

SOCL 923: Critical Methods in Media and Cultural Studies

Department of Sociology, Lancaster University

Lent Term, 9-11.30am, Friday, County South SR1

Course convenor

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Guests on the course

Joe Deville, Adam Fish, Graeme Gilloch, Tracey Jensen, Miriam Meissner

About the course

This course explores contemporary research practice in Media and Cultural Studies (MCS). Given the dynamism and complexity of media cultures, research in MCS is quite plural. It includes textual and discourse analysis, visual analysis, ethnography and participatory approaches, but with strong emphasis on engaging with issues of identity, differences, power and experience in the hyper-complex media and cultural environments we inhabit.

This course is designed to introduce students to contemporary methodological issues, key approaches, practical techniques, and exemplary cases relating to the study of media and culture. It uses recent examples of media and cultural research done here at Lancaster to expose students to particular research methods and approaches, and encourage an exploration of their theoretical and practical implications..

In conversation with invited guests, participants in the course will also discuss and critically evaluate different methodological approaches and learn how to draw on these approaches as a starting point for their own research. By the end of the course, students should have a strong understanding of key elements in planning and carrying out independent research projects.

A groupwork project is a key experience in this course. Throughout the course of the term, you will put various methods and approaches into practice during the group research work. You will be assessed in stages throughout the term (see below for assessment details). The final assessment is based on an individual essay, due after the Easter break.

Course objectives

1. To explore the main methods used in media and cultural studies and how they relate to the key problems and approaches of that field.
2. In dialogue with media and cultural studies researchers, to show how issues of identity, power, value and experience can be researched.
3. Using visual, textual and observational materials, show how media and other cultural processes can be understood differently using different methodological approaches.

Course Content

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

- The range of objects, things, events and processes studied in media and cultural studies, with a particular emphasis on textual, visual and related forms;
- Key research methods and their relation to associated disciplines (sociology, anthropology, history, gender and womens studies, science and technology studies, film studies, philosophy);
- The relationship between theory and practice;
- Experience, reflexivity, and ethics (including research ethics);
- Situated knowledges, participatory and activist methods;
- Media production/consumption.

Assessment

Assessment takes the form of an ongoing research project, carried out in groups, documented in a group research blog. The group research project is intended to introduce you to the process of preparing a research proposal, designing and writing methodology, carrying out research and reflecting critically on the production of knowledge.

*****In 2017, the group project research topic is 'fake news.'*****

Assessment for this course is:

1. **Group work: online portfolio 25%; due week 20, 5pm Monday 20 March**
2. **Group work: presentation of research project 15%; due week 20, 24 March**
3. **Individual essay on research (3000 words) 60%; due Tuesday 2 May 4pm.**

The group research project is an important component of this course. It provides an opportunity to conceive of, design, and pilot a viable media and/or cultural studies research project at a Masters level. You will be assigned to research groups in Week 1, and as mentioned above, you will develop the research proposal and research project throughout the course.

Full details of assessment will be discussed in the first seminar.

The group research project: online portfolio and presentations

The progress of the project, and the variety of academic, media and other materials that relate to the project should be documented on a research blog during the first 9 weeks of the course. This blog

can easily be set up at wordpress.com or blogger.com. But given the topic of this year's project, it could also be on Facebook.com.

Regardless of the platform, each member of the research group should have edit access to the blog, and each blog should show individual contributions from all members of the research group. Each week, groups will be tasked with adding new questions, examples, sample analysis, references or critical reflections to the group project blog. The blog should be seen as a research portfolio and research log for the group project.

In week 10, groups will briefly present a worked-out design for a full research project based on the topic.

Assessment criteria for the online group research project

1. The blog should show regular and frequent contributions from all members of a research throughout the course.
2. The contents of the blog should document the development of the research project beginning from choice of topic, through framing of questions, consideration of relevant academic work, design of research, examples of materials, objects, things, and events relating to the project, and critical, theoretically and methodologically informed writing about how the research group carried out the project.
3. The blog should demonstrate the research group has a considered and practiced with a range of different research methods and approaches, and this range of methods should include visual, textual, and audiovisual analysis, ethnographic and interview techniques, as well as consideration of medium specificity. It may also include activist, participant, and other kinds of critical practice such as photography, video-making, sound recordings, etc.
4. Effective research blogs will make use of the many different blogging possibilities of displaying images, writing entries, tagging entries to organise them, linking to other sources (including other blogs), and feedback through comments.

Assessment criteria for the group research project presentations

The presentations should focus on presenting the research design for a group research project. This will be assessed according to way in which it:

1. Proposes a research topic and research questions;
2. Says why this question is interesting in terms of major theories or understandings of media and culture;
3. Outlines the relevant academic work on the topic and in relation to the research questions;
4. Presents a research methodology designed to address the questions. This research methodology must combine textual, visual and ethnographic approaches. It may also use inventive/live approaches.

The essay question (3000 words)

Our collective research topic this term has been 'fake news.' In your group projects you have investigated various ways of making sense of this recent controversy. Drawing on your experience of working on this topic, the various exploratory activities undertaken in your groups, and the in-class interviews with guest, as well as media and cultural studies readings, critically reflect on the following statement:

'In its research practice, media and cultural studies is a way of making sense of a world that works primarily through, or in reliance, on media.'¹

In writing your essay, you are not expected to carry out new research, but you should draw on readings, concepts and analytical approaches discussed during the course.

Background reading and MCS literature on research

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.

A thoughtful, quite sophisticated textbook would be: Couldry, Nick. (2000) *Inside Culture: Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural Studies*. London: Sage.

Another would be: Angela McRobbie (2005) *The uses of cultural studies: A textbook*, London: Sage. This assumes more theoretical background knowledge.

A good textbook for the visual components of the course would be 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>.

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

¹*With apologies to Nick Couldry who writes: 'I use the term "media culture" .. to refer to collections of sense-making practices whose main resources of meaning are media. The only criterion for identifying a media culture is that its members are likely to recognize its distinctiveness, its way of "hanging together". When I say "sense-making", I do not mean that media cultures are exclusively or primarily ways of making sense of *media*. I mean instead that they are ways of making sense of *the world* that work primarily *through*, or in reliance on, media' (Couldry *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. 2012, 159–160).

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

Alaasutari, 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.

Media technologies and cultural techniques

Bolter, J.D. & Grusin, R.A., 2000. *Remediation: understanding new media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Manovich, L., 2002. *The language of new media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Parikka, J., 2012. *What is media archaeology?*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Sterne, J. 2013.. *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012

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.

Searching for and obtaining academic books and academic journal articles

Any academic research project involves searching for relevant literature. Despite the digital revolution, academic literature is still mainly published in the form of books and articles. These can often be read electronically, but they still follow the conventions of printed media. They have 'pages', chapters, volume numbers, etc.

Obtaining relevant academic books and articles is a 'critical' research method for postgraduate students. While bibliographies or reference lists like the one above are a good starting point, you also need to learn to search, access and manage academic literature using bibliographic search engines and bibliography software.

To find academic articles and books, one place to start is Google Scholar:

<http://scholar.google.co.uk/>. This search engine links to practically every scholarly publisher and journal. The problem with Google Scholar is that it is indiscriminate. It presents results from all disciplines mixed together, and with little regard to their source. This makes it **much less useful** for researchers who are new to media and cultural studies. That said, it is particularly useful for finding contemporary work (i.e. published in the last 10-15 years) although some older publications 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.

Thomson ISI 'Web of Knowledge' is another important bibliographic database, accessible through the Lancaster University Library homepage. It allows downloads of collections of bibliographic records. More importantly, it allows researchers to refine the search according to disciplines. (<http://isiknowledge.com/wos>).

As postgraduate researchers, you should familiarise yourself with and use bibliographic software to keep track off and format academic and non-academic references in your written work. I recommend **Zotero**, open source software developed by Digital Humanities at George Mason University (<https://www.zotero.org>). Again, this will be demonstrated during the course.

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://onesearch.lancs.ac.uk>. To make a request, you need to log into OneSearch using your library card and password.

You should also spend some time browsing the articles in key journals in media and cultural studies, and related fields. They include:

<i>Angelaki,</i>	<i>M/C</i>
<i>Body and Society</i>	<i>Media and Society</i>
<i>Convergence</i>	<i>Media, Culture and Society</i>
<i>Critical Inquiry</i>	<i>New Formations</i>
<i>Cultural Studies</i>	<i>New Media and Society</i>

<i>differences</i>	<i>Parallax</i>
<i>boundary 2</i>	<i>Public Culture</i>
<i>Cultural Critique</i>	<i>Social Text</i>
<i>Cultural Sociology</i>	<i>Space and Culture</i>
<i>Cultural Values</i>	<i>Subjectivity</i>
<i>European Journal of Cultural Studies</i>	<i>Substance</i>
<i>Feminist Media Studies</i>	<i>Theory, Culture and Society</i>
<i>Fibreculture</i>	<i>Third Text</i>
<i>Inter-Asia Cultural Studies</i>	
<i>International Journal of Cultural Studies</i>	

How to approach reading for this course

Most weeks of the course there are **two** set readings:

One reading will focus on research methods.

The other reading demonstrates research methods in practice. This second reading will usually be written by a member of staff in the department. That member of staff will participate in the session for that week in an 'author meet critics' session.

You **must** do the two set readings before the seminar. In class discussions will focus heavily on these readings.

Every week:

To help you with your reading, you might want to ask the following questions:

- 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 classes

Week 1: Introduction: researching media and culture

Suggested reading

Back, Les, and Nirmal Puwar. 'A Manifesto for Live Methods: Provocations and Capacities'. *The Sociological Review* 60 (2012): 6–17.

Dumit J (2014) Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time. *Cultural Anthropology* 29(2): 344–362.

Week 2: Working with texts I: Texts in media-worlds

Guest: Dr Anne Cronin (to be confirmed)

Reading

Couldry, Nick. 'Introduction', *Inside Culture: Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural Studies*. Sage, 2000, 1-19.

Cronin, A.M., 2008. Mobility and market research: outdoor advertising and the commercial ontology of the city. *Mobilities*, 3(1), pp.95–115.

Week 3: Working with texts II: Online Content Analysis

Guest: Dr Tracey Jensen

Reading

Couldry, Nick. 'Questioning the Text'. In *Inside Culture: Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural Studies*, Sage, 2000, 67–87.

Jensen, Tracey (2013) Mumsnetiquette': online affect within parenting culture. In: Maxwell C and Aggleton P (eds), *Privilege, agency and affect: Understanding the production and effects of action*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 127–145.

Week 4: Studying urban visual culture

Guest: Dr Miriam Meissner

Reading

Rose, Gillian. 'The Question of Method: Practice, Reflexivity and Critique in Visual Culture Studies'. In *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, edited by Ian Heywood, Barry Sandywell, Michael Gardiner, Gunalan Nadarajan, and Catherine M Soussloff, London: Berg, 2012, 542–558.

Lindner, Christoph, and Miriam Meissner. 2014. "Slow Art in the Creative City: Amsterdam, Street Photography, and Urban Renewal." *Space and Culture*. doi:10.1177/1206331213509914.

Week 5: Studying interfaces and platforms

Guest: Dr Joe Deville

Reading

Vis, Farida, Simon Faulkner, K Manyukhina, Katy Parry, and L Evans. 2013. 'Twitpic-Ing the Riots: Analysing Images Shared on Twitter during the 2011 UK Riots'. In *Twitter and Society*, 385–98. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79098>. doi:10.1177/1532708608321574.

Deville J (2016) Seeing the Invisible Algorithm. The practical politics of tracking the credit trackers. In: Amoore L and Piotukh V (eds), *Algorithmic life: calculative devices in the age of big data*, pp. 90–109. Available from: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=4218417> (accessed 13 January 2017).

Week 6: Describing what happens: ethnography

Guest: Dr Adam Fish

Reading

Murthy, Dhiraj (2013). 'Ethnographic Research 2.0: The Potentialities of Emergent Digital Technologies for Qualitative Organizational Research'. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* 2(1):23–36.

Fish, Adam, 2013. Participatory Television: Convergence, Crowdsourcing, and Neoliberalism. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 6(3), pp.372–395.

Extra reading

Clifford, James (1986) Introduction: Partial Truths. In J. Clifford & G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* pp. 1-26. Berkeley: University of California.

Week 7: Developing the research projects

No class this week – groupwork as programmed

No Reading

Week 8: Writing with theory

Guest: Graeme Gilloch

Mitchell, W.J.T., 2002. 'Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture' *Journal of Visual Culture* 1 (2), 165-181.

Gilloch, Graeme, "Streets in Busan and Elsewhere. Part 1: Prolegomena: The Landscape of 'Dynamic Busan'"

Week 9: Developing the research projects

Students will work in groups, developing the design of their group research project. This will involve gathering some relevant academic literature, developing a research design, and experimenting with various methods (e.g by conducting interviews, carrying out participant observation, collating and analysing texts and visual material). All research projects will combine textual, visual and ethnographic methods.

We will also work on presentations for week 10.

Week 10: Student Presentations on research projects

In the first half of the session, we will practice the 15 minute presentations. In the second half, another member of staff and Adrian Mackenzie will assess the presentations.