

MEDIA CRITICISM

S P R I N G 2 0 0 2

E59.0014.005
MW 3:30-4:45 pm

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Office Hours: I'm available on Tuesdays from 2-3, Wednesdays from 2-3, and Thursdays from 1-2—but because I have no NYU space to call my own, I'm not localized in any one place. Therefore, I ask that you please inform me in advance—either by email (at least 24 hours in advance) or before or after class—if you'd like to set a time and place to meet.

The field of media criticism can be investigated through a variety of theories and methodologies. Our focus will be on some of the dominant critical perspectives that have contributed to our understanding of media and its role in society. This course will provide you with the basic vocabulary and concepts used in the criticism of different kinds of media. Our purpose throughout the semester is to explore, understand and effectively apply the various schools of media criticism through reading, watching, discussing, and writing about a wide range of media texts.

Required Reading:

E59.0014 Course Packet: Available at **Unique Copy Center** (252 Greene Street)

Additional readings will be provided by the instructor or available online at Daniel Chandler's Media and Communication Studies Site: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Functions/mcs.html>

Course Schedule:

Readings are to be completed *before* class!

W 1/23 **Introductions & Overview**

M 1/28 **High, Low
Why Study the Media?**
de Tocqueville, Alexis. "In What Spirit the Americans Cultivate the Arts."
McDonald, Dwight. "A Theory of Mass Culture."

W 1/30 **SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE
Structuralism & Semiotics, for Starters**
Daniel Chandler's *Media and Communication Studies* Site: Semiotics for Beginners
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/>
Read Sections 1, 2, 16; Skim 7, 8

M 2/4 **Semiotics for Media**
Excerpts from Daniel Chandler's *Media and Communication Studies* Site: Semiotics for Beginners
In Course Packet, pp. 1-29.

- W 2/6 **How do Media Texts Work?**
Bignell, Jonathan. "Signs and Myths" and "Advertisements."
Barthes, Roland. "Toys" and "Ornamental Cookery."
- M 2/11 **Stouts and Signifiers**
Berger, Arthur Asa. "'He's Everything You're Not...': A Semiological Analysis of Cheers."
- W 2/13 **Sporting Signs**
Fiske, John. "Reading Blue Jeans."
- M 2/18 **President's Day—No Class**
- W 2/20 **IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**
What is Ideology?
Base and Superstructure
Marx, Karl. "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas." (excerpts)
Williams, Raymond. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory."
- M 2/25 **Marx, Revisited**
Frankfurt School
Chandler, Daniel. "Marxist Media Theory."
Adorno, Theodor. "The Culture Industry Reconsidered."

First Assignment Due (Semiotic Analysis)

- W 2/27 **ISAs and Subjectivity**
Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and the State."
- M 3/4 **Manufacturing Consent**
Chomsky, Noam and Edward Herman. "A Propaganda Model."
- W 3/6 **Cultural Studies**
Hall, Stuart. "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies."
Giroux, Henry. "Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?"
- 3/9-3/17 **Spring Break!**
- M 3/18 **The Politics of Pop**
Storey, John. "Popular Music."
- W 3/20 **PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH**
Intro to Psychoanalysis
Berger, Arthur Asa. "Psychoanalysis" In Media Analysis Techniques.
- M 3/25 **The Workings of the Unconscious**
Freud, Sigmund. "Symbolism in Dreams."

Second Assignment Due (Ideological Analysis)

- W 3/27 **Recesses of the Mind**
Tarratt, Margaret. "Monsters from the Id."
- M 4/1 **Eye Candy**
Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."
- W 4/3 **GENDER THEORY**
Representing Femininity
Dyer, Richard. "The Role of Stereotypes."
van Zoonen, Liesbet. "Gender, Representation, and the Media."

van Zoonen, Liesbet. "Feminist Perspectives on the Media."

M 4/8 **Now *That's a Real Man***
Strate, Lance. "Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity."

W 4/10 **OTHER SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS**
Beyond Boys & Girls
Doty, Alexander. "What Makes Queerness Most?"
Doty, Alexander. "There's Something Queer Here."

Third Assignment Due (Psychoanalysis)

M 4/15 **OTHER SUBJECTIVITIES**
The Multiply Determined Subject
hooks, bell. "Selling Hot Pussy."
Dyer, Richard. "White."

W 4/17 **POSTSTRUCTURALISM & POSTMODERNISM**
Post-ness, Plurality, and Pastiche
Thompson, Kenneth. "Social Pluralism and Post-Modernity."
Jencks, Charles. "What is Postmodernism?"
Eco, Umberto. "I Love You Madly, He Said Self-Consciously."
Baudrillard, Jean. "The Map Precedes the Territory."

M 4/22 **Pomo To Go**
Collins, Jim. "Television and Postmodernism."

W 4/24 **Presentations**

M 4/29 **Presentations**

W 5/1 **Presentations**

M 5/6 **A Fond Farewell**
Closing Remarks & Evaluations

Course Requirements:

20% **Attendance and Participation:** Because this is a discussion course, your attendance and thoughtful participation are integral to its success. You will be permitted three excused absences. Even then, however, an absence is no excuse for not having done the required work. Each absence in excess of three will negatively impact your attendance score. If you accumulate more than eight absences, you will not pass the course. Promptness is also greatly appreciated. Every two late arrivals (i.e., more than ten minutes into the class) will constitute one absence. And please make sure to turn off your cell phones, pagers, and all other potentially disruptive electronic devices before entering the classroom.

We will strive to foster an inclusive, constructive classroom atmosphere so that everyone feels comfortable participating. All *thoughtful* and *respectful* comments are welcome. It is in your best interest to make yourself known as a conscientious contributor to class discussions—and as a courteous listener to all others who may have the floor.

- 10% **Prompted Writings:** Throughout the semester you will be asked to write a total of 12 prompted writing at the beginning of class. These exercises serve a dual purpose: first, to help you “warm up” for the following class discussion by working through and synthesizing the assigned readings; and, second, to help me ensure that you’re doing the readings. These exercises will not be graded; you will receive full credit if you demonstrate an engagement (or at least an attempt at engagement) of the assigned texts in **10** of the prompted writings. N.B.: If you’re late to class, you may not have time to satisfactorily complete the exercises.
- 45% **Three Short Papers** (4-5-pages each): Details for each assignment will be provided within two weeks of its due date. Each paper must be typed, *stapled*, and submitted at the *beginning* of class on the due date. Late work will lose points—and after a week, will not be accepted.
- 25% **Group Presentation** In small groups students will conduct a detailed analysis of a media text, making use of a range of readings from various perspectives. Each student will analyze some aspect of the text with/through the concepts and frameworks covered over the course of the semester. Details will be provided later.