available to you and contain things that might interest you. Try to pick one that you think no one else will choose! We will share our choice of archives in class on **Monday, November 6th.**

2. Choose your objects
Before you visit your chosen archive, spend some time looking at the finding aids online, and select some items that interest you. Make sure to choose a couple, and write down whatever call numbers or other identifying information is provided on the website before you go. Investigate the procedures of the archive – some places want you to submit requests digitally in advance, and some places you can just request items when you arrive. Make sure you know what you want to see before you go!

3. Visit the archive
Research your archive's procedures and policies before you go. Know what you can bring in to the reading room, and what you can't. Bring your laptop, if permitted, or pencil and paper for taking notes. If you intend to take photographs, make sure get permission from the archivist.
When you are there, observe the items you have requested, and choose the one that interests you most. Take detailed notes on the item itself and your experience of the archive. What is it like to look at this object in this particular setting? How are you looking at things differently here than you do in the rest of the world? How do the procedures of the archive frame this item for your viewing?
Make sure you visit your archive before you leave for Thanksgiving break!

4. Write your response
To complete the project, you will write a reflection on your experiences in the archive. This is not a full scale archival research paper. Instead, this assignment asks you to situate your specific archival research in relation to the archive as a larger social, cultural, and political structure. Make sure, as always, to reference the course readings, and to use proper citation procedures.

Your response should include three things.

1. Your observations of the object
2. Your observations of the archive
3. An analysis of the archival structures that frame your object (relate 1 to 2)

Your response should be 1000-1200 words.

Assignment 4 – Media Ethnography

Due Wednesday, December 20, 2017 at 11:59PM

1. Class discussion and group assignment

On **Monday, Nov. 27th** we will generate a list of media inflected sites and practices, drawing from the knowledge of media we have acquired from the course readings. Come to class prepared with a site and practice to add to the list (i.e., the cinema and movie watching) along with a reference for your site or practice (bell hooks). We will assign groups based on the list we generate.

2. Preliminary Observations

Choose two or more physical locations where your chosen site and practice exist in the world around you. Visit the locations in pairs to make preliminary observations. Take photographs and notes. You should be looking to discern patterns in behavior, how people relate to the media in their environment. Be aware of your own observational techniques. Ask yourself: is this the best location to record this practice? Is this the best method of observation? Meet as a group to review your initial observations and prepare to share them with the class, along with your proposal draft, on **Monday, Dec. 4th**

3. Proposal

Based on your preliminary observations decide, as a group, what location and method of observation is best suited to your particular site and practice. The goal is to produce an ethnographic documentation of cultural techniques and behaviors surrounding media. The proposal will state and defend your choice of observational method and location, and set out a well articulated plan for completing your ethnography. It should indicate specific tasks for each group member, and general goals for the group work. A draft of the proposal should be circulated during the **preliminary presentations on Dec. 4th**, after which you will have 24 hours to incorporate class criticism and suggestions. The final draft of the proposal is due by email at **1:45 PM** on **Tuesday, December 5th**. I will act as an internal ethics review board, and an imaginary funding committee. I will assess your proposals and return them in class on **Wednesday, Dec. 6th** with comments but no grade.

4. Project

Complete your ethnographic research project as outlined in your proposal. We will discuss the best way of submitting your project depending on the end result. Projects are due by midnight on **Wednesday, December 20th**.

5. Individual Response

Each student will write a short response describing your role in the group project. The responses are intended to be personal statements of responsibility in the group work. No more than 400 words, due by email on **Thursday, December 21st**.

Grade Breakdown:
Preliminary Observations and Proposal: 40%
Final Project: 50%
Individual Response: 10%