

E59.0014 Introduction to Media Criticism

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will investigate media criticism through a variety of theories and methods. The focus will be on some of the dominant critical perspectives that have contributed to our understanding of media and its role in society. The course will provide the basic vocabulary and concepts used in the criticism of different types of media. The purpose throughout the semester will be to explore, understand, and effectively apply the various schools of media criticism through reading, watching, discussing and writing a wide range of media texts.

COURSE FORMAT, GENERAL REQUIREMENTS, & ATTENDANCE

Each class will begin with an introductory lecture that examines the themes and readings for the week. The rest of the class will focus on class discussion about the various readings and media texts. Therefore, attendance is important and you are expected to have read the scheduled course material before class. Please bring a copy of the assigned readings to class each week. Active participation is required and part of your grade will be determined by how often you engage in class discussion and how carefully you have read and thought about the assigned readings.

To aid our discussion and to improve your writing skills, you will be **required to turn in ten (10) Blackboard posts** where you will (1) provide a brief, 1-2 paragraph summary of the key theme(s)/argument(s) of each reading; and (2) pose at least one question about the readings and/or topics under discussion. **Your summary/question must be posted on Blackboard by 9:30 p.m. the day before class. You must post four of your ten responses by February 24th.**

You will also have three short writing assignments (4-5 pages) during the course of the class. Short papers will apply methods of analysis from the week's readings to a media object of the students' choice. More information on these assignments will be provided in class. In addition, there will be a take-home final exam (more information/due date will be provided in class).

Because this is a seminar course, regular class attendance is required. **More than two missed classes without prior notice or documented excuse will result in your grade being dropped by one-half letter.**

Please be advised that no late work will be accepted and no exam will be rescheduled without a preceding agreement with your instructor or documented illness/emergency. Delayed due dates will only be scheduled under truly justified circumstances (which will be determined by your instructor prior to the original due date).

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Assignments received in my mailbox after class are considered late. Late assignments should be left in my mailbox (7th floor, East Building) and will be marked down one-half grade per day late (not including weekends). Please discuss any extenuating circumstances with me before the due date.

Because this syllabus is a guide, changes in schedule, readings, or assignments may occur. You will be properly notified in advance if changes need to be made.

Fair warning of things I will take note of, but may not call you on: Coming to class late, leaving class early, sleeping in class, playing on your laptop or other electronic device, doing work for other courses in class—these activities will negatively affect your participation grade.

Before class begins, please turn off all cell phones and any other items that might ring, buzz, play music, or otherwise call attention to themselves and disrupt class.

REQUIRED READING:

Reading Package available on Blackboard as pdfs under “Course Documents”.

EVALUATION:

Attendance and Participation.....	15%
Blackboard Posts.....	10%
3 short papers (3x15)	45%
Final Paper.....	30%

EVALUATION STANDARDS AND POLICIES:

A=Excellent. Outstanding work in all respects. Demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Includes skillful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and contains no grammatical or typographical errors.

B=Good. This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials, examples, illustrations, are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Paper has been carefully proofread.

C=Adequate/fair. This work demonstrates understanding that hits in the ballpark but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expresses some significant errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing or articulation may appear vague, hard to follow, or loaded with typos and other technical errors.

D=Unsatisfactory. This work demonstrates a serious lack or error in understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing is deficient.

F=Failed. Work not submitted or attempted.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980, 240 Greene Street, www.nyu.edu/csd.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Students who follow special religious holidays that may interfere with the class schedule need to see me at the beginning of the semester to talk about your schedule.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY & PLAGARISM

Plagiarism or cheating on any assignment will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will result in a failure of the assignment and possibly failure of this class. “Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do. You violate the principle when you cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions...” (see School of Education Bulletin, 2004-6, p. 174)

FORMAT

Format of written work: All written work must be typed, double-spaced, and paginated. Multiple pages should be stapled. You are expected to follow a formal style manual for guidelines on citations, quotations, etc. Purchasing a style manual is strongly encouraged as it will help you improve the organization and composition of your written work and ensure the proper citation of sources. Whatever citation style you choose, please use it consistently throughout your writing.

Style manuals are available at the bookstore. A recommended style manual is: *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

STUDENT RESOURCES

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities: 240 Greene St, 2nd Floor.

Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS:

WEEK 1

1/19: **Class introduction and overview**
During the first meeting, we will discuss the syllabus, goals and requirements of the course.

1/21: **Differentiating popular and scholarly media criticism**

READ: Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 1 “Images, Power, and Politics”
Barnes, “Audiences Laughed to Forget Troubles” (online link:
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/30/movies/30yearend.html?_r=1&ref=movies)
Bissinger, “Tiger in the Rough” (online link:
<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2010/02/tiger-woods-201002>)

WEEK 2: **Formal and Semiotic Analyses**

1/26: **READ:** J. Bignell, “Television,” and “Cinema”

1/28: **READ:** E. Seiter, “Semiotics, Structuralism, and Television”

WEEK 3: **Ideology and Marxist Critique**

2/2: **READ:** R. Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”

2/4: **READ:** Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry”
F. Jameson, “Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: Dog Day
Afternoon as a political Film”

Assignment handed out. Please bring a hard copy to class on February 16th.

WEEK 4: **Ideology and the News**

2/9: **READ:** S. Hall, “Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect”
M. White, “Ideological Analysis and Television,”

2/11: **READ:** J. Bignell, “TV News”

WEEK 5: **Political Economic and Industrial Approaches**

2/16: **READ:** R. McChesney, “U.S. Media at the Dawn”
Liebman, “Corporate Soul Mates”

2/18: **READ:** Levine, “Toward a Paradigm for Media Production Research: Behind the Scenes
at *General Hospital*”

WEEK 6: **Genre Analysis**

2/23: **READ:** Braudy, “Genre: The Conventions of Connection”

2/25: **READ:** Giroux, “Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?”

Assignment handed out. Please bring a hard copy to class on March 9th.

WEEK 7:

Discourse Analysis

3/2: *READ:* R. Fowler, “Critical Linguistics”

3/4: *READ:* Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre”

WEEK 8:

Psychoanalytic Criticism

3/9: *READ:* S. Freud, “Symbolism in Dreams”

3/11: *READ:* L. Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
S. Flitterman-Lewis, “Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television”

WEEK 9

Spring Break

WEEK 10:

Feminist Analyses

3/23: *READ:* L. Van Zoonen, “Gender, Representation and the Media”
L. Van Zoonen, “Feminist Perspectives”

3/25: *READ:* J. Arthurs, “*Sex and the City* and Consumer Culture: Remediating Postfeminist Drama”

WEEK 11:

Race and Representation

3/30: *READ:* A. Corea, “Racism and the American Way of Media”
M. Diawara, “Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance”

4/1: *READ:* Y. Rivero, “Erasing Blackness: The Media Construction of Race in *Mi Familia*, the First Puerto Rican Situation Comedy with a Black Family”

Assignment handed out. Please bring a hard copy to class on April 13th.

WEEK 12:

Audience Studies and Spectatorship

4/6: *READ:* R. Allen, “Audience-Oriented Criticism and Television,”
L. Siegel, “Double Vision: Large Screen Video Display and Live Sports Spectacle”

4/8: *READ:* R. Lembo, “Components of a Viewing Culture”

WEEK 13:

Media and the Construction of Identity

4/13: *READ:* A. Doty, “What Makes Queerness Most?”

4/15: *READ:* Castiglia & Reed, “‘Ah, Yes, I Remember It Well’: Memory and Queer Culture in *Will and Grace*”

WEEK 14:

Postcolonial Critique

4/20: *READ:* E. Said, *Framing Islam* (Chapter 2),

4/22: *READ:* Shohat and Stam, “The Imperial Imaginary” in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*

WEEK 15: Postmodernism and Wrap-up/Review

4/27: *READ:* Sturken & Cartwright, Chapter 8 “Postmodernism, Indie Media, and Popular Culture”
Joseph, Ralina “‘Tyra Banks is Fat’: Reading (Post-)Racism and (Post-)Feminism in the New Millennium

4/29: *READ:* Kimmelman, “At Louvre, Many Stop to Snap but Few Stay to Focus” (online link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/03/arts/design/03abroad.html>)

Take Home Exam Handed Out/ Review for Final