

**Production of Culture in the Digital Age**  
**MCC-GE 2184.001 / SOC-GA 2072**  
**Fall 2022**

Location and Time: Tuesdays, 2-4:30 pm, EDUC building Room 1078  
Professor Rodney Benson  
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication, NYU  
239 Greene Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10003  
Office Hours: TBD

**Course Description**

This is an exciting and transformative moment for cultural production across the globe. Our goal is to lift the veil and explore the concrete making of cultural products (music, cinema, art, digital news, television dramas, etc.) by various types of individuals and organizations, working with diverse technologies, oriented toward divergent audiences. The premise of the course is that the process is not random. There are differences across organizations, worlds, networks, and/or fields (pick your framework) and these differences are consequential for the kind of culture that gets produced, which may be normatively desirable or undesirable depending on your conception(s) of excellence and the common good. What are the differences that make a difference: organizational structures and dynamics, forms of ownership and funding, government regulatory regimes, and/or the social properties of media owners, workers, and audiences? These are complex questions, and we will attempt to answer them through comparative research – implicit or explicit, across geographical regions, time periods, and institutional fields. Drawing on the latest theorizing and research in the sociology of culture and media studies, this course offers a theoretical and methodological roadmap to such a project, incorporating a range of case studies.

**Teaching / Course Objectives**

- to provide you with an understanding of the concrete working conditions and challenges that shape the production of culture across a range of cultural fields;
- to provide you with new theories to evaluate cultural excellence and explain how it gets produced (or not);
- to equip you with useful knowledge of the methods you'll need to do original research about cultural production, such as analysis of government and industry data, ethnography, in-depth interviewing, and discourse/image analysis;
- to give you an opportunity to conduct your own in-depth research project on contemporary cultural production.

**Required Books:** Purchase or Use NYU Library Ebook

Melissa Aronczyk and Maria I. Espinoza. 2022. *A Strategic Nature: Public Relations and the Politics of American Environmentalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/view/10.1093/oso/9780190055349.001.0001/oso-9780190055349>

Claudio E. Benzecry. 2022. *The Perfect Fit: Creative Work in the Global Shoe Industry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6820964>

Thomas Poell, David Nieborg, and Brooke Erin Duffy. 2022. *Platforms and Cultural Production*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Library currently only has physical copies available:

[https://bobcat.library.nyu.edu/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=nyu\\_aleph008473596&context=L&vid=NYU&lang=en\\_US&search\\_scope=all&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=all&query=any,contains,Thomas%20Poell,%20David%20Nieborg,%20and%20Brooke%20Erin%20Duffy.%202022.%20Platforms%20and%20Cultural%20Production&offset=0](https://bobcat.library.nyu.edu/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=nyu_aleph008473596&context=L&vid=NYU&lang=en_US&search_scope=all&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=all&query=any,contains,Thomas%20Poell,%20David%20Nieborg,%20and%20Brooke%20Erin%20Duffy.%202022.%20Platforms%20and%20Cultural%20Production&offset=0)

Hannah Wohl. 2021. *Bound by Creativity: How Contemporary Art is Created and Judged*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Recommended** (purchase used or new and add to your personal library):

Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Howard Becker. 2008 [1982]. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

**Pdf texts:** Available on NYU Brightspace “Resources” (indicated in schedule with \*).

**Course Assignments and Evaluation**

Evaluation of your performance in this course will center around three elements:

(1) *Active and Informed participation (10 percent of grade)*: Attendance is required. You are expected to complete all readings before class and to be able to engage in the discussion in an informed manner.

(2) *NYU Brightspace Discussion Forum Posts (20 percent of grade)*: Each week, no later than 8 pm the night prior to class, you will post a 200-250 word (MAXIMUM) critical commentary on the readings. Focus on at least two readings – in some cases, I may specify which ones are most crucial -- and touch on as many of the readings as possible.

Engage with what you consider to be the key theoretical or methodological contributions of the readings. For some weeks, I will provide discussion prompts or other guidelines. Grading will be based on informed participation as evidenced in your observations and analysis and in your comments on classmates' posts.

(3) *Critical Response Paper* (15 percent): Each person will write one in-depth critical response paper (4 pages: 1000 words) to the book or cluster of readings assigned for one class and present a 5-10 (maximum) minute critical summary (not a complete reading) of the paper during class. You will sign up for this assignment at the end of the first class session. This essay should offer a critical synthesis and analysis and develop a few key arguments supported by evidence (short citations) from the texts. Your essay should address the following issues: a) what are the primary arguments/claims, b) what *evidence* (drawing on what methods) is provided in support of the argument(s), and c) how does this work contribute to the study of the production of culture, noting any significant connections to other authors. Do not consult or cite any outside sources. The paper should be posted on NYU Brightspace by 6 p.m. the evening prior to class.

(3) *Final paper* (55 percent of final grade: 10 percent for research design assignment, 10 percent for in-class presentation, and 35 percent for final paper): In this 5,000 word paper (about 20 pp.), you will research and write a production of culture case study. Ideally, you could compare two organizations or sites of cultural production similar in many ways but which vary in at least one important variable (ownership, funding, organizational culture, audience, etc.), thus allowing you to test this variable's effects on what gets produced. However, other types of investigations are possible. This paper should a) make clear what's at stake civically or aesthetically, b) situate the research question in a live scholarly debate, c) develop and justify a research design and methodology, d) conduct preliminary research (in-depth interviews, ethnographic observations, analysis of industry/professional documents or records, network and/or content analysis, etc.), e) offer preliminary explanations for your findings, and f) reflect on the limits of your findings and directions for future research. The paper should cite at least 5 texts from the syllabus (either required or bibliography), plus 5 additional secondary sources and 10 primary sources: these are minimums. You will need to secure my approval in advance for your paper topic (including cases, research design, methods, and use of outside sources). You must turn in with your final paper copies of all primary research materials, including your notes for interviews or observations.

#### Assignments and weighting:

In-class Participation:	10%
Discussion Forum Posts:	20%
Critical Response Paper:	15%
Research Design Short Paper:	10%
Final Paper Presentation:	10%
Final Paper:	35%

### **Grading Policies**

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. This policy will be strictly enforced. "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 of Education Statement on Academic Integrity)

### Assignments:

1) must be turned in on-time: unless excused, late assignments may be down-graded; 2) must have your name at the top of the page; 3) must have all pages numbered. You are responsible for keeping a digital copy of all assignments.

### 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 and sound, as well as creative 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 engaged with the course. A C grade for a graduate student is a sign of substantial underperformance and is cause for concern.

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 and any additional information provided about assignments (basic requirements for page length, topical focus, types and number of primary and secondary sources, deadlines).

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

**Schedule** (subject to revision):

\* indicates texts available through NYU Brightspace

## 9.6

### 1 Introductions / What's at Stake / Defining Excellence

-Bring to the first class an example of an "excellent" media/cultural product (however you define it)

**For Future Reading (not for first class):**

\*David Hesmondhalgh. 2017. "Capitalism and the media: moral economy, well-being and capabilities." *Media, Culture & Society* 39 (2): 202-18.

\*Myra Marx Ferree, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht. 2002. "Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies." *Theory and Society* 31: 289-324.

\*Williams, Bruce and Michael X. Delli Carpini. 2011. "Shaping a New Media Regime." In *After Broadcast News*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

## 9.13

### 2 Capitalism / Hegemony

\*Des Freedman. 2015. "Paradigms of Media Power." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8 (2): 273-89.

\*Raymond Williams. 1981. *The Sociology of Culture*, pp. 33-117 (chs. 2-4, "Institutions," "Formations," and "Means of Production"). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\*Raymond Williams. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 108-14 (ch. 6, "Hegemony"). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

\*Todd Gitlin. 2004. *The Whole World is Watching*, pp. 1-77, 249-82.

## 9.20

### 3 Fields, Institutional Logics, Orders of Worth

\*Pierre Bourdieu. 1980. "The production of belief: contribution to an economy of symbolic goods." *Media, Culture and Society* 2: 261-93.

\*Patricia H. Thornton, William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury. 2012. *The Institutional Logics Perspective*, pp. 1-18, 50-75 (chs. 1 & 3). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

\*Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. 1999. "The Sociology of Critical Capacity." *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (3): 359-77.

**Recommended:**

\*Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant. 1992. "Fields" and "Habitus" in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\*Tyler Leeds. 2022. "The Journalistic Field in the Platform Economy: The New York Times and the Inverted Pyramid." *Social Problems*, pp. 1-20, doi.org/10.1093.

## 9.27

**4 Worlds, Actor-Networks, Interaction Rituals, Production of Culture Perspective**

\*Howard Becker. 2008 [1982]. *Art Worlds*, preface, chs. 1-2, and afterword.

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

\*Bruno Latour. 1990. "Technology is Society Made Durable." *The Sociological Review* 38: 103-31.

\*Randall Collins. 1998. "Coalitions in the Mind" (chapter 1), pp. 19-53 in *The Sociology of Philosophies*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press.

\*Richard Peterson and N. Anand. 2004. "The production of culture perspective." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 311-34.

## 10.4

**5 De-Centering the Global North**

*Class Visit for Q&A: James Siguru Wahutu*

\*James Siguru Wahutu, *African Journalism* (book-in-progress), selected chapters

\*Francis Nyamnjoh. "Reporting and writing Africa in a world of unequal encounters," chapter 5 in M. Bunce et al., eds., *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 2016.

\*Bellarmine Ezumah. 2019. "De-Westernizing African Journalism Curriculum through Glocalization and Hybridization." *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 74 (4): 452-67.

\*Fackson Banda. 2008. "African Political Thought as an Epistemic Framework for Understanding African Media." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 29 (1): 79-99.

\*Julian Go. 2013. "For a Postcolonial Sociology." *Theory and Society* 42: 25-55.

**10.11 NO CLASS (Fall 'Legislative' Day)****10.12 ASSIGNMENT DUE: 250 word paper proposal**

## 10.18

**6 Platforms and 'Amateur' Cultural Producers**

Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy, *Platforms and Cultural Production*, selected chapters.

\*Stuart Cunningham and David Craig, eds. 2021. *Creator Culture*, selected chapters. New York: NYU Press.

**10.25****7 Cross-National Comparisons**

\*Angèle Christin. 2018. "Counting Clicks: Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France." *American Journal of Sociology* 123, 5: 1382-1415.

\*Elena Raviola. 2022. *Organizing Independence: Negotiations between Journalism and Management in News Organizations*, selected chapters. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

\*Rodney Benson, Timothy Neff, Mattias Hessérus, and Julie Sedel. *How Media Ownership Matters*. Oxford University Press, in press, chs. 1, 4-5.

**11.1****8 Inequalities and Representations**

\*Karim Hammou. 2016. "Mainstreaming French rap music: Commodification and artistic legitimation of Othered cultural goods." *Poetics* 59: 67-81.

\*Murali Balaji. 2009. "Why do good girls have to be bad? The cultural industry's production of the other and the complexities of agency." *Popular Communication* 7 (4): 225-36.

\*Anamik Saha. 2011. "Negotiating the third space: British Asian independent record labels and the cultural politics of difference." *Popular Music and Society* 34(4): 437-54.

\*Aymar Jean Christian. 2019. "Beyond Branding: The Value of Intersectionality on Streaming TV Channels." *Television & New Media* 21 (5): 457-74.

\*Reece Peck. 2019. *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class*, ch. 3. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

**11.8****9 Globalization Case Study: Global Cultural Production of Shoes**

*Class Visit for Q&A: Claudio Benzecry*

Benzecry, *The Perfect Fit: Creative Work in the Global Shoe Industry*

**11.11 (Friday) ASSIGNMENT DUE: 1,000 word Research Design** (Preliminary Research Questions, Cases, Samples, Methods, Lit Review)

**11.15****10 Historical Research: Public Relations and Environmental Activism**

*Class Visit for Q&A: Melissa Aronczyk*

Aronczyk and Espinoza, *A Strategic Nature: Public Relations and the Politics of American Environmentalism*

**11.22 Contemporary Visual Art**  
**11** Wohl, *Bound by Creativity*

**11.29**

**12 Research Workshop: In-Depth Interviewing**

\*Pierre Bourdieu. 2000. "Understanding." In *The Weight of the World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

\*Sherry Ortner. 2010. "Access: Reflections on studying up in Hollywood." *Ethnography* 11, 2: 211-33.

\*Robert Mikecz. 2012. "Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues." *Qualitative Inquiry* 18(6): 482-93.

\*Michele Lamont and Ann Swidler. 2014. "Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing." *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2).

**12.6**

**13 Student Presentations**

**12.13**

**14 Student Presentations**

**\*Final Paper due 1 week after last week, end of day 12.20\***



## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Theory

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- Becker, Howard S. 1976. "Art Worlds and Social Types." *American Behavioral Scientist* 19 (6): 703-718.
- Benkler, Yochai. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks*. New Haven: Yale.
- Benson, Rodney. 2006. "News Media as a 'Journalistic Field': What Bourdieu adds to New Institutionalism, and Vice Versa." *Political Communication* 23 (2): 187-202.
- Bottero, W. and N. Crossley. 2011. "Worlds, Fields and Networks." *Cultural Sociology* 5 (1): 99-119.
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- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *The Rules of Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2005. "The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field." In R. Benson & E. Neveu, eds., *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- David Hesmondhalgh. 2006. "Bourdieu, the Media, and Cultural Production." *Media, Culture & Society* 28(2): 211-23.
- Hesmondhalgh, David. 2019. *The Cultural Industries*. London: Sage, Fourth Edition.
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- Hesmondhalgh, David, and Anamik Saha. 2013. "Race, Ethnicity, and Cultural Production." *Popular Communication* 11: 179-195.
- Law, John. 1992. "Notes on the theory of the actor-network: Ordering, strategy, and heterogeneity." *Systems Practice* 5(4): 379-393.
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### Methodology

- Benson, Rodney, Mark Blach-Ørsten, Matthew Powers, Ida Willig, and Sandra Vera Zambrano. 2012. "Media Systems Online and Off: Comparing the Form of News in the United States, Denmark, and France." *Journal of Communication* 62: 21-38.

- Benson, Rodney and Tim Wood. 2015. "Who Says What or Nothing at All? Speakers, Frames, and Frameless Quotes in Unauthorized Immigration News in the United States, Norway, and France." *American Behavioral Scientist* 59, 7: 802-821.
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- Ganti, Tejaswini. 2014. "The Value of Ethnography." *Media Industries* 1, 1: 16-20.
- Hallin, Daniel. 1993. "From Vietnam to El Salvador: Hegemony and ideological change." In *We Keep America on Top of the World*. London: Routledge.
- Jerolmack, Colin and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2): 178-209.
- Lamont, Michele, and Ann Swidler. 2014. "Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing." *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2).
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- Powers, Matthew, and Sandra Vera-Zambrano. 2018. "The Universal and the Contextual of Media Systems: Research Design, Epistemology, and the Production of Comparative Knowledge." *International Journal of Press/Politics* 23, 2: 143-160.
- Mikecz, Robert. 2012. "Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues." *Qualitative Inquiry* 18(6): 482-93.
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### **Amateur/Peer Digital Production**

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2012. *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: NYU Press.
- Benkler, Yochai, and Helen Nissenbaum. 2006. "Commons-based Peer Production and Virtue," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 14(4): 394-419.
- Carah, Nicholas and Michelle Shaul. 2016. "Brands and Instagram: Point, tap, swipe, glance," *Mobile Media & Communication* 4(1): 69-84.
- Cunningham, Stuart and David Craig. 2019. *Social Media Entertainment: The New Intersection of Hollywood and Silicon Valley*. New York: NYU Press.
- Duffy, Brooke Duffy. 2018. *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. 2013. *Spreadable Media*. New York: NYU Press.
- Marwick, Alice. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity & Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

### Book Publishing

- Childress, Clayton. 2017. *Under the Cover*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Thompson, John. 2012. *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Plume.

### Film

- Ganti, Tejaswini. 2012. *Producing Bollywood*. Duke University Press.
- Lauzen, Martha M. 2012. "Where are the film directors (who happen to be women)?" *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29(4): 310-319.
- Lopes, Paul. 2019. *Art Rebels: Race, Class, and Gender in the Art of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ortner, Sherry. 2013. *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

### Journalism and the Public Sphere

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- Public Discourse in Progressive Communities*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
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### **Music**

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### **Software / Videogames / Platforms**

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