

*Zur 436*  
**Culture and Media**  
Spring 2018

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This course will introduce you to a variety of approaches for studying the media and the way they operate culturally. Engaging the readings and assignments and participating in the discussions is critical for you to leave this course with a greater understanding of how and why the media operate as they do, as well as how they are both shaped by and contribute to the social and cultural formation in which you live. Part of this process will involve enhancing our interpretive abilities and critical thinking skills so as to **consider alternatives to our ‘common’ sense** in an effort to think through the **larger ethics and implications of media practices** and beliefs and our individual relationships to them. It is important to ask yourself about **your ‘location’ in this social and cultural configuration (your cultural ‘box’** so to speak), how you fit within it, and in turn, how it affects you and you affect it. Integral to understanding society and culture is gaining a better understanding of ourselves and the **intersections of identity, experience, and representation that connect us beyond our personal ‘borders’ of definition.**

The purpose of this course is to provide a space in which we can **analyze and discuss the role of the mass media in and between societies through the lens of cultural theory.** Our goal is to develop **critical thinking** (meaning to question that which is most obvious), so as to discern how ideas and experiences are produced and disseminated through the mass media within and across cultures, and how specific cultural, social, political, and economic forces influence and inform these processes.

Exploring these issues will involve:

- asking how and why media take the particular *forms* that they do
- analyzing media *content* and how it is related to media forms
- exploring how *audiences* (i.e. including ourselves) relate to and interact with media and representations
- looking at the *industry* and *practices* behind the media
- considering the mass media as an *institution*, operating in relation to other societal institutions such as the family, religion, science, etc.
- questioning the images and ways the media presents ‘Reality’ and the ‘Truth’

**Caveat:** You may encounter ideas and thoughts in this course you may not agree with or that may even offend you. Understand that this is part of the strategy behind the course design – to challenge you -- as we seek to engage alternative and opposing perspectives. A suggestion: before drawing impulsive conclusions, *pause* first, *really* think about what is being communicated, *consider* the texts, statements, images, and arguments, *reflect* on them, and then *respond* in a *respectful* manner. Passion is fine for this course; disrespect, condescension, and outright dismissal of your colleagues is unacceptable. The *goal* is to build dialogue in this course. This requires respect, honesty, decorum, and most of all, that you initially suspend judgment. No topic or perspective is off limits, but they must be presented and engaged with maturity and critical thinking. Finally, do not think that your opinion is valued only if it agrees with mine. I expect us to disagree on many points as we move towards critical understandings and consciousness of alternative perspectives.

**\*THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER\***

- **YES**, the Media *are* fun and entertaining, often providing pleasurable escapes for us from our thoughts, work, and the daily grind.
- **BUT**, the Media are also *very* influential in our lives in many obvious and subtle ways; considering how and why something in the media appeals to us (or does not appeal to us) can tell us a lot about the way we see ourselves, the world, and our behavior and place in it.
- **NO**, the Media are *not* innocent – their structure and forms are political and complexly organized, producing *real* consequences that affect all of us. To be critical of the Media is to ask questions that generally are transparent, not considered, or go unasked in our daily lives; the fact that they may seem *negative* only serves to underscore the power of the media and its ability to influence our ‘realities’ in specific ways that we may not even be aware of.

Developing critical consciousness does not mean to reject the Media, its messages, and minders (people who work within the Media) within reductive arguments that view them all as ‘simple,’ ‘evil,’ ‘devious,’ or part of ‘conspiracy theories’; rather, critical consciousness means to actively engage the Media, their messages, and their minders in ways that recognize the power they possess, giving them the respect and consideration they deserve, while providing honest and thoughtful criticism so as to promote and produce social awareness, civic improvements, and universal social justice.

**Required Text:**

*All readings will be provided to you online*

\* Occasionally, an additional short reading might be assigned during the semester, provided to you via email or URL link.

**Course Requirements:**

If at any time, you have a question about any of the assignments, it is up to you to approach me in due time (i.e. not the day before something is due); I cannot read your mind and it is much better to be overly safe than sorry later: No question is stupid except the one that goes unasked.

**Class Participation: [20% of final grade]** Students must come to class prepared, having done the readings and ready to address the course material, answer questions, and engage their classmates and the instructor in a thoughtful and respectful manner. Class attendance and participation is crucial to the success of our semester and is therefore expected, with the following policy in effect:

- 2 absences = 1 full letter grade reduction (i.e. A→B)
- 3 absences = 2 full letter grade reduction (i.e. A→C)
- 4 or more absences = failing course grade (F for the course)

Students arriving late to class **will not receive credit for attending class that day**. In case of a verifiable emergency, excused absences MAY be granted. Non-emergency appointments are not legitimate excuses for absences. Students are responsible for any class material they miss due to absences; it is up to the student to obtain the materials.

**Quizzes: [30% of final grade]** There will be a quiz each week focused on the course material assigned for that week and current events **starting in week 3**. The quizzes will be 5 multiple choice questions (time limited; question bank) on the main ideas in the readings for the week and will be posted online 12 hours prior to our class meeting (i.e. Tuesday Evening 9:45pm – Wednesday Morning 9:45am); there will be 10 quizzes total (weeks 3-12).

**In class presentation: Theory Explication [30% of final grade]:** each week, we will engage a different branch of cultural theory and one of its main representatives (as well as one of their works; some weeks will have 2 groups). Each group will be responsible at the beginning of class to a) explain a bit about the school of theory b) the author’s contributions and c) the main ideas behind their work. These presentations should be 7-10 min. in length and include powerpoints as well as a five- page extended summary (to hand in). Be concise and to the point!

**Final Exam: [20% of final grade].** There will be an online final exam that will be taken during the 12th week and will consist of 50 multiple choice questions from a larger test bank, covering material from the entire semester. The details related to this will be discussed in class.

**Semester Grading Breakdown:**

<b>Attendance and Class Participation</b>	=	20%
<b>Quizzes</b>	=	30%
<b>In Class Explication/Presentation</b>	=	30%
<b>Final Exam</b>	=	20%
<b>TOTAL</b>		100% of final grade

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<b>A</b>	93 and higher	<b>C+</b>	77 – 79.99
<b>A-</b>	90 - 92.99	<b>C</b>	70 – 76.99
<b>B+</b>	87 - 89.99	<b>D</b>	60 – 69.99
<b>B</b>	83 - 86.99	<b>F</b>	59.99 and below
<b>B-</b>	80 - 82.99		

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*Exams might be curved based on class performance; **I don't curve final grades***

**Personal Communication Devices:**

Use of cell phones and other personal computing/communication devices in the classroom beyond class parameters is discouraged. You can be asked to leave if your engagement in such practices is overly disruptive and/or distracting to other students/the instructor. Repeated offenses will affect your quiz grades. Make sure your ringers are turned off prior to entering the classroom.

**Food and Beverages:**

Food and drinks are officially prohibited in the classroom by university policy. Although I will not be policing the room, I would ask that you please eat before you come to class. You will be asked to dispose of any food items I see being eaten flagrantly and may be asked to leave if you are found consuming them during class time more than once. Beverages are okay as long as they are in a spill-proof container.

### Guidelines for In Class Presentation/Papers:

- **Presentation:** Be concise/to the point (rehearse it); how you deliver it is part of the grade
- **Paper:** 5-6 pages, 12 pt. type, double-space and APA style.
- Hard copy should be turned in on the day of the presentation
- Do not turn in a first draft. Proof read your work!

#### **Guidelines for Academic Integrity:**

It is your responsibility to refrain from violations of academic integrity, from behavior that may lead to suspicion of such violations, and from behavior that helps others in such violations.

Violating academic integrity is defined as:

**Cheating:** Intentionally and knowingly using or attempting to use unauthorized material, information, study aids, or electronic data in any academic exercise.

**Plagiarism:** Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic endeavor.

**Fabrication:** Intentional or unauthorized falsification of any information or citation in an academic endeavor

### Semester Schedule

#### **Week 1:**

**Introduction – overview of course, syllabus and requirements;**

#### **Week 3:**

**Matthew Arnold – Culture and Anarchy**

*Mass Communication: A Critical Approach (Chapter 1)*

W. James Potter: Living in the Message-Saturated World; Media Literacy Approach

Alan O'Conner: Culture as Communication

#### **Week 4:**

**Karl Marx & Frederick Engels: The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas; Base and Superstructure**

**Natalie Fenton: Bridging the Mythical Divide**

*Media Economics and the Global Marketplace (Chapter 13)*

#### **Week 5:**

**Jurgen Habermas: The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article**

The Culture of Journalism: Values, Ethics, and Democracy (Chapter 14)

Slavko Splichal & Peter Dahlgren: [Journalism between de-professionalization and Democratization](#)

Kurt Anderson: [How America Lost Its Mind:](#)

**Week 6:**

**Foucault: Panopticism**

*Movies and the Impact of Images (Chapter 7)*

James Marshall: Foucault and Education;

Film: Whiplash

**Week 7:**

**Guy Debord: Society of the Spectacle**

*Advertising and Commercial Culture (Chapter 11)*

Kristin Hearn: [Meat Mask Burdon](#); probing the contours of the branded self

**Week 8:**

**Edward Said: Orientalism: Introduction**

**Stuart Hall: Identity in Question**

Laura Cashman: New Labels No Progress: Institutional racism and the persistent segregation of Romani students in the Czech Republic

**Week 9:**

**Bourdieu: Social Capital**

Deuze: Media Life

Generation Like

*The Internet, Digital Media, and Media Convergence (Chapter 2)*

**Week 10:**

**Feminism: The Fourth Wave**

**Susanne Freimüller: Categorization in Relation to Sexual Identity**

Adrieene Shaw: Putting the Gay in Games: Cultural Production and GLBT Content in Video Games

Simona Fojtová: Contested Feminism: The East/West Feminist Encounters in the 1990s Digital Gaming and the Media Playground (Chapter 3)

**Week 11:**

**Antonio Gramsci: Three Selections**

Power and Ideology in Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci: A Comparative Analysis

Ani Bundel: Netflix's 'Altered Carbon' is a smart prestige drama that's too violent for its own good

Deepfakes and why the Future of Porn is Terrifying

Porn land: Grooming for Gonzo

**Week 12:**

**Dick Hebdige: Semiotics**

**Stuart Hall: Encoding/Decoding**

Jonathan Sterne. Sounds like the **Mall of America**: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space.

*Global Sounds;; Sound Recording and Popular Music (Chapter 4)*

- Summary/Future of Culture/Media/Theory -- Final Exam
  - o What ever happened to the public intellectual
  - o What every American should know

The keys to success for all of us regarding this course are engagement, participation, and communication. Feedback and input between and amongst us is a necessary component towards that success and can only occur if everyone is actively involved. If you have any problems, questions, concerns, etc. in relation to this course, its content, structure and/or assignments, please let me know as soon as possible so we can get them resolved. I appreciate and look forward to the opportunity to work with you this semester.