

# Soc1923: Critical methods in media and cultural studies

Week 1, 2017



# Overview of today's session

- **Course outline**
- **Course assessment**
- **Methods talk in media and cultural studies**
- **Research project planning**



# Course outline

- **Weeks 1-7: methods, guest interviews**
  - Each week: 1-2 methods; 1 guest whose work we read and discuss in terms of methods
- **Weeks 8-10: group projects;**



# Course assessment

- **Group research projects developed each week**
- **Group work documented in online research portfolio**
- **Group work summarised in presentations Week 20**
- **Individual essay reflecting on methods in media and cultural studies**
  - Question is **already** in the course outline

**Assessment for this course is:**

- 1. Group work: research methods portfolio 25%; due week 19, 20 March**
- 2. Group work: presentation of research project 15%; due Week 19, 24 March**
- 3. Individual essay on research (3000 words) 60%; due Monday Week 21, Summer term, 20 April 2017, 5pm.**



# How to study media cultures today?

- Media:

... a form of unevenly shared consciousness of persistently external events. [Media] is what appears to happen, in these powerfully transmitted and mediated ways, in a world within which we have no other perceptible connections but we feel is at once central and marginal to our lives. (Raymond Williams, 1973: 295-6)

- Culture

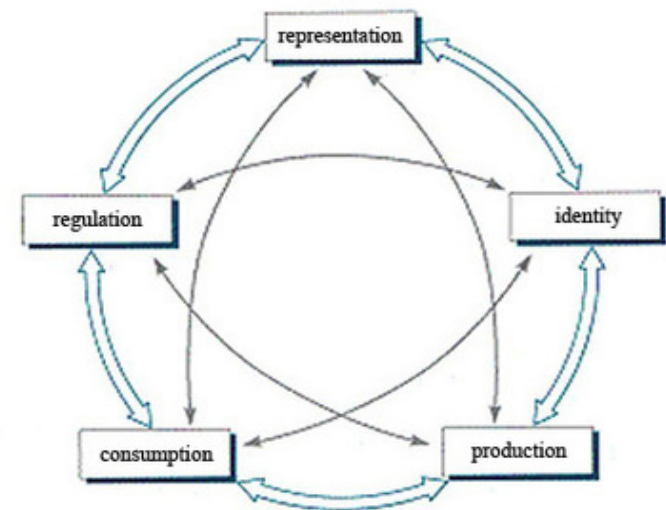


Fig. 1 du Gay et al's Circuit of Culture

# VANITY FAIR

JULY 2015

## “Call me Caitlyn”

By BUZZ BISSINGER Photos by ANNIE LEIBOVITZ











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Adrian

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**Mark Zuckerberg** ✓

November 19, 2016 · 🌐

A lot of you have asked what we're doing about misinformation, so I wanted to give an update.

The bottom line is: we take misinformation seriously. Our goal is to connect people with the stories they find most meaningful, and we know people want accurate information. We've been working on this problem for a long time and we take this responsibility seriously. We've made significant progress, but there is more work to be done.

Historically, we have relied on our community to help us understand what is fake and what is not. Anyone on Facebook can report any link as false, and we use signals from those reports along with a number of others -- like people sharing links to myth-busting sites such as Snopes -- to understand which stories we can confidently classify as misinformation. Similar to clickbait, spam and scams, we penalize this content in News Feed so it's much less likely to spread.

The problems here are complex, both technically and philosophically. We believe in giving people a voice, which means erring on the side of letting people share what they want whenever possible. We need to be careful not to discourage sharing of opinions or to mistakenly restrict accurate content. We do not want to be arbiters of truth ourselves, but instead rely on our community and trusted third parties.

While the percentage of misinformation is relatively small, we have much more work ahead on our roadmap. Normally we wouldn't share specifics about our work in progress, but given the importance of these issues and the amount of interest in this topic, I want to outline some of the projects we already have underway:

- Stronger detection. The most important thing we can do is improve our ability to classify misinformation. This means better technical systems to detect what people will flag as false before they do it themselves.
- Easy reporting. Making it much easier for people to report stories as fake

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# How to study media cultures today?

- **Media**

... a form of unevenly shared consciousness of **persistently external events**.  
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# Textual methods

- **From 'classic' cultural studies methods (semiotics) to contemporary 'textual environments.'**



# Visual methods

- **From formal composition analysis to 'expert readings.'**
- **From 'expert readings' to 'discourse analysis'**





# Discourse analysis

- **Analysis of how statements structure what we think**
- **Moving from elite or authoritative examples to a more diverse archive**



# Ethnography

- **Observing what people do with and in media as participants (not just as audience or spectator)**
- **Researcher becomes a participant**
- **Challenges of digital ethnography**



# Digital methods

- **Emerging in last 5-10 years**
- **Seek to engage with the specificities of online, network or digital cultures**
- **Aim to overcome some of difficulties of working with networked and algorithmic media**



# The group project topic: 'fake news'

- **Topic does not have to be something that everyone in the group is interested in**
- **Requirements:**
  - international in scope
  - Involves recent event (2015 onwards)
    - e.g. a news event, a media event (e.g. film launch), an online event ('blue' dress), something in popular culture, etc.
  - Can be researched using multiple methods – textual, visual, discourse analysis, ethnography, digital methods





# Getting into your research project: the method of 'writing the implosion':

- **A series of exercises to help explore the fabric of an object, and thereby ourselves!**
  - See Dumit, J., 2014. Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time. *Cultural Anthropology* 29, 344–362. doi:10.14506/ca29.2.09 (on the moodle)
- **'pick an artifact or a thing' - as a specific as possible: 'fake news on Facebook'**
  - **Step 1: Brainstorm: write notes about the thing in response to the questions on pages 351-354**
    - Labour, epistemology, materials, technologies, contexts, politics, economics, texts, bodies, histories, parts, education, myth, symbolism
  - **Step 2: From knowledge-map to ignorance-map**
    - Look for patterns of ignorance in what you know about the object: why do you know some things and not others
    - Where/how could you get answers to what you don't know ?
  - **Step 3: Try to find answers**
    - Who controls the answers (experts, institutions, platforms, etc.)?
    - This is the work of **discourse analysis**: 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault)



# Setting up the group research digital portfolio

- **Your could set up a Facebook group or sign up a for a blog account (wordpress, blogger, blog.com, or somewhere else). Either way, make sure everyone has access to it**
- **Send me the address or URL so I can see it.**
- **Write a brief description of significance of 'fake news' as a topic for media and cultural studies research (300-400 words)**
- **Post the description online (blog, Facebook, etc).**



# Next week

- **Textual analysis**
- **Read article by Anne Cronin on advertising & cities**

