SOCL 923: Critical Methods in Media and Cultural Studies

Department of Sociology, Lancaster University

Course convenor

Adrian Mackenzie, a.mackenzie@lancaster.ac.uk

Staff contributing to the course

Anne Cronin, Adam Fish, Graeme Gilloch, Lucy Suchman, Imogen Tyler

About the course

This course explores research practice in Media and Cultural Studies (MCS). Compared to many other social science and humanities fields, method in MCS is quite plural. It includes textual analysis, visual analysis, ethnography and participatory approaches. 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.

This course is designed to introduce students to live methodological issues, main approaches, practical techniques, and exemplary cases relating to the study of media and culture. By the end of the course, students should have a practical grounding in planning and carrying out independent research projects. It uses recent examples of media and cultural research done here at Lancaster to give a taste of particular research methods and approaches, and encourage an exploration of their theoretical and practical implications and consequences. Participants in the course will also discuss and critically evaluate different methodological approaches and learn how to draw on these discussions as a starting point for your own research.

A groupwork project is key part of 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 essay, due after the Easter break.

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;

- Key research methods and their relation to associated discipines (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 (further details on this below). 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.

Assessment for this course is based on **85**% written work and **15**% presentation, as follows:

1. Group work: research blog **25**%; Final draft submitted **week 19, 12 March**

2. Group work: presentation of research project **15% Week 10, 16 March**

3. Individual essay on research (3000 words) **60**% **Monday Week 2, Summer term, 27 April 2015, 5pm.**

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

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 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: Metheun.

----- (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 biobliography software.

To find academic articles and books, one 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. We will practice this in Week 2.

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. We will practice working with both databases early in the course (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:

Angelaki,

Body and Society

Convergence

Critical Inquiry

Cultural Studies

differences

boundary 2

Cultural Critique

Cultural Sociology
Cultural Values
European Journal of Cultural Studies
Feminist Media Studies
Fibreculture
Inter-Asia Cultural Studies
International Journal of Cultural Studies
M/C
Media and Society
Media, Culture and Society
New Formations
New Media and Society
Parallax
Public Culture
Social Text
Space and Culture
Subjectivity
Substance
Theory, Culture and Society
Third Text

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

Reading

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

Part I: Working with texts

Week 2: Working with texts I: Textual Analysis

Guest: Dr Imogen Tyler

Reading

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

Tyler, Imogen. 2011. 'Pramfaced Girls: The Class Politics of "Maternal TV".' In *Reality Television and Class*, edited by Beverly Skeggs and H. Woods, 210–24. London: BFI.

Week 3: Working with texts II: Content Analysis

Guest: Dr Anne Cronin

Reading

Couldry, Nick. 'Questioning the Text". In *Inside Culture: Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural*

Studies, Sage, 2000, 67–87.

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

Part II: Working with sound and images, audio and visual

Week 4: Studying visual culture

Guest: Dr John McKnight

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.

McKnight, John Carter. 2012. "A Failure of Convivencia Democracy and Discourse Conflicts in a Virtual Government." *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 32 (5): 361–74.

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.

Week 5: The Visual as Method – photography and film

Guest: Dr Graeme Gilloch

Reading

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

Gilloch, Graeme, and Jaeho Kang. '"Below the Surface": Siegfried Kracauer's "Test-Film" Project'. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 61 (2007).

Part III: Working in the field

Week 6: Describing what happens: ethnography

Guest this week: Professor Lucy Suchman

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.

Suchman Lucy A (2012) Configuration. In: Lury C and Wakeford N (eds), *Devices and the Happening of the Social*, Routledge, pp. 48–60.

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: Participating in what happens through ethnography

Guest: Dr Adam Fish

Reading

Carrington, Ben. 2008. '"What's the Footballer Doing Here?" Racialized Performativity, Reflexivity, and Identity'. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 8 (4): 423–52. doi:10.1177/1532708608321574.

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

Part IV: Research projects and presentations

Week 8-9: 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.

The group research project: blog and presentations

The group research project is an important component of this course. It provides an opportunity to conceive of, design, plan and develop 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. Each week, groups will add new questions examples, concepts, references or ideas to the group project.

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. 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.

Assessment criteria for the group research project blog

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 critieria for the group research project presentations

The presentations should focus on presenting the research design for a group research project. This will be asssessed 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.