Introduction to Communication Research

Course description:
This doctoral methods course focuses on the philosophical and theoretical assumptions behind, and rationales for, qualitative and interdisciplinary methodologies and approaches. The aim of the course is to establish a vocabulary for methodological approaches to research, to examine the nature of research questions served by different methods, to analyze the usefulness and limits of certain methods, and for students to be able to design a research project and apply its methods. Readings include explanations of method as well as examples of particular theoretical/methodological approaches.

Our approach will thus be both practical and meta-theoretical. We will unpack the assumptions, techniques, and aims of different methods, and do short exercises in using them. We will look at the methodological aims and approaches of a range of texts, examining the ways in which various scholars construct their arguments, define their materials, data, and objects of study, and justify their examples as representative of broader cultural and media contexts. With each approach, we will examine what kinds of questions a method will help us to ask (and not ask) and the limits and strategies of each approach. Fundamental to this collective inquiry will be an examination of the kinds of knowledges that particular approaches can help us to understand, and the kinds of case studies, objects of study, and expanded definitions of data we can work with.

In looking at readings we will consider the following questions: What questions is the author asking? What is the object of study? What is the data? What is the argument? What methods is the author using to make this argument? How do you know, i.e. how does the author reveal his/her method and what consequence does this have? How persuasive is the argument? How does the author argue that his/her object(s) of study is representative of a larger field? What is gained by this choice of method? What is not available to the author through this choice?

In addition, we will also examine the politics of method, how disciplines define (and police) methods, and the relationship of method to interdisciplinary approaches in the humanities and social sciences.
Assignments and requirements:
Students are expected to do all readings in preparation for class, to participate fully in
class discussions, and to do one class presentation. Assignments for this class will
consist primarily of weekly writings, that we will share on a wiki, in which you will
apply a particular method. These are meant to be short exercises, no more than a few
pages. There are 13 assignments of which you need to complete 12. In addition, you will
have a 5-8 page final research proposal due in which you will outline a research project,
focusing on the qualitative method(s) you think are most appropriate for your project.
Grades will consider weekly writings, 60%, research proposal 20%, class participation
and presentation 20%.

Readings:
Articles listed on the syllabus will be available in pdf form on Blackboard.

Recommended:
Gillian Rose, Visual Methodologies

Course Schedule:

Week 1, Sept 9: Introduction: Thinking about Knowledge and Evidence
Reading:
Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes”
Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading”

Recommended:
Rose, Chapter 1

Assignment 1: Choose a text that has influenced your scholarly interests and analyze its
method.

Week 2, Sept. 16: Semiotics and Structuralism: Guest Lecture, Dana Polan
Reading:
Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style, Introduction and Chapter 1
Roland Barthes, “Myth Today” from Mythologies
Umberto Eco, “A Reading of Steve Canyon”
Dennis Porter, “The Perilous Quest: Baseball as Folk Drama”

Recommended:
Umberto Eco, “Narrative Structure in Fleming”
Rose, Chapter 5

Assignment 2: Conduct a semiotic analysis of an image, object, or print advertisement.
Note the elements of it that could be subject to a structuralist analysis, or not.
**Week 3, Sept. 23: Empiricism, Experience, and Questions of Evidence**

Reading:
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* excerpt and “Understanding”
Sarah Igo, Introduction to *The Averaged American*
George Steinmetz, “Positivism and its Others in the Social Sciences”
James Schwoch and Mimi White, “The Questions of Method in Cultural Studies”
Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies”

Recommended:
Toby Miller, “What it Is and What it Isn’t: Introducing Cultural Studies”

**Assignment 3**: Write a thought piece on the questions and dilemmas raised by the categories of experience and evidence in scholarly research.

**Week 4, Sept. 30: Socio-Historical Analysis and the Archive**

Reading:
Lynn Spigel, “Introduction to Welcome to the Dreamhouse” and “Outer Space and Inner Cities”
Lisa Gitelman, “Media as Historical Subjects”
Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* excerpt
Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* excerpt
W.J.T. Mitchell, “The Abu Ghraib Archive”

**Assignment 4**: Analyze an historical image or object (or object or text in an archive) in terms of what socio-historical meaning it conveys and what further meanings you would have to research about it.

**Week 5, October 7: Ideological Analysis**

Reading:
Lauren Berlant, Introduction to *Queen of American Comes to Washington City*, and “The Theory of Infantile Citizenship”
Marita Sturken, *Thelma & Louise* excerpt
David Harvey, “Materializations: Paris 1848-1870” from *Paris, Capital of Modernity*
Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race* excerpt

Recommended:

**Assignment 5**: Conduct an ideological analysis of a film or television show.
**Week 6, October 14: Political Economy**

Reading:
John Caldwell, “Cultural Studies of Media Production”
Dana Polan, “Cable Watching: HBO, The Sopranos and Discourses of Distinction”
Janet Wasko, “Show Me the Money”
Nicholas Garnham, “Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication”
Tom Streeter, “Romanticism in Business Culture: The Internet, the 1990s, and the Origins of Irrational Exuberance”

**Assignment 6:** Conduct a political economic analysis of the same film or television show.

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**Week 7, October 21: Discourse Analysis**

Reading:
Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex”
Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy”
Jason Mittel, “Television Genres as Cultural Categories”
Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History*: “Tourism and Sacred Ground”
Herman Gray, “The New Conditions of Black Cultural Production”

Recommended:
Rose, Chapter 8

**Assignment 7:** Conduct a discourse analysis of a site, event, or museum.

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**Week 8, October 28: Psychoanalysis**

Reading:
Tania Modleski, *Women Who Knew Too Much*: Introduction and Rebecca
Josefina Saldana-Portillo, “In the Shadow of NAFTA”
Anne McClintock, “The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism,” from *Imperial Leather*
Marita Sturken, “The Wall, the Screen, and the Image”

Recommended:
Judith Mayne, “Paradoxes of Spectatorship”
Rose, Chapter 6

**Assignment 8:** Apply one or two concepts of psychoanalysis of an image, film, or institutional context.
Week 9, Nov. 4: Postmodernism
Reading:
Richard Dyer, *Pastiche*, excerpt
George Lipsitz, “Cruising Around the Historical Bloc”
Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Is Nick for Kids?”
Jason Mittel, “Making Fun of Genres”
Alexander Galloway, “Allegories of Control” from *Gaming: Essays on Algoithmic Culture*

Recommended:
Fredric Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”

Assignment 9: Analyze a cultural product as postmodern.

Week 10, Nov. 11: Feminist Method
Reading:
Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” and “Apes in Eden, Apes in Space”
Sandra Harding, “Is There a Feminist Method?”
Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, excerpt
Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, Introduction
Esther Sonnet, “Just a Book, She Said”

Assignment 10: Use feminist analysis to examine the role of gender in a particular media context, event, or image.

Week 11, Nov. 18: Ethnography and Anthropology
Reading:
Clifford Gertz, “Thick Description”
Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception* excerpt
Elizabeth Chin, *Purchasing Power* excerpt
Janice Radway, “Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies”
Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*, excerpt

Recommended:
James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority”

Assignment 11: Choose a topic that you think would benefit from ethnographic analysis and explain why ethnography would be the best methodological choice. Elaborate on how you would go about conducting your ethnography.
Week 12, Nov. 25: Media Audiences and Reception
Reading:
Ellen Seiter, “Qualitative Audience Research”
Janet Staiger, Media Reception Studies, excerpt
Elizabeth Bird, The Audience in Everyday Life, excerpt
David Morley, “Methodological Problems and Research Practices”
David Morley, excerpts from Television, Audiences & Cultural Studies

Recommended:
John Corner, “Reception”
Rose, Chapter 9

Assignment 12: Choose a media topic that you could do audience research on, and analyze how you would do media ethnography on it and why. Analyze what you would learn and not learn from such a study.

Week 13, Dec. 2: Surveys, Focus Groups, and Internet Ethnography
Reading:
Eva Ilouz, Consuming the Romantic Utopia, excerpt
Katherine Sender, Business, Not Politics, excerpt
Barry Wellman, et al, Connected Lives: The Project
Mizuko Ito et al, Living and Learning with New Media
On-Line Social Research: Methods, Issues and Ethics, excerpts

Assignment 13: Choose a web site (blog, virtual world, social network site, etc.) and analyze the potential benefits and pitfalls that might be involved methodologically in doing an ethnographic study of it.

Week 14, Dec. 9: The Politics of the Academy
Reading:
Andrew Ross, “The Mental Labor Problem”
Stanley Aronowitz, “The Last Good Job in America”
Stephen Duncombe, “ICE from the Ashes of FIRE: NYU and the Economy of Culture in New York City”

Final assignment: Write a short proposal for a research project, with an explanation of your object of study, data, and methods you would use and why.