



INSTEP-WFU London

MEDIA, SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

“We cannot evade media presence, media representation. We have come to depend on our media, both printed and electronic, for pleasure and information, for comfort and security, for some sense of the continuities of experience, and from time to time also for the intensities of experience.” (Silverstone, *Why Study the Media?* 1999, pp. 1-2).

Much hype surrounds the media: their liberating and empowering potential, their educational role and their responsibility for true public deliberation, their overwhelming presence in our lives and their irresistible seductiveness. Yet, at the same time, suspicion and criticism of the media are growing. Television is often accused of “dumbing down” culture, of offering nothing but poor entertainment, escapism and diversion, rather than creating a meaningful, critical public debate. Global media corporations are depicted as the new missionaries of capitalism and cultural imperialism, promoting commercial values while denigrating journalism and culture. The Internet is said to increase levels of loneliness and erode any sense of community. Facebook and other social media platforms are said to have blurred traditional boundaries between public and private and create new forms of sociability. The global coverage of suffering is seen to create “compassion fatigue” and alienation. The media are sexist, we are told. And so on and so forth. In short, the media have a pervasive social presence that deserves close scrutiny, and media literacy is now as significant as traditional literacy.

The goal of the proposed course is to offer theoretical tools for thinking critically about the media, by analysing its relationship with social, cultural, historical, political and economic processes and structures. It will examine the centrality, power and influence of media as institutions, industries, representations and technologies.

The course will examine key theoretical debates concerning media and communications: Frankfurt School’s critique of the “culture industries” and its implications for media power, the role of the media in the creation and sustainment of a public sphere, the implications of social media for personal and social life, gender and the media, and the ethical and moral impact of the media in today’s culture and society.

Course Structure

This course will consist of seminar discussions. There will be readings assigned for each week, which students will be expected to have done all before the class (see below). For some of the classes, students will have to prepare a 10-15 minutes class presentations based on the assigned readings, as indicated below (see 'Requirement for class' section). Students are encouraged to show examples of media materials in their presentations (e.g. video clips, advertisements, newspaper articles etc.). Class presentations will be marked and count toward the course's final grade.

The final grade is calculated as follows:

Class presentations: 20%

First essay: 40%

Second essay: 40%

Key Texts

Silverstone, R. *Why Study the Media?* (1999).

Assessment and submission deadlines

Students are required to prepare **class presentations** and write **two essays of not less than 2,500 words each.**

The first paper is due on TBC and should be submitted to the teacher at the beginning of the seminar.

The first essay should address one of the following questions:

1. How useful is Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industries for the analysis of contemporary media? Give specific examples to support your argument.
2. Critically discuss the symbolic process of Othering in the media, focusing on specific contemporary examples of race, racism and the media.
3. To what extent do contemporary media representations challenge gender stereotypes? Refer in your answer to current examples.

The final paper is due no later than **TBC** and should be submitted to your teacher and the INSTEP London office.

The final essay should address one of the following questions:

1. Is quitting social media the solution for overcoming the problems they entail? If so, why? If not, what alternative solutions are there?
2. Is celebrity culture dumbing down our culture?
3. The relationship between Trump and the media has deep historical roots while at the same time it is characterized by important discontinuities. Drawing on the discussion in the book *Trump and the Media*, critically discuss one continuity and one discontinuity.

Course Outline

Seminar 1

Introduction: Why study the media?

Deuze, M. (2011). Media life. *Media Culture & Society*, 33(1): 137-148.

Livingstone, Sonia (2009) On the mediation of everything: ICA presidential address 2008. *Journal of communication*, 59 (1). pp. 1-18.

Available at:

[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21420/1/On_the_mediation_of_everything_\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21420/1/On_the_mediation_of_everything_(LSERO).pdf)

Seminar 2

Media and Power: The Frankfurt School Critique and Symbolic Power

1. Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M (1972) *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception in Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Seabury Press, pp. 120-167. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>

2. Thompson, J. B. Action, Power and Communication, in Thompson, J. (1995) *The Media and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, pp. 12-18.

Requirement for the class:

Does Frankfurt School's critique still apply today and how useful is the concept of symbolic power for today's media environment?

Seminar 3

Media, the Other and Racism

1. Silverstone, R. (1999). Chapter 15 'The Other' (pp. 134-142), in *Why Study the Media?*

2. Hall, S. (1997) Chapter 4 'The Spectacle of the Other' (pp.223-279), in Hall, S. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.

3. Hall, S. (1990) The Whites of Their Eyes: racist ideologies and the media. In Alvarado, M. and Thompson, J. (eds) *The Media Reader*. London: BFI.

4. White People: Shut Up about Beyonce: <https://bittergertrude.com/2016/02/08/white-people-shut-up-about-beyonce/>

Requirement for the class:

Each student will have to prepare a 10 minutes presentation on one of the readings.

Seminar 4

Media, Gender and Feminism

1. Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity. Chapter 3: Advertising and postfeminism (pp. 73-112).
2. Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). Popular feminism: #MeToo, *LA Review of Books*, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/popular-feminism-metoo/>
3. Rottenberg, C. (2018). How neoliberalism colonised feminism – and what you can do about it. *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/how-neoliberalism-colonised-feminism-and-what-you-can-do-about-it-94856>

Requirement for the class:

Each student has to present two examples of gender representation, the first demonstrating or challenging the discussion in Rosalind Gill's chapter (Reading 1), Banet-Weiser's (Reading 2) and Rottenberg's (Reading 3).

Seminar 5

Media and protest

Cottle, S. (2011) Transnational Protests and the Media: New Departures, Challenging Debates. In: S. Cottle and L. Lester *Transnational Protests and the Media*. New York: Peter Lang.

Mendes, K. (2014). 'Our Clothes is Not Our Consent': SlutWalk, Feminism and News' <https://ira.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/31628/2/Mendes%20-%20SlutWalk%20and%20Feminism.pdf>

Requirement for the class:

To what extent and in what ways the arguments made in the readings about protest and the news media apply to current examples of protest (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Occupy, Metoo, etc.)?

Seminar 6

Media Representations of Suffering and Migration

1. Cohen, S. (2001). Chapter 7: Images of Suffering (pp. 168-195), in *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge: Polity.
2. Orgad, S. (2012). Chapter 4: Imagining possible lives: Representations of migration, in *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity.

Requirement for the class:

In this class we will examine current examples of media representation of distant suffering and migration. Each student is required to bring two recent examples, one of a representation of a humanitarian disaster and one of a representation of refugees or migrant, and analyse them in class in light of the arguments made in the readings.

Seminar 7

Celebrity Culture

1. Turner, G. (2014). Chapter 4: 'Celebrity, the tabloid and the democratic public sphere' (pp. 78-95), in *Understanding Celebrity* (second edition). London: Sage.
2. Littler, J. (2017). In Toby Miller (ed) *Routledge Companion to Global Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Requirement for the class:

In pairs, prepare a 10-15 presentation of the representation of a particular celebrity, drawing on the arguments in one or more of the readings.

Seminar 8

Social media and surveillance capitalism

1. Fuchs, C (2017). Facebook: Surveillance in the age of Edward Snowden. In: *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2nd Edition), pp. 183-216.
2. Cobbe, J. (2018). The problem isn't just Cambridge Analytica or Facebook – it's "surveillance capitalism". *Open Democracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/jennifer-cobbe/problem-isn-t-just-cambridge-analytica-or-even-facebook-it-s-surveillance-capitali>
3. Schneier, B. (2015). How we sold our souls – and more – to the internet giants. *Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/may/17/sold-our-souls-and-more-to-internet-giants-privacy-surveillance-bruce-schneier>

Seminar 9

The social and psychological consequences of new media

1. Turkle, S. (2012). Chapter 9 'Growing up tethered' (pp. 171-186), in *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from ourselves*. New York: Basic Books.
2. <http://www.psmag.com/nature-and-technology/i-have-never-had-an-original-thought>

Seminar 10

Trump and the media

Boczkowski P. and Papacharissi, Z. (2018). *Trump and the Media*. Boston: MIT Press.

For this session, each student has to choose two chapters from a different section in the book *Trump and the Media* and present them in class.

Seminar 11

Conclusion and supervision

In this final session we will review the course themes and look at the essay questions. Please prepare questions related to any of the topics that we have discussed and/or the essay questions.