

INTRODUCTION TO BOOK & MEDIA STUDIES

BMS100H1-F, Fall 2024

Book & Media Studies, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto

Instructor: Dr. Felan Parker, Associate Professor, Teaching Stream

E-mail: felan.parker@utoronto.ca

Student meetings: Drop-in office hours online, Thursdays 3:30pm-5:30pm or by appointment

Lecture time and location (in-person): Wednesdays 1-3pm, [Northrop Frye Hall NF 003](#)

Teaching assistants and discussion tutorials (in-person):

Liz Poliakova – lizzie.poliakova@utoronto.ca

- TUT0101: Wednesdays 3-4pm, [Alumni Hall AH 302](#)
- TUT0201: Wednesdays 4-5pm, [Alumni Hall AH 304](#)
- TUT0601: Thursdays 4-5pm, [Alumni Hall 306](#)

Bud Roach – bud.roach@mail.utoronto.ca

- TUT0301: Thursdays 9-10am, [Teefy Hall TF 102](#)
- TUT0401: Thursdays 12-1pm, [Alumni Hall AH 302](#)
- TUT0501: Thursdays 1-2pm, [Alumni Hall 304](#)

THE BASICS

WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?

“The medium is the message.”

– Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (1964)

“The way power works, the shape it takes, will be very specifically tied to the medium in question.”

– Sarah Sharma, *Re-Understanding Media* (2022)

Introduces the academic study of media in all its forms, including books and print media as well as modern electronic and digital media. Provides an overview of key theories of media, culture, and society and relates them to contemporary issues, enabling students to apply different critical approaches to their everyday experiences with media.

MARKING SCHEME + ASSIGNMENTS

Full assignment instructions can be found on Quercus and at the end of this document.

- **Lecture quizzes (2 points each, 6 quizzes, drop lowest mark) – 10%**

- Low-stakes quizzes held at a random time during lecture
- **Tutorial attendance + participation – 10%**
 - Being present and engaged in tutorials
- **Media aphorism (creative work + 250 word statement, due Friday, September 20) – 10%**
 - Creatively express a McLuhan-style catchy phrase expressing an idea about media
- **Reading response paper (500-750 words, due Friday, October 4) – 10%**
 - Read, summarize, and respond to a *non-textbook* required reading
- **Reading comparison paper (500-750 words, due Friday, October 25) – 15%**
 - Read, summarize, and compare *two non-textbook* required readings
- **Reading application paper (500-750 words, Friday, November 22) – 20%**
 - Read, summarize, and apply an *optional reading* to analyze an example of your choice
- **Take-home test (exam period, due date to be announced) – 25%**
 - Short essay questions applying concepts from the class to a surprise example

HOW DOES THIS COURSE WORK?

This is a fully in-person lecture-based course with smaller tutorials for discussion. Each week, we will learn about a particular aspect of the field of book and media studies. Lectures will present key theories, concepts, and examples, building on the readings, and tutorials will be an opportunity to review, discuss, ask questions, and examine more examples. Outside of class, students will complete the readings (before lecture), work on assignments, and pay attention to their everyday experiences with media of all kinds.

IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION

DOING THE READINGS

Each week there are three required readings, totalling about 30 pages: a chapter from the textbook to give us a broad overview of the topic, and short sections from a canonical media studies text and a more contemporary one. Please note that you *only* need to read the assigned pages for the last two readings, as indicated on the Weekly Schedule + Reading List (although you are welcome and encouraged to read more). The required readings are mandatory and must be completed *before* coming to class.

Media scholar Marshall McLuhan allegedly once said “I don’t pretend to understand my stuff. After all, my writing is very difficult.” Some of the readings in this class will be challenging, using obscure academic language and presenting complex ideas. That’s okay! You aren’t expected to understand everything right away, that’s part of the learning process! Just do your best to read carefully, take some quick notes while you read or right afterwards, and come to class prepared with your thoughts, questions, things that didn’t make sense to you, and relevant examples to share in tutorials.

The optional readings are academic texts that may also be referenced in the required readings or lectures. You are *not* expected to read the optional readings every week, and they will not be on the

test, but you will select one optional reading to use in one of the assignments. Of course, if you're curious you should feel free to take a look!

All required and optional readings are linked on the Weekly Schedule + Reading list and are digitally accessible for free by logging to the library catalogue with your UTORID. If you have any issues accessing course content, don't hesitate to ask for help.

The textbook is [The Media Studies Toolkit](#) by Michael Z. Newman (Routledge, 2022). You can read the textbook online in your web browser or download it as a PDF (in whole or in part). If you would prefer a physical copy, you can buy it [directly from the publisher](#) or other booksellers.

COURSE ANNOUNCEMENTS + COMMUNICATION

All course announcements will be posted to Quercus and forwarded to your UofT e-mail address by default. Students are responsible for making sure they are not missing announcements.

The best way to contact me is to e-mail me directly at felan.parker@utoronto.ca. Please note that I do not usually answer messages after 5pm Eastern time or on weekends, but you're welcome to e-mail me at any time and I will get back to you when I can. Your TA will let you know their preferred communication method and timing. I encourage students to set healthy boundaries on their work time as well.

IN-CLASS TECHNOLOGY POLICY

This class is about media, so we will of course be using media and communication technology in class. Students are welcome to use laptops and tablets for note-taking and in-class activities, but please do not let them become distractions (for yourself, or for the people sitting near you).

As we'll learn, books and writing are also forms of media. Always bring a pen or pencil and notebook to class for quizzes and in case of emergency! Some students find that using pen and paper instead helps you focus, so you may want to give it a try.

Please save non-class uses of technology such as texting, chatting, social media, games, etc. for personal time and put your phones away and silenced during class unless we are using them as part of a specific activity.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS + LATE POLICY

Always read assignment instructions closely to avoid mistakes and ask questions if you're not sure about something! Asking questions is a key part of learning.

There are **no late penalties** for this class. I am happy to be flexible and make accommodations as needed. Do your best to complete assignments by the due dates on the syllabus so that you get feedback promptly and don't fall behind. Two exceptions to this policy: there will be a cut-off date for

the test because it is time-sensitive, and there will be no make-up quizzes (if you miss one, you won't lose any marks).

If you expect to hand something in **more than a week late** you should notify me and your TA by e-mail, but an explanation or documentation is not required. Near the end of the term, I will let you know the latest possible date for unfinished work to be submitted for it to count toward your final grade.

All assignments should be double-spaced, with 12pt font and standard 2.54cm (1 inch) margins, with your name, the course, the date, and a title at the top. The file name should include your last name, the course, and the assignment (e.g. lastname_bms100_reading_response1.pdf) for reference.

All assignments are submitted digitally in PDF format on Quercus, in the appropriate section.

CITING YOUR SOURCES

You must always cite the source of any idea that is not your own. You may use any citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) as long as your citations are correctly formatted and consistent. These styles all have specific formats for citing web content, social media posts, online videos, video games, etc. in addition to scholarly sources. Many styles even have formats for citing AI-generated content (see Generative AI policy)!

This isn't just about avoiding plagiarism – as scholar Sarah Ahmed argues, citation is also about “acknowledging our debt to those who came before” (17). Think about your work as part of a much larger conversation between scholars, students, and thinkers throughout history; citations are how you do justice to others, bring them into the conversation, and invite the reader to join as well.

Please note that there are many websites that claim to be able to generate citations and bibliographies, but most of them are sketchy and not very accurate. If you want to use software to help with citations, I recommend [Zotero](#), a free, open-source citation manager. UofT has some useful [guides to using Zotero](#).

More information about how and why to cite properly and how to avoid plagiarism is available at the [UofT Library website](#), [UofT Writing website](#), and the [Kelly Library Writing & Research Centre website](#).

The readings listed on the syllabus are not full citations, so do not use them as a model for proper citation. Word counts do not include works cited / bibliography lists.

Work Cited

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at the UofT. Participating honestly, respectfully,

responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your UofT degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement (including paying other people to write your assignments or using generative AI without attribution).
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts, or citing sources not actually used.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work).
- On tests and exams: using or possessing any unauthorized aid, looking at someone else's answers, letting someone else look at your answers, or misrepresenting your identity.
- Submitting altered work for re-grading.
- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

These offences are easy to detect and the consequences can be very serious. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the [College Writing and Research Centre](#), the [Academic Success Centre](#), or the [U of T Writing website](#).

GENERATIVE AI + WRITING TOOLS POLICY

YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED to use AI to write your assignments or summarize readings for you.

YOU ARE ALLOWED to use AI for translation or grammar, **BUT** you must submit the original text.

YOU ARE ALLOWED to use AI to assist with research, **BUT** always fact-check and cite sources.

Generative AI systems like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Google Gemini are becoming increasingly common (and controversial). These systems automatically generate text based on user prompts "by predicting the next word in a given text, based on the patterns [they have] learned from a massive amount of data during [their] training process" ([Fedewa, 2023](#)). This means that while the information generated by these systems *might* be accurate, it can also very easily be false, and any arguments they make are not actually evidence-based. They are only able to imitate evidence-based arguments, and in some cases they even [fabricate fake sources](#) to make things seem more convincing.

Using these tools carelessly can result in poor quality work and issues with academic integrity, whether you intended to cheat or not. Another important factor to consider is environmental impact: research shows that the generative AI boom is [driving massive increases in energy use and carbon emissions](#), which contribute directly to the existential crisis of climate change. Quite apart from unreliability, honesty, and the environment, relying on AI means missing out on the necessarily slow process of learning, thinking, and making judgements, which is the whole point of university: it's not about the final product, it's about the *process*.

The assignments in this course are all based on reading, research, analysis, and writing. You are **not allowed to use generative AI to write your assignments or summarize texts instead of doing the work yourself** (this includes generating a "rough draft" and then editing it). Turning in a paper that is wholly or partially generated by AI without attribution is no different than any other form of cheating or plagiarism and will be treated as such (see the Academic Integrity and Citing Your Sources sections for details).

For the same reasons, I encourage students not to use generative AI or other software to translate their work into English, correct their grammar, or otherwise make automatic changes to their writing (Google Translate, Grammarly, etc.). By relying on these tools, you are missing out on the opportunity to learn and improve your own skills. If you choose to, **you are allowed to use generative AI for translation and grammar help**, but you must also submit the original un-translated, un-edited version of the text to "show your work" and avoid potential academic integrity issues.

However, there are other ways you **are allowed** to use generative AI other than just letting it do the work for you. For example, you could use a generative AI system to help you find scholarly sources related to your research question, to help you get a sense of the "common sense" understanding of an issue, or to help you brainstorm ideas on a topic. Any AI-generated content included in an assignment must be clearly indicated, assessed for accuracy and reliability, and cited just like any other source. Much like Wikipedia, generative AI can be a useful tool, but you should approach it with a critical perspective and fact-check using trustworthy sources (see Citing Your Sources). If your only source for a piece of information or idea is a generative AI system, it is probably not valid and you should not use it.

This policy applies to me too! I will not use AI-generated material in my lectures, grading feedback, e-mails, etc. without explicitly telling you where it came from, nor will the TAs.

SHARING INTERESTING LINKS

Since we're studying media, communication, and technology, it will be important for you to pay attention to current events in these fields.

I will periodically share relevant or interesting articles, videos, or other resources related to media on [this public Feedly link board](#), which you can also subscribe to by making a free account. Feel free to send me links to things to share with the class and I'll add them to the list!

STUDENT SUPPORT + RESOURCES

OFFICE HOURS AND STUDENT MEETINGS

I will always be available to meet with students online on Thursdays between 3:30pm and 5:30pm using the Zoom link below. **You do not need an appointment to talk to me during that time.** Just show up! If I'm with another student, just wait in the Zoom waiting room and I'll let you in when I'm ready. We can discuss the course material, assignments, or anything else.

uoft.me/ProfParkerOffice

(links to <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/87532290326>)

Meeting ID: 875 3229 0326

Passcode: 057611

If you're not able to talk during that time, no problem! Just **e-mail me to schedule an appointment** for an in-person or online meeting at another time. I am also always happy to answer questions by e-mail. Your TA will also be available to talk to students at the end of tutorials.

For in-person meetings, please wear a well-fitted mask – my office is small and not well ventilated. If you need one, I have extras, so just let me know.

ACCESSIBILITY

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course! If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to contact me and/or Accessibility Services at accessibility.utoronto.ca. We're here to help every student have a positive learning experience.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

We are still living with the impacts of a global pandemic, and although the state of emergency has ended, health and safety is still top priority. All students will follow UofT's [current health and safety regulations](#).

I will be wearing a mask, since it is proven to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other airborne diseases; you may want to do the same. Please note that the quality and fit of your mask [makes a big difference](#) – N95-style respirator masks are more effective than disposable surgical masks or cloth masks. Doctors also recommend staying up to date with your vaccinations to reduce the risk of serious illness.

If you are not feeling well, stay home (especially if you are experiencing [COVID-related symptoms](#)). You will not be penalized for missing class, and you do not need to provide any proof or medical documentation. My goal is to be as flexible and accommodating as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to e-mail me.

If we need to cancel any in-person lectures or tutorials, students will be notified as soon as possible, and we will move to an online synchronous format on Zoom, with a recording for backup.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Balancing school, work, and life can be extremely stressful, especially during times of global crisis, but you're not alone! If you're feeling the crunch or are concerned about your mental health, don't hesitate to reach out for help.

Health and wellness counseling and other resources are available for all students through the [UofT Student Mental Health Resource](#), including 24-hour support via [UofT Telus Health Student Support](#).

You can also access health and wellness services through your home College:

- [Innis College Health & Wellness Supports](#)
- [New College Health & Wellness](#)
- [St. Michael's College Health & Wellness Resources](#)
- [Trinity College Health & Wellness](#)
- [University College Advising & Support](#)
- [Victoria College Student Wellness](#)
- [Woodsworth College Counselling & Mental Wellness](#)

If you are in crisis or there is an immediate safety risk to yourself or others:

- Call **911**
- Call or text **988** for the suicide crisis helpline
- Visit your nearest **emergency room**

WRITING, RESEARCH, AND LANGUAGE HELP

The St. Michael's College [Writing and Research Help Centre](#) at the Kelly Library offers one-to-one research, writing, and citation support for St. Mike's students and for students taking St. Mike's classes. Appointments are available online or in person, and they are totally free.

The Book & Media Studies Liaison Librarian Stacy Reardon is available to help you with any questions related to research and the library. You can e-mail her directly at s.reardon@utoronto.ca. Kelly Library also maintains a [Research Guide for Book & Media Studies](#).

The central [UofT Academic Success Centre](#), the [UofT Writing website](#), and the [English Language Learning](#) unit all offer excellent consultations, drop-ins, courses, workshops, and information to all students hoping to improve their writing, research, and English language skills. Take advantage of these valuable resources!

RECOGNIZED STUDY GROUPS

Recognized Study Groups (RSGs) are small, student-led, online or in-person study groups of 3 to 6 students from the same course who meet weekly to learn course content in a collaborative environment. Each group is made up of students from the same course, and one student volunteers to lead the group. RSGs also have staff support to help you connect you to academic resources and support your group's goals. To learn more, visit the [Sidney Smith Commons RSG website](#).

FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE DROP-IN STUDY SESSIONS

[Meet to Complete](#) is a series of drop-in group study sessions held exclusively for Faculty of Arts & Science undergrads. Offered multiple times per business day and led by trained A&S student-staff, they help students to stay motivated and productive by offering daily goal-setting and the opportunity to study alongside their A&S peers.

PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS

If you're finding it difficult to focus during class or when you're trying to work, try using productivity tools like [StayFocusd](#), [Freedom](#), [Apple Screen Time](#), and [Android Digital Wellbeing](#) to limit or block social media and other distractions. Don't forget to put Quercus, Outlook, Zoom, and other school-related pages on your safe/allowed list!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE + READINGS

Week 1 – September 4, 2024

Introduction

Required readings

- Read the [syllabus](#)!

Week 2 – September 11, 2024

What is Book & Media Studies?

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 1: Introduction](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- John Durham Peters, "[Mass Media](#)" [pages 266-277, 277-278] of in *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (2010)

Week 3 – September 18, 2024

Media as technology

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 10: Technology](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Marshall McLuhan, "[The Medium is the Message](#)" [pages 107-108, 116] in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1964/2005)

- Sarah Sharma, "[A Feminist Medium Is the Message](#)" [pages 1-3, 10-11] in *Re-Understanding Media: Feminist Extensions of Marshall McLuhan* (2022)

Optional readings

- Harold Innis, "[The Bias of Communication](#)" in *The Bias of Communication Second Edition* (1951/2008)
- Walter Benjamin, "[The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (1935/2005)

Week 4 – September 25, 2024

Media as industry

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 2: Industry](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "[The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception](#)" [pages 40-44] in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (1944/2005)
- Andrew deWaard, "[Financialized Hollywood: Institutional Investment, Venture Capital, and Private Equity in the Film and Television Industry](#)" [pages 56-60, 83-84] in *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (2020)

Optional readings

- Vincent Mosco, "[Overview of the Political Economy of Communication](#)" in *The Political Economy of Communication Second Edition* (2009)
- Janet Wasko, "[From Global Media Giants to Global Internet Giants: Reflections on Media Diversity](#)" in *Audio-Visual Industries and Diversity: Economics and Policies in the Digital Era* (2019)

Week 5 – October 2, 2024

Media as text

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 3: Text](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Roland Barthes, "[Rhetoric of the Image](#)" [pages 31-37] in *Image, Music Text* (1964/1977)
- Lauren McLeod Cramer, "[Anderson .Paak, Kendrick Lamar, and Colin Tilley 'Get up in Our Rearview Mirror': Collectively Analyzing the 'Tints' Music Video](#)" [pages 605-610] in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* (2022)

Optional readings

- Susan Sontag, "[Against Interpretation](#)" in *Against Interpretation* (1964/1966)
- Scott Bukatman, "[Sculpture, Stasis, the Comics, and Hellboy](#)" in *Critical Inquiry* (2014)

Week 6 – October 9, 2024

Media audiences

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 4: Audience](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Stuart Hall, "[Encoding/Decoding](#)" [pages 163-166, 171-173] in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1973/2005)
- Julie Levin Russo, "[The Queer Politics of Femslash](#)" [pages 155-158, 160-162] in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom* (2017)

Optional readings

- Henry Jenkins, "[Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars?: Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (2003/2005)
- Andrew Doty, "[There's Something Queer Here](#)" in *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (1993)

Week 7 – October 16, 2024

Media representation

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 5: Representation](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- bell hooks, "[Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace](#)" [pages 61-63, 67-69, 76-77] in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992/2014)
- Kristin Warner, "[In the Time of Plastic Representation](#)" [pages 32-37] in *Film Quarterly* (2017)

Optional readings

- Laura Mulvey, "[Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1975/2005)
- Richard Dyer, "[Stereotyping](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1984/2005)

Week 8 – October 23, 2024

Media and ideology

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 6: Ideology](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Louis Althusser, "[Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses \(Notes Towards an Investigation\)](#)" [79-81, 86-87] in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1970/2005)
- Natalie Coulter and Kristine Moruzi, "[Woke girls: From The Girl's Realm to Teen Vogue](#)" [pages 765-766, 770-776] in *Feminist Media Studies* (2022)

Optional readings

- Frederic Jameson, "[Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1984/2005)
- Patricia Ventura, "[Introduction: American Neoliberal Culture](#)" in *Neoliberal Culture: Living with American Neoliberalism* (2016)

READING WEEK – October 30, 2024 – NO LECTURE OR TUTORIALS

Week 9 – November 6, 2024

Media and democracy

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 8: Citizenship](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, "[A Propaganda Model](#)" [257-258, 279-283] in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1988/2005)
- Elisha Corbett, "[No News Isn't Always Good News: Media Representation of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada](#)" [1-2, 6-9] in *Indigenous Studies Portal* (2019)

Optional readings

- Jürgen Habermas, "[The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1989/2005)
- Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald Shaw, "[The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media](#)" in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1972)

Week 10 – November 13, 2024

Media from local to global

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 11: Global and Local](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Edward W. Said, "[My Thesis; On Flaubert; Latent and Manifest Orientalism](#)" [pages 106-114] in *Orientalism: A Reader* (1978/2019)
- Souvik Mukherjee, "[Playing Subaltern: Video Games and Postcolonialism](#)" [504-506, 515-518] in *Games & Culture* (2016)

Optional readings

- Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, "[Introduction: Instructions on How to Become a General in the Disneyland Club](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1971/2005)
- Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "[Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1991/2005)

Week 11 – November 20, 2024

Media and consumer culture

Required readings

- Michael Z. Newman, "[Chapter 9: Consumerism](#)" in *The Media Studies Toolkit* (2022)
- Guy Debord, "[The Commodity as Spectacle](#)" [pages 117-121] in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (1977/2005)
- Elizabeth Affuso, "[Drop Culture: Masculinity, Fashion Performance, and Collecting in Hypebeast Brand Communities](#)" [pages 149-151, 158-161] in *Sartorial Fandom: Fashion, Beauty Culture, and Identity* (2023)

Optional reading

- Dallas W. Smythe, "[On the Audience Commodity and its Work](#)" in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (1981/2005)
- Daniel Joseph and Sophie Bishop, "[Advertising as governance: The Digital Commodity Audience and Platform Advertising Dependency](#)" in *Media, Culture & Society* (2024)

Week 12 – November 27, 2024

Conclusion / Test Review

Readings and topics to be announced later.

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Lecture quizzes (2 points each, 6 quizzes, drop lowest mark) – 10%

Instead of taking attendance in lecture, there will be 6 unannounced quizzes during lectures. Students will not know in advance which weeks will have quizzes, or when the quiz will be during lecture – they can happen at any time between 1:10pm and 2:50pm. I will hand out paper quiz sheets, so make sure to bring a pen or pencil to write with. Students will have 5 minutes to answer the question.

The quiz questions will be intentionally easy and based on the lecture content: if you show up and pay attention in lecture, you should be able to answer them correctly. Each quiz is worth 2 points, and you can drop your lowest mark for a total out of 10 points.

Tutorial attendance + participation – 10%

Staying engaged is an essential part of learning, and it takes effort. For this reason, 10% of your final grade is based on attendance and active participation in tutorials; absences, lateness, leaving early, or a lack of engagement will negatively affect this grade.

However, I understand that life is complicated. Each class is worth 1%, so you can miss up to two tutorials with no penalty and still get 10/10 if you're participating actively in the other weeks. If you have to miss class, let your TA know by e-mail as soon as possible and you will not be unfairly penalized. You are not required to disclose any additional explanation or provide documentation for absences.

In general, active participation includes...

- Being prepared, including doing the readings
- Staying focused and avoiding distractions
- Asking questions about things you don't understand or want to know more about
- Making specific comments on the topics we're discussing
- Sharing relevant examples (from personal experience or articles, videos, etc.)
- Listening and responding thoughtfully to other students' questions, comments, and examples

- Treating everyone with kindness, respecting differences in identity, culture, and perspective and being mindful of how systems of power and oppression affect each of us differently

Please note that your comments, questions, and examples **don't have to be polished!** We're all learning and it's okay if your language or ideas aren't perfect. All well-meaning contributions are valuable and count for participation points!

If you have a disability or any other issue that makes attendance and participation in this class difficult, please bring this to my attention as soon as possible and we can discuss accommodations.

Media aphorism (creative work + 250 word statement, due Friday, September 20) – 10%

Marshall McLuhan's fame as a media scholar and public intellectual can be attributed at least in part to his quotable aphorisms like "the medium is the message" and "art is anything you can get away with." An aphorism is a short, catchy saying or slogan that concisely expresses a thought-provoking idea.

For this assignment, come up with an aphorism about media in your own words, inspired by what we're learning in this class, and creatively express it in medium of your choice. Possibilities include writing it in a stylish font, a physical or digital drawing, designing a poster, incorporating it into a photo, a short video or audio clip (15 seconds max), a meme, an advertisement, or anything else. Along with your aphorism, submit a short "artist statement" explaining your aphorism, why you chose to express it in this way, and how it relates to the course content.

For example, I might coin the phrase "if we're the product of our media environment, who's buying?" and use it as the caption for a "Surprised Pikachu" meme (see below). In my written statement, I would connect it to the readings about the political economy of media industries.

if we're the product of our media environment,

who's buying?



As you can see, I am not expecting professional-level creative work – it's more about the concept than the execution. Take the opportunity to be creative and have fun with it! This assignment will be graded based on the insightfulness and creativity of your aphorism.

Submit your assignment on Quercus as a PDF (double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, 2.54cm margins). If the file is too large, you may include a link to an external platform like OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive, SoundCloud, YouTube, TikTok, etc. Be sure to cite your sources properly and include a Works Cited page if you reference specific readings.

Reading response paper (500-750 words, due Friday, October 4) – 10%

The three short reading papers are designed to help you practice critically reading and writing about academic texts in various ways. Each one is different, so make sure to read the instructions carefully.

For the first paper, choose one *non-textbook* required reading on the syllabus that we have already covered in weeks 2 to 5 (Peters, McLuhan, Sharma, Horkheimer and Adorno, deWaard, Barthes, or Cramer), and read, summarize, and respond to it.

For example, you could dig more deeply into Sarah Sharma's feminist extension of McLuhan's media theory.

Re-read the chapter or article, this time the whole thing start to finish (not just the sections listed on the syllabus). Take notes and identify the central thesis or argument the author is making, and the main points they use to support that thesis. Think about the context the author is writing in, what they are writing about, how they are writing about it, and why it matters.

Summarize the author's thesis and key points in your own words, paraphrasing whenever possible instead of using direct quotes. Don't try to include everything or follow the exact structure of the original text. Focus on what you think are the most important points and organize them in a logical way for the reader. This section is not based on your own opinion – your job is to clearly and accurately translate and condense the author's ideas into your own words.

Respond to what you read, sharing your thoughts and informed opinions. What did you think of the reading? What did you find most interesting, surprising, challenging, or confusing? Did you find the author's ideas convincing? What makes this text useful for understanding media? What questions or issues does it raise for you?

Don't forget to cite any ideas that are not your own properly, whether they are quoted or paraphrased, and include a properly formatted reference list. Additional sources outside of your chosen text are not required for this assignment, but you are welcome to reference the textbook or other readings.

Submit as a PDF (double-spaced, 12pt font, 2.54cm margins) via Quercus.

Reading comparison paper (750-1000 words, due Friday, October 25) – 15%

The three short reading papers are designed to help you practice critically reading and writing about academic texts in various ways. Each one is different, so make sure to read the instructions carefully.

For the second paper, choose *two non-textbook* required readings on the syllabus that we have already covered in weeks 5 to 8 (Peters, McLuhan, Sharma, Horkheimer and Adorno, deWaard, Barthes, Cramer, Hall, Russo, hooks, Warner, Althusser, or Coulter and Moruzi), and read, summarize, and compare them. Choose readings that you think would be interesting to examine side by side. You cannot use the reading you chose for the first response paper again.

For example, you could examine the Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the culture industries in relation to Russo's research on queer female fandom.

Re-read both readings, this time in their entirety start to finish (not just the sections listed on the syllabus). Take notes and identify the central thesis or argument each author is making, and the main points they use to support that thesis. Think about the contexts the authors are writing in, what they are writing about, how they are writing about it, and why it matters.

Summarize both authors' theses and key points in your own words, paraphrasing whenever possible instead of using direct quotes. Don't try to include everything or follow the exact structure of the original texts. Focus on what you think are the most important points and organize them in a logical way for the reader, making sure to be clear about the differences between the two. This section is not based on your own opinion – your job is to clearly and accurately translate and condense the authors' ideas into your own words.

Compare what you read, situating the two authors' ideas in relation to one another. What are the key differences and similarities between their perspectives? Why do you think they contrast or complement one another in these ways? Did you find one author's ideas more convincing or useful for understanding media? What questions or issues do they raise for you?

Don't forget to cite any ideas that are not your own properly, whether they are quoted or paraphrased, and include a properly formatted reference list. Additional sources outside of your chosen texts are not required for this assignment, but you are welcome to reference the textbook or other readings.

Submit as a PDF (double-spaced, 12pt font, 2.54cm margins) via Quercus.

Reading application paper (750-1000 words, Friday, November 22) – 20%

The three short reading papers are designed to help you practice critically reading and writing about academic texts in various ways. Each one is different, so make sure to read the instructions carefully.

For the third paper, choose one *optional reading* on the syllabus that we have covered so far in weeks 2-11 (Innis, Benjamin, Mosco, Wasko, Sontag, Bukatman, Jenkins, Doty, Mulvey, Dyer, Jameson, Ventura, Habermas, McCombs and Shaw, Dorfman and Mattelart, Mohanty, Smythe, or Joseph and Bishop), and read, summarize, and apply it to analyze an example of your choice.

For example, you could use McCombs and Shaw's concept of "agenda-setting" in news media to critically analyze a video from a popular political YouTuber.

Read the whole chapter or article from start to finish. Take notes and identify the central thesis or argument the author is making, and the main points they use to support that thesis. Think about the context the author is writing in, what they are writing about, how they are writing about it, and why it matters. Keep in mind how you might use the reading as a tool for analysis.

Summarize the author's thesis and key points in your own words, paraphrasing whenever possible instead of using direct quotes. Don't try to include everything or follow the exact structure of the original text. Focus on what you think are the most important points and organize them in a logical way for the reader. This section is not based on your own opinion – your job is to clearly and accurately translate and condense the author's ideas into your own words.

Apply the reading to help you critically analyze a relevant, contemporary media example of your choice using ideas from the reading (such as a type of media, a specific media object, a media-related event, etc.). What do the author's ideas reveal about your example? Does your example complicate or challenge the author's ideas? Do you find the author's ideas convincing or useful for analyzing media? What questions or issues does this analysis raise for you?

Don't forget to cite any ideas that are not your own properly, whether they are quoted or paraphrased, and include a properly formatted reference list. Additional sources outside of your chosen text are not required for this assignment, but you are welcome to reference the textbook or other readings.

Submit as a PDF (double-spaced, 12pt font, 2.54cm margins) via Quercus.

Take-home test (exam period, due date to be announced) – 25%

The final assessment for this class will be a take-home test during the exam period. It will include two or three short essay questions to be answered based on a surprise example (such as a type of media, a specific media object, a media-related event, etc.). I will share the example at a specific date and time, then students will have a limited number of days to write and submit their answers.

Full details and dates for the test will be announced later in the term.