

# SOCL 923: Critical Methods in Media and Cultural Studies

---

## About the course

In this course, we explore the relationship between theory and practice in Media and Cultural Studies research. Unlike other disciplines such as Sociology, the question of ‘method’ in MCS is often rather opaque; particularly in cultural theory, it’s often unclear what the methodological approach of a given study is, or what the relationship is between theory, methodology, and research method. In the first part of this course, we examine how methodology might be relevant to MCS scholars by reading two texts each week: one which takes an exemplary approach to exploring issues of methodology, and a more technical text either explaining a specific research method, or illustrating a theoretical position that has been important to media scholars. Not all of these texts are obviously ‘about’ methodology: for example, in the section on textual analysis, we will reflect on the ways in which we read media texts and ask: how might reading (or watching) be carried out as a form of ‘research’?

This course is designed to introduce students to methodological issues relevant to media and cultural studies, and to give a practical grounding in planning and carrying out independent research in the field. It uses exemplary recent examples of media research to give a taste of particular research methods and approaches, and encourage an exploration of their theoretical and practical implications and consequences. In this course, you will discuss and critically evaluate different methodological approaches and learn how to draw on these discussions as a starting point for your own research.

Running parallel to the academic workshop sessions is a groupwork project, in which you will put your findings and reflections into practice. You will be assessed in stages throughout the term (see below for assessment details). The final assessment is based on an individual critically reflexive essay, due in after the Easter break.

## Course Content

The course is divided into 3 sections: Visual Analysis, Textual Analysis and Qualitative Research, each covering a different aspect of research in media and cultural studies. Areas covered within these topics include:

- Research ethics
- The relationship between theory and practice
- Reflexivity and power
- Situated knowledge
- Media production/consumption

## Assessment

Full details of assessment will be discussed in the first seminar. Assessment takes the form of an ongoing research project, carried out in groups, which is intended to introduce you to the process of preparing a research proposal, planning your methodological approach, carrying out research and reflecting critically on questions of epistemology and method.

Assessment for this course is based on 80% written work and 20% presentation, as follows:

Group work: written research proposal 20% Final draft submitted in week 7

Group work: presentation of research questions 20% Week 10

Personal reflection on research (essay) (3000 words) 60% Monday Week 1, Summer term

## **Reading**

It is expected that you will carry out your own independent reading as well as referring to the set readings. The following are some suggestions for further reading.

The reader for this course is Gillian Rose (2007) *Visual methodologies : an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, London : Sage. There are several copies in the library: at classmark V8EV <R> (C Floor Green Zone).

The journal *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* publishes cutting-edge articles on methodology by cultural studies researchers, some of which are included on this course. You can access the full table of contents and PDF articles at their website. Access to full articles is free from on campus or via Lancaster VPN. See <http://csc.sagepub.com/content/by/year>.

For guides to using specific methods, see:

General Media/Cultural Studies Methodology

Fiske, J. (1989) *Reading the Popular*, Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Stokes, J. (2009) 'Getting Started' in *How to do Media and Cultural Studies*, London, Sage. Highly recommended as a practical guide to planning, carrying out and writing up a research project.

Storey, J. (2003) *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

## **Feminist Methodology**

Fonow, M. M. & Cook, J.A. (Eds) (1991) *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist methods in Social Research* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ramazanoglu, C. with Holland, J. (2002) *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*, London: Sage.

Skeggs, B. (Ed.) (1995) *Feminist Cultural Theory: Process and Production*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (in library). This book focuses primarily on gender research but should be read by all as it is still one of the best guides to media and cultural studies methodologies out there. The book includes chapters on specific methods – audience studies, textual analysis, ethnography etc – there is truly something for everyone.

## **Qualitative Methods**

Alaasuutari, P. (1995) *Researching culture: qualitative method and cultural studies*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.

Back, L. (2007) *The Art of Listening*, London: Berg. While Back positions himself firmly as a sociologist, this is an exemplary and beautifully written work which is relevant to anyone interested in studying the popular.

Fielding, N. (2003) *Interviewing*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.

Hine, C. (2000) *Virtual Ethnography* London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage. Hine focuses on online ethnography, but her reflections on ethics and informed consent are relevant for anyone considering an empirical research project.

Keats, D. (1999) *Interviewing: A Practical Guide for Students and Professionals*, Sydney: UNSW Press.

Silverman, D. (2000), *Doing Qualitative Research: A practical handbook*, London: Sage.

Weiss, R. (1994), *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*, New York: Free Press

## **Textual Analysis and Discourse Analysis**

Barry, P. (2009) *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Manchester University Press. Whilst aimed mainly at English students, this is a really useful guide to the various approaches to studying texts, including chapters on Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic readings as well as self-study exercises and ‘how-to’ guides for various forms of analysis.

Fairclough, N. (2003) *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research*, London: Routledge.

Hall, G. (2006) ‘Cultural Studies and Deconstruction’ in G. Hall and C. Birchall, eds., *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, Edinburgh University Press, 31-53.

Jørgensen, M. and Phillips, L.J. (2002) Discourse analysis as theory and method, London: Sage.

Krippendorff, K. (2004) Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology, London: Sage.

McQuillan, M. (2001) Deconstruction: A Reader, London: Routledge.

## **Visual Analysis**

Barthes, R. Camera Lucida (various editions and translations available in the library). Not a methodological text as such, but one of the key works on photographic images.

Pink, S. (2007) Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media, Representation in Research, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.

Sontag, S. (1978) On Photography, New York: Allen Lane (and various other editions). As with the Barthes, this is not a methodological 'how-to' but rather an exemplary piece of writing on the visual. Sontag writes in an accessible style and is well worth reading for an example of how to write well about media sources.

## **Audience Studies**

Ang, I. (1985) Watching Dallas. New York: Methuen.

----- (1996) Living Room Wars. Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World. London and New York, Routledge.

Radway, J. (1983) Reading the Romance. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

## **Planning a Research Project**

Knight, P. (2003), Small-Scale Research, London: Sage.

Walliman, N. (2001) Your Research Project: a step by step guide for the first time researcher, London: Sage.

## Getting hold of books and resources

Where possible, we have tried to ensure that books referenced on the course are in the university library and that articles are accessible from the library e-journal database. Should this not be the case, or should you wish to borrow books that are not available from Lancaster library, you can use the Inter-library Loan and Document Supply services. Taught postgraduate students can make a maximum of 10 requests per academic year. Full details of the service are available at: <http://libweb.lancs.ac.uk/g23.htm>.

To make a request, you need to log in here using your library card and password:  
<http://cat.lib.lancs.ac.uk/F/8D55V421Q3HA9GMHBFBSR72UQ2VVS462L58XEHAPPHQGU52MV-27706?func=new-ill-request-l>.

To find academic articles and books, the best place to start is Google Scholar:  
<http://scholar.google.co.uk/>. This is an academic search engine which links to practically every scholarly publisher and journal. It is particularly useful for finding contemporary work (i.e. published in the last 10-15 years) although some canonical works are included as well. Most articles should be accessible in PDF form if you are either on campus, or logged on to the VPN from home. Using Scholar correctly requires a little practice – you may need to work on refining your search terms – but it is well worth taking the time to become familiar with it.

## How to approach the readings

Each week there are 2 readings. Usually, these will consist of one reading that explicitly focuses on a specific research method or approach, and one which demonstrates how that approach works in practice (highlighted in bold). Seminar discussions will focus mainly on the highlighted readings; however, it is recommended that you do all the reading before the seminar, as this will help you to get a feel for research methods and planning, which will help you plan your own research project/assessment. Some weeks, these readings are supplemented by a short piece by a ‘canonical’ writer whose theoretical work has been particularly relevant to the development of a specific methodological approach and whose work is referred to in the lecture.

## Every week:

Questions/reading guides will be circulated each week in class. To help you with your reading, you might want to ask the following questions (based on Skeggs 1996: 4):

- What method is used in the reading under discussion? What kind of research is it?
- How do you think the area of study was chosen? What institutional, economic, social factors might have underpinned the choice? Does the writer make this explicit?
- Which frameworks of established knowledge are used, referred to, challenged, ignored? Why do you think this is?
- Which methods were used for study? Why do they work for carrying out the kind of research the writer is doing?

- What other methods could have been used? Why weren't they?
- What do you think the original research questions were? How might these have changed in the process of doing the research?
- How does the writer present him/herself? Do they put themselves into the text, or does it appear objective? How are these effects achieved through the writing style?
- Is the research presented as a 'final product', or as more of a process? How much of the researcher's process is visible in the final piece?
- How did the process of writing influence the final product? What writing style is used? Is it effective?
- How would you have approached the source material that is being discussed? Would you have done things differently? Why?
- How might the writer's methodological approach be used to study other cultural phenomena?
- What kinds of problems/questions might it address particularly effectively?

## Schedule of lectures/seminars

### Week 1: Introduction: Approaches to Researching Media and Culture

#### *Reading*

Henry A. Giroux (2001) 'Cultural Studies as Performative Politics' *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* 1 (1), 5-23.

Jane Stokes (2009) 'Getting Started' in *How to do Media and Cultural Studies*, London, Sage, 7-37.

### Week 2: Studying visual culture

#### *Reading*

WJT Mitchell (2002) 'Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture' *Journal of Visual Culture* 1 (2), 165-181.

Extract from John Berger (1972) *Ways of Seeing*: <http://desperate-ingorgia.blogspot.com/2010/04/ways-of-seeing-by-john-berger.html>

Gillian Rose (2007) 'Researching Visual Materials: towards a critical visual methodology' *Visual Methodologies : an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, London : Sage, 1-28.

See also: The Gender Ad Project: <http://www.ltconline.net/lukas/gender/pages/gaze.htm>

### Week 3: The Visual as Method – Photography

Barry Mauer (2005) "The Epistemology of Cindy Sherman: A Research Method for Media and Cultural Studies." *MOSAIC: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* (38)1, 93-113.

Sarah Pink (2006) 'Planning and Practicing "Visual Methods"' in *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 40-62.

See also: Cindy Sherman gallery: <http://www.cindysherman.com/>

### Week 4: Deconstructing Différance: Textual Analysis

### *Reading*

Joan W. Scott (1988) 'Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism' *Feminist Studies* 14 (1), 32-50.

Jacques Derrida (1982) Excerpt from *Différance*, trans Alan Bass, *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982, 3-27.  
<http://hydra.humanities.uci.edu/derrida/diff.html>

## **Week 5: Qualitative research and critical reflection: ethnography**

### *Reading*

Ben Carrington (2008) 'What's the Footballer Doing Here? Racialized Performativity, Reflexivity, and Identity' *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* 8 (4), 423-452.

Les Back (2003) 'Gendered Participation: Masculinity and Fieldwork in a South London Adolescent Community' in D. Bell and P. Kaplan, eds., *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*, London and New York: Routledge.

## **Week 6: Working with media materials: Content Analysis**

### *Reading*

David Altheide (2006) 'Terrorism and the Politics of Fear' *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 6 (4), 415-439.

Gillian Rose (2007) 'Content Analysis: Counting what you (think you) see' in *Visual Methodologies : an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, London : Sage, 59-72.

## **Week 7: Rethinking audience studies: fan communities**

### *Reading*

Constance Penley (1997). *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*. New York: Verso

Gillian Rose (2007) 'Audience Studies: Studying how television gets watched' *Visual methodologies : an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, London : Sage.



## **Week 8-9: Feedback on research proposals/independent research**

There will be no formal teaching in these weeks; instead, students will work in groups, carrying out their own independent research on their chosen topic, either by conducting interviews, carrying out participant observation, collating and analysing texts and visual material, or some combination of these. Each group is required to 'check in' for supervision meetings during this time.

## **Week 10: Student Presentations on research projects**