Course Description

This course presents an investigation into the complex relationship between television and politics in Italy, a dangerous liaison whose most visible embodiment is the current prime minister and television tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. The first past of the course will provide an historical overview needed to account for the development of such unprecedented interpenetration between economic, cultural and political powers. Covering the emergence of the broadcasting system from the post-War period to the advent of private television, we will outline the distinctive elements of continuity and change in the relation between television and politics. In particular, special emphasis will be given to the transformations of the political public sphere under the mediating effects of commercial television.

The second part of the course is centered on a close analysis of a number of contemporary examples of political communications based on the intermeshing between entertainment, information and politics. By closely observing case studies centered on the circulation of politics among genres as diverse as sports programs, talk-shows, parody news and reality TV, we will interrogate the functioning of television entertainment as an increasingly relevant site of political discourse. By combining the study of historical material with a hands-on approach on comparative case studies, the course aims at giving students valuable theoretical and empirical tools to understand the relations of power between media and politics, both in Italy and worldwide.

Texts

Books


Additional readings available on Blackboard (readings indicated in schedule with asterisk)
Class structure
The class time will be divided into two roughly equal periods of lecture and discussion. In the second part of the semester, the second part of the class will be dedicated to students’ presentations.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

(1) Attendance and Participation (20 percent of final grade): Attendance is mandatory. I will take attendance each class. Students are allowed a maximum of 2 excused leaves (except for religious holidays), for which they will need to provide valid justification. Any subsequent absence will affect the final grade. Before the midterm, at every class the students will need to bring a one-page short essay containing a combination of comments and questions regarding at least one of the texts assigned. Students’ essays will be part of the topics covered during the class discussion, and will be collected for my record at the end of the class.

(2) Midterm exam (35 percent of final grade): The midterm will be an in-class test based on a combination of multiple choice and short essay questions covering the material from the first part of the semester.

(3) Final presentation and paper (45 percent of final grade): This final assignment will consist of an individual presentation and of a final paper based on your individual research on one of the four case studies presented in the second half of the semester. By October 18th each student will have to choose a slot in the calendar for the final presentation, and submit a draft of the final research project. All the topics for the final research project will have to be approved by November 8th.

Grading Policies
I will use the full scale of grades in this class. I will make sure to read your work as thoroughly as possible before assigning a grade, and my final decisions will not be negotiable. Also, when grading, I will give particular emphasis to the students’ writing ability, including spelling, organization and style.

A = Excellent. The work is outstanding, in all respects.
B = Good. The understanding of the course materials is complete and thorough.
C = Adequate. The writing is incoherent and contains grammatical or spelling errors. Also, the use of the source materials is not proper, and there is evident lack of depth to the analysis.
D = Unsatisfactory. Work reveals no understanding or awareness of basic concepts and themes of the course. Participation has been inadequate or superficial.
F = Failed. Work was not submitted or completed according to the basic parameters.

Plagiarism is, of course, strictly prohibited, and will be punished according to the New York University policies.
Schedule (Any changes will be communicated beforehand):

9.6  Class Presentation
Introduction to the course
Movie Screening: The Berlusconi Show by Mark Franchetti

9.13  Television and Democracy: RAI and the post-War Years
Hibberd, Chapters 4 and 5

9.17  The Wild West of the Airwaves: the Advent of private Television
Hibberd, Chapter 6

9.20  The Wild West of the Airwaves: Silvio Berlusconi
Stille, Chapters 3 - 5

9.27  The Political Rise of Silvio Berlusconi
Hibberd, Chapter 8
Stille, Introduction, Chapters 6 and 7

10.4  Berlusconi in and out of Power
Stille, Chapters 8 - 12

10.11  Italy: a Videocracy?
Stille, Chapters 13, 14 and Afterword

10.18  MIDTERM EXAM
Movie screening: Videocracy by Erik Gandini

10.25 – 11.1 FALL BREAK

11.8  Political Communications in the Age of Entertainment
11.15 The Ball is Round: Soccer as Politics

Presentations

11.22 Fake News as Political Inquisition

Presentations

11.29 The Politics of Sex: Scandals and Power in the Media Age
* Cosentino, Gabriele “The Vallettopoli Scandal on the talk-show Matrix, or the Exposure of the Political Spectacle on Television” (Dissertation Chapter)

Presentations

12.6 Reality TV and Politics: Exposure, Surveillance and Instant Celebrity

Presentations

12.13 FINAL PAPER DUE