“The Culture Industries”
MCC-UE 1005
Course Syllabus

This course examines how the work that people do throughout the culture industries—i.e., newspapers, magazines, television, radio, the movies, music and book publishing—has been affected by a range of factors such as media concentration, hyper-commercialism, digital technology, and the likelihood (or fact) of interference, or retaliation, by government or corporate powers.

Requirements

Our study of the subject will be based on an extensive bibliography (and filmography), as well as weekly presentations by guest lecturers with pertinent experience in the industries concerned.

Your requirements, therefore, include (a) regular attendance, (b) timely reading and/or viewing of all the works assigned each week, and (c) close and courteous attention to our speakers’ lectures, and your full participation in the Q&A.

In order to ensure that all of us are really present during class, the use of laptops is forbidden unless medically necessary. You must therefore take notes by hand, on paper, using pen or pencil.

You will also be expected to complete a take-home midterm and final paper, as well as several quizzes on the reading. Your grade will be determined on this basis: 40% for your final paper (due May 11), 25% for your midterm (due March 23), and 15% for your overall class participation, including quizzes.

Your written work must be your own, with full documentation of whatever ideas, writing and/or information you derive from other sources. Plagiarism will result in failure of this course.

A note on the reading

Beyond each week’s assignments, you must read The New York Times on a daily basis. The point of this requirement is twofold. First, of all, the Times provides extensive coverage of developments within the culture industries—especially in its Arts and Business sections. It will therefore help to keep you up-to-date on what is happening within those industries. And, second, the Times is also of great interest as a major medium itself. In reading it, therefore, pay close attention not just to its coverage of the culture industries per se, but also to its coverage of the news in general, as some of our guest lecturers, and certain of our readings, will concern the history of the Times’s journalistic practice.

To read that paper (or any other) critically, one must get some sense of what’s not there—i.e., those stories that the Times has deemed not “fit to print”—and, no less, one must see that there are other ways of understanding what the Times does cover. In order to create that larger context for yourself, you must subscribe to
Consortiumnews, AlterNet and Truthout, and scan their daily stories. (You may also follow them on Twitter.) You will be quizzed, from time to time, on your reading of the New York Times and those Websites.

My availability

I am always reachable, either by phone or email. I am also available to meet at any time convenient for us both. To make an appointment, simply contact me by phone or email, or talk to me before or after class.

Course Schedule (in progress)

Jan. 29: Introduction

Feb. 4:
Journalism under fire

GUEST: Victor Pickard, Assistant Professor, Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania


Feb. 11:
Print journalism

GUESTS: Lewis Lapham, editor of Harper’s, 1976-81, 1983-2006, now editor of Lapham’s Quarterly; Tom Robbins, former columnist at the Village Voice, now Investigative Journalist in Residence at CUNY School of Journalism.


Feb. 18:
Broadcast news
GUESTS: Kristina Borjesson, free-lance journalist, former producer for “CBS Reports,” CNN, PBS; Danny Schechter, former producer at ABC, CNN, co-founder of GlobalVision, executive editor of the Media Channel; Glenn Silber, former producer at ABC News.


Feb. 25:
Photojournalism

GUESTS: Marc Asnin, photographer, 2010; Kathleen Klech, former photo editor at Condé Nast Traveler; Marcel Saba, President, W. Eugene Smith Foundation

READING: TBA

March 4:
Review

March 11:
Documentary film

GUESTS: Mike Bonanno of the Yes Men; John Kirby and Libby Handros, the Press and the Public Project, Inc.; Jean-Philippe Tremblay, DocFactory


READING: TBA

March 25:
Radio

GUESTS: Darren DeVivo, WFUV-FM; Rebecca Myles, radio journalist (BBC, WBAI); Omoyele Sowore, founder of Sahara Reporters

READING: Mark Lloyd, “From Roosevelt to Roosevelt: Wireless and Radio (1900-1934),” in Prologue to a Farce: Communication and Democracy (University of Illinois Press, 2006); (more TBA)
April 1:
The movie business

GUESTS: Kenneth Lonergan (and others TBA)

VIEWING: You Can Count on Me, dir. Kenneth Lonergan (2000); Margaret (2011)

READING: TBA

April 8:
Acting

GUESTS: Kathleen Chalfant, Cynthia Nixon, Mimi Kennedy

READING/VIEWING: TBA

April 15:
TV drama/comedy

GUEST: Beau Willimon, creator of House of Cards

VIEWING: House of Cards (Netflix)
READING: TBA

April 22:
The book business

GUESTS: E.L. Doctorow, author; Jane Friedman, publisher, Open Road Media; Emma Parry, literary agent, Janklow and Nesbit Associates; Sarah McNally, founder/owner, McNally/Jackson Bookstore

READING: E.L. Doctorow, Andrew’s Brain (Random House, 2014); André Schiffrin, The Business of Books (Verso, 2001)

April 29:
Music

GUESTS: Jean Cook, Director of Programs, Future of Music Coalition (others TBA)


May 6: Summary discussion

PAPER DUE ON MAY 10