

MA Core Seminar, Fall 2014
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
New York University
MCC-GE 2001.001 MA CORE
Wed. 11:00 AM – 1:10 PM

LOCATION: East Building, Room 207

Prof. Rodney Benson

239 Greene Street, East Building, Room 722
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication, NYU
E-mail: rodney.benson@nyu.edu
Mailbox: 8th Floor, Dept. Main Office
Telephone: 212/992-9490

Office Hours: TBD

Required Books: Available for purchase at NYU Bookstore or online.

Jeffrey Alexander. 2011. *Performance and Power*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Walter Lippmann. 1997 [1922]. *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press.

Robert McChesney. 2013. *Digital Disconnect*. New York: New Press.

José Van Dijk. 2013. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Raymond Williams. 2003 [1974]. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. London:
Routledge Classics.

Other readings indicated with a * will be available as pdfs on NYU Classes.

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce MA students to the broad range of theories in media, culture, and communication. The course is loosely organized around three broad and interrelated themes: (1) Institutions and Ideological Power; (2) Culture and Meaning; and (3) Technology, with an undergirding subtheme of Policy and Activism.

We will seek to understand the complex linkages between the social structures of media industries (technological, political, economic), the meaningful cultural objects (texts and images) they produce and distribute, and the interpretations and uses people make of these texts and images. We will read theory not only as a form of critique but also as a framework for constructing and testing researchable hypotheses. Students will learn the differences among the major theoretical approaches, be able to explain the strengths and weaknesses of each, and put them into practice for their own analysis, research, and professional practice.

Course Policies

This course has four requirements: Active in-class participation; occasional reading response papers; two in-class oral presentations/short papers; and a final comparative paper. All requirements must be completed in order to pass the course.

(1) Attendance and Participation (10%)

Please inform me in advance if you will be missing class for religious observances, family emergencies, or medical problems.

You are expected to arrive on time, fully prepared to discuss the readings and participate in class discussions. The course is a collaborative, interactive seminar: please bring your experience, insight, and intelligence to our discussions.

Please bring a paper copy of the assigned reading (article or book) to the class, so that we will all be, literally, on the same page. I strongly encourage active, annotated reading practices.

Cell phone use (including texting) is not permitted in class. Laptops should only be used for note-taking. Use of laptops for email or internet surfing, unless linked to a class assignment, is not permitted: violation of this policy will negatively affect your participation grade.

(2) Short Comments (10%)

You will turn in a total of 6 short critical responses to the readings (300 words maximum, equivalent to about 1 page double spaced, either typewritten or handwritten neatly), due at the beginning of the class for that week's readings. Comments will be graded with a plus (A range -- insightful, original, evidence of close reading), check (B range -- meets requirement), or minus (C-D range -- needs more thought or effort). Everyone will turn in a short comment for the first two and last two weeks of the class; the other two required short comments are of your choice.

(3) Theory Application Presentations / Short Papers (2 x 20% = 40%)

For this assignment you will link the week's readings to current examples of media practice gleaned from your own observations or practice. The assignment consists of two parts: a) in-class presentation, illustrated with handouts or computer projections – no more than 10 minutes; and b) a followup paper of 4-5 pages (1000-1250 words) to be turned in within 5 days (normally, Monday at 5:30 p.m. of the following week).

(4) Final Comparative Paper (40%)

This 10-12 page (2500-3000 words maximum) paper should offer a close and detailed comparison of two theorists considered in the course. One theorist may be from your theory application presentation; the other theorist must be from another week's readings. The most successful comparative essays begin with a basic "problem" in media/social theory and then seek to uncover through close readings of texts both the similarities and differences in how each theorist tackles this problem. Classic problems include: How is change generated? What are the major forms of power and how do various media relate to these forms? How are individual and collective agency understood in relation to these

structures of power? Etc. I must approve topic and approach. Do not consult or cite any outside sources. This paper should be stapled and double-spaced and is due at the end of the semester.

Grading standards:

A = excellent. Outstanding work in all respects. Your papers and essays are thoroughly researched, appropriately documented, logically organized and rhetorically convincing. Your analysis is comprehensive, insightful, and original.

B = good. Your understanding of course materials is complete and thorough, and there is at least some evidence of your own critical intelligence at work. You demonstrate basic competence in research, writing and oral presentation.

C = barely adequate. Your writing is vague and incoherent or riddled with grammatical or spelling errors. You do not make proper use of source materials, and there is little depth or concreteness to your research or analysis. Your understanding of concepts and ideas is incomplete and often misguided, but there is at least some evidence that you “got” something.

D = unsatisfactory. Work exhibits virtually no understanding or even awareness of basic concepts and themes of course. Your participation has been inadequate or superficial. Either you have not been paying attention or you have not been making any effort.

F= failed. Work was not submitted or completed according to the basic parameters outlined in the course syllabus (basic requirements for page length, topical focus, types and number of sources).

Grades are calculated according to the following scale: 94-100 A; 90-93 A-; 87-89 B+; 83-86 B; 80-82 B-; 77-79 C+; 73-76 C; 70-72 C-; 67-69 D+; 63-66 D; 60-62 D-; 0-59 F

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. “Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated. Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score and/or other materials which are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: Copy verbatim from a book, an article or other media; Download documents from the Internet; Purchase documents; Report from other’s oral work; Paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis and/or conclusions; Copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.” (NYU Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity)

LATE POLICY: Response essays or Comparative essays received after the designated day and time will be downgraded. For each 24-hour period it is late, it will be downgraded one full grade (B+ to C+, etc.).

You are responsible for keeping a digital copy of all assignments.

Schedule (subject to modification): *indicates text available on NYU Classes,
indicates “Short Comment” due at beginning of class.

9.3 Introduction: What’s at Stake?

*Myra Marx Ferree, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht. 2002. “Normative Criteria for the Public Sphere.” In *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 205-231.

#9.10 Democracy and the Public: The Lippmann-Dewey Debate

Lippmann, *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press,
chs. 1, 3-8, 24, 26-28.

*John Dewey. 1922. Review of *Public Opinion*. *The New Republic* 30(3):
338-344.

Recommended:

-Brett Gary. 1993. “Modernity’s Challenge to Democracy: The Lippmann-Dewey Debate.” In R. Kroes, R.W. Rydell, and D.F.J. Bosscher, eds., *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, pp. 35-46.

#9.17 Modernity Critique

*Max Weber. 1958 [1904-5]. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. Pp. 13-31 (Introduction) and 155-183 (Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism)

*Herbert Marcuse. 1998. [1941]. “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology.” In *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Volume One*, ed. Douglas Kellner. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 41-65.

*Theodor Adorno. 1989 [1967]. “The Culture Industry Reconsidered.” In S.E. Bronner and D.M. Kellner, eds., *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 128-135.

*Martin Heidegger. 2008 [1954]. “The Question Concerning Technology.” Pp. 307-342 in *Basic Writings*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Recommended:

-Michel Foucault. 1977. *Discipline and Punish* (The body of the condemned; docile bodies; panopticism), pp. 3-31, 135-169, 195-228. New York: Vintage.

9.24 The Public Sphere: Old and New

*Jürgen Habermas. [1964] 1991. "The Public Sphere." In C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 398-404.

*Sonia Serra. 2000. "The killing of Brazilian street children and the rise of the international public sphere." In J. Curran, ed., *Media Organisations in Society*. London: Arnold, pp. 151-171.

*Yochai Benkler. 2006. *Wealth of Networks*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, excerpts.

Recommended:

-John Durham Peters. 2001. "The Problem of Communication." Pp. 1-32 in *Speaking into the Air*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Jürgen Habermas. 1989. "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society" and "Social Action and Rationality" in S. Seidman, ed., *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 77-103 and 142-164.

-Nancy Fraser. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In C. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

10.1 Critical Political Economy and Policy

McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*

Recommended:

-James Curran et al.. 2012. *Misunderstanding the Internet*. London: Routledge.

10.8 Habitus and Fields of Cultural Production and Consumption

*Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. Pp. 169-200, 260-283, 288-290, 298-301, 324-325, 334-336, 339-357, 440-453 in *Distinction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*Pierre Bourdieu, 2005. "The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field." In R. Benson and E. Neveu, eds., *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

*Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam. 2012. *A Theory of Fields*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (excerpts).

Recommended:

-Christopher A. Bail. 2012. "The Fringe Effect: Civil Society Organizations and the Evolution of Media Discourse about Islam since the September 11th Attacks," *American Sociological Review* 77, 6: 855-879.

-Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, "interview," pp. 94-140, sections on field and habitus.

-Rodney Benson. 1999. "Field theory in comparative context: a new paradigm for media studies." *Theory and Society* 28 (3): 463-498.

10.15 NO CLASS

(Makeup Class: Date TBD)

Cultural Analysis

Jeffrey Alexander. 2011. *Performance and Power*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Recommended:

-Emile Durkheim. 1912. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (Karen Fields, translator), pp. 1-18, 207-41, 242-275, and 418-448.

-Clifford Geertz. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (pp. 3-30) and "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (pp.412-453) in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

-James Carey. "A Cultural Approach to Communication." Pp. 13-36 in *Communication as Culture*. New York: Routledge.

-Michael Schudson. 1989. "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols." *Theory and Society* 18 (2): 153-80.

10.22 Audience Reception

*Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes. 1987. "Decoding Dallas: Notes from a Cross-Cultural Study." In H. Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View*. New York: Oxford University Press.

*John Fiske. 1989. "Moments of television: Neither the text nor the audience." In E. Seiter et al. (eds.), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. London: Routledge, pp. 56-78.

*Janice Radway. 1991. "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading." In C. Mukerji and M. Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

*Stuart Hall. 1980. "Encoding / Decoding." In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Routledge, pp. 128-138.

Recommended:

-David Morley. 2006. "Unanswered Questions in Audience Research." *The Communication Review* 9: 101-121.

10.29

Medium theory

*Marshall McLuhan. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (excerpts).

*Marshall McLuhan. 1995. "Playboy Interview," in E. McLuhan and F. Zingrone, eds., *Essential McLuhan*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 233-269.

*Elizabeth Eisenstein. 2005 [1983]. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (excerpts).

Recommended:

-Joshua Meyrowitz. 1994. "Medium Theory." In D. Crowley and D. Mitchell, eds., *Communication Theory Today*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 50-77.

11.5

Social Theory Responses to Medium Theory (I): Social Constructivism

Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*

*Claude S. Fischer. 1992. "Technology and Modern Life." In *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 1-31.

Comparative Paper Proposal due: 250 words (maximum): What will you compare? Why? How?**Paper meetings (Wed-Friday)**

11.12

Social Theory Responses to Medium Theory (II): Network Society

*Manuel Castells. 2000. "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, 5: 693-98.

*Manuel Castells. 2007. "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society." *International Journal of Communication* 1, 238-266.

*Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (excerpts)

Recommended:

-W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerburg. 2012. "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics." *Information, Communication & Society* 15, 5: 739-768.

11.19 **Social Theory Responses to Medium Theory (III): Actor-Network Theory**

- *Bruno Latour. 1991. "Technology is society made durable." In *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, ed. J. Law, 103–131. Routledge: London.
- *C.W. Anderson and Daniel Kreiss. 2013. "Black Boxes as Capacities for/ and Constraints on Action: Electoral Politics, Journalism, and Devices of Representation." *Qualitative Sociology* 36: 365-382.
- *Ursula Plesner. 2009. "An actor-network perspective on changing work practices: Communication technologies as actants in newswork." *Journalism* 10, 5: 604-626.

Recommended:

- Bruno Latour. 2007. *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford: OUP.
- Fred Turner. 2005. "Actor-Networking the News." *Social Epistemology* 19, 4: 321-24.
- John Law. Law, J. (2007). Actor network theory and material semiotics. Available from John Law's STS webpage, retrieved 5 November 2010, <http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2007ANTandMaterialSemiotics.pdf>.
- Gilles Deleuze. 1992. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (winter): 3-7.

#11.26 **Power and Technology in Contemporary Social Media** Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*

#12.3 **Globalization, Hybridity, and Postcolonialism**

- *James Curran and Myung-Jin Park. 2000. "Beyond Globalization Theory." Pp. 3-18 in J. Curran and M-J. Park, eds. *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. London: Routledge.
- *Joseph Straubhaar. 2010. "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity." Pp. 261-78 in D. Thussu, ed., *International Communication* (Routledge).
- *Marwan Kraidy. 2005. *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press (excerpts).
- *R. Shome and Radha Hegde. 2002. "Postcolonial Approaches to Communication." *Communication Theory* 12(3): 249-270.

Recommended:

- Arjun Appadurai. 1996. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chandra Mohanty. 1988. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30: 61-88.
- Edward Said. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, pp. 3-19, 31-97.

Final Comparative Paper DUE: Wed., 12.10.2014, 6 p.m., my mailbox, 239 Greene St., 8th Floor