

COURSE INFORMATION:

Media Narratives
Instructor: Scott Herndon
Office: JO 3.210
Phone: extension 4806
Email: scott.herndon@utdallas.edu
Office Hours: T-R 12-2, by appointment

CLASS DESCRIPTION:

We listen to the radio on the way to work or to the mall, “unwind” with the television and retrieve sports scores with our cell phones. What we don’t think about as we do these every day tasks are the role they play in defining our culture and indeed our very identity. The goal of this class is to move students from the real of passive observer to that of active participant in our mediated reality.

This IS NOT a lecture class- it is a seminar. I expect you to read, have opinions, ask question and engage not just the material and the instructor but also each other. Come prepared or face the Tick!

TEXTS AND READINGS:

Holtzman, Linda. Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation. ME Sharp. 2000.

I’m not going to lie to you folks....we will read a little in this class. In addition to the text we will read a number of scholarly articles, as well as make use of the internet and view several films.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are no tests in this class. Instead we will focus on discussion, various exercises and a series of written papers to explore various aspects of our mediated reality. Some writing will be short, in-class writing on a suggested topic, others will be longer analytical papers. These assignments are described below.

1. **Short writings (150 points)** – 1-2 page papers written in-class on a given subject. There are five “scheduled” writings and two “pop-writings.” Each short paper is worth 25 points. Students will keep their best 6 grades for these assignments.
2. **Critical essays (400 points)** – Early in the semester you will select an artifact that will become the basis for ALL of your critical essays. There are four critical essays, each one focusing on your artifact through the lens of four critical methods (narrative criticism, perspective by incongruity, genre analysis and media ecology). Each essay is worth 100 points.
3. **Final essay & presentation (250 points)** – This assignment is an extension of your previous essays with a few extra sections that tie your research into one cohesive final work of criticism (think of it as a paper about your artifact in four chapters). These additional sections include an abstract, introduction where you justify the study of your artifact, discuss its cultural and historical relevance and a concluding section that ties your work together and provides closure and conclusions.
4. **Media journal (150 points)** – Beginning the first day of class student will keep a journal of their media exposure, thoughts, innovations, musing, etc. Students should have at least one entry per week the course meets.
5. **Identizine (75 points)** – Students will construct the front page of their own style magazine. More interesting and fun than it sounds in one sentence.
6. **Culture Jam (100 points)** – Students will create and perform an original culture jam.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, January 10 – Course Introduction (1)

Topics:

Course Introduction
Review of Syllabus, Class Procedures and Assignments
Assign Media Journal and Artifact Selection

Thursday, January 12 - The Situationist International, Humor and Resistance (2)

Topics:

The Situationist, consumerism, media and culture
The politics of pie

Read:

Debord, Guy. "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Condition of Organization and Action." Situationist International June 1957.
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html>.

Cox, Ana Marie. "The Medium is the Meringue." *Mother Jones*, March-April 1999.

Vanderford, Audrey. "Speaking Pie to Power." Darkwing, University of Oregon. 2000.
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~audreylv/Pranks/pie.htm>.

Activities:

How would a Situationist respond?

Tuesday, January 17 - Culture Jamming (or, what's more real than reality?) (3)

Topics:

Interpreting and re-interpreting mediated signs
The Biotic Baking Brigade and Ad Busters as media criticism?

Read:

Dery, Mark. "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs." Open Magazine Pamphlet, 1993.

Eco, Umberto. "Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare." *Travels in Hyper-reality* Trans: William Weaver. Harcourt, New York. 1986, 135-145.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Stanford University Press. 1998. 166-184.

Lloyd, Jan. Culture Jamming: Semiotic Banditry in the Streets." University of Canterbury, Department of Cultural Studies. 2003. <http://www.cult.canterbury.ac.nz/cult/Jan%20Lloyd%20research%20cultjam.htm>.

Activities:

Ad-Busters, Biotic Baking Brigade

Thursday, January 19 – Culture Jamming Continued (4)

Activities:

Viewing of film: *Culture Jam*

Tuesday, January 24 Culture Jamming (5)

Due:

Culture Jam Projects/Discussion

Thursday, January 26 - Critical Writing Skills and the Role of the Critic (6)

Topics:

The role of the critic
Writing the critical essay, expectations, form, etc.
Artifact selection revisited

Read:

Foss, Sonja. "Doing a Rhetorical Criticism" Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practices. Ed: Sonja Foss. Waveland Press. 1996. 399-477.

Ivie, Robert. "Productive Criticism."

Activities:

In-class Writing # 1: "What is the role of the critic in media criticism?"

Due:

Artifact Selection

Tuesday, January 31 - Storytelling, Democracy and Media (7)

Topics:

Homo narrans and the logic of good reasons

Read:

Fisher, Walter. "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument." Communication Monographs 51 (1984): 1-22.

Herman, David. "Toward a Trans-Media Narratology." Narrative Across Media. Ed. Marie-Laure Ryan. University of Nebraska Press. 2004. 47-75.

Rivera, Roberto. "Elves, Wookies and Fanboys: Star Wars and Our Need for Stories." Boundless Webzine. 1999. <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citmla.htm>.

Thursday, February 2 – More than Stories (8)

Topics:

Practicing Narrative Criticism
Pictorial Narrativity – At the Limits of Narrative?

Read:

Steiner, Wendy. "Pictorial Narrativity." Narrative Across Media. Ed. Marie-Laure Ryan. University of Nebraska Press. 2004. 145-177

Foss, Sonja. "Narrative Criticism." Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practices. Ed: Sonja Foss. Waveland Press. 1996. 399-477.

Activities:

Studying Stories (Narrative or Narrativity?)

Tuesday, February 7 - Telling Stories About Class (9)

Activities:

Viewing of Film: *Roger and Me*

Thursday, February 9 – No Class Today (11)

Activities:

Viewing of Film: *Roger and Me*

In-Class Writing # 2

Tuesday, February 14 – Swiss Cheese & Gender (12)

Topics:

Perspective by Incongruity

What does Disney teach us about gender?

Assign Identizine

Read:

Inge, Thomas M. "Walt Disney's Snow White: Art, Adaptation and Ideology." Journal of Popular Film & Television (2002): 132-142.

Levasseur, David G. "Edifying Arguments and Perspective by Incongruity: The Perplexing Argumentation Method of Kenneth Burke." *Argumentation and Advocacy*. 29:4 (1993).

Due:

Narrative Criticism

Thursday, February 16 – Madonna & Gender (or the politics of dancing) (13)

Topics:

Performative Identity & Gender

Gender through the lens of popular culture: Music Videos

Read:

Butler, Judith. "Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex." New York: Routledge. 1993.

Ristry, Reena. "Madonna and Gender Trouble." *Theory UK Online*. 2000.

<http://www.theory.org.uk/madonna.htm>.

Activities:

Paris is Burning Clips / Discussion

Tuesday, February 21 – Dreamworlds (14)

Activities:

Viewing of Film: *Dreamworlds*

Thursday, February 23 - Dreamworlds (15)

Activities:

Discuss Film

In-class writing #3: Reaction to *Dreamworlds*

Tuesday, February 28 – Identizines (16)

Activities:

Identizines Due / Discussion

Thursday, March 2 – Identizines Continued (17)

Spring Break March 6 – 11 NO CLASS

Tuesday, March 14 – Introduction to Genre (17)

Topics:

Genre, the good the bad and the misplaced
Basics of generic criticism

Read:

Foss, Sonja. "Generic Criticism" Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practices. Ed: Sonja Foss. Waveland Press. 1996. 483-531.

McDowell, Matt. "What Choice? Subculture Films, Naturalization, and the Post-Modern Condition."
Washington State University. No date given. <http://www.creighton.edu/~spoko/subculture/index.html>.

Due:

Perspective by Incongruity

Thursday, March 16 – Genre, Reality TV and Spectacle (18)

Topics:

(Re) interpreting Genre – TV Reality and the allure of spectacle

Read:

Freeland, Cynthia. "Ordinary Horror on Reality TV." Narrative Across Media. Ed. Marie-Laure Ryan. University of Nebraska Press. 2004. 244-276.

Christensen, Christian. "Tsunamis and Death-Toll Pornography." Common Dreams News Center. December, 29. 2004. <http://www.commondreams.org/views04/1229-10.htm>.

Activities:

Viewing of 'Cops' / Discussion

Tuesday, March 21 - Genre and Exclusion (19)

Topics:

Homosexuality in the media
Dealing with inclusion/exclusion in genre

Read:

Quimby, Karin. "Will and Grace" Negotiating (Gay) Marriage on Prime-Time TV." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 38:4 (2005): 713-731.

Yosso, Tara J. "Critical Race: Challenging Deficit Discourse about Chicanas/os." *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*. Summer (2002): 52-62.

Activities:

Pop journalism and gay marriage – bring a newspaper or magazine article taking a position on gay marriage.

Thursday, March 23 - Intersections (20)

Activities:

Viewing of Film: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

Tuesday, March 28 - Intersections (21)

Activities:

Viewing of Film: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*
In-class Writing #4

Thursday, March 30 – Catch Up Day (22)

Due:

Genre

Tuesday, April 4 – The Mediated Environment (23)

Topics:

What is Media Ecology?

Read:

Heise, Ursula K. "Unnatural Ecologies: The Metaphor of the Environment in Media Theory." *Configurations*. 10:1 (2002): 149-168.

Virilio, Paul. "Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!" *CT Theory Net*. August 27, 1995.
http://www.cttheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=72.

Activities:

Envelope Reports

Thursday, April 6 – Bowling Alone (24)

Topics:

Civic participation and media

Read:

Putnam, Robert. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy*. 6:1 (1995): 65-78.

Activities:

In-class Writing # 5

Tuesday, April 11 – Cell phone, Ecosystem or Both? (25)

Topics:

Digital environments

Read:

Strate, Lance. "The Cell Phone as Environment." *Explorations in Media Ecology*. 2:1 (2003).

Aarseth, Espen. "Quest Games as Post-Narrative Discourse." *Narrative Across Media*. Ed. Marie-Laure Ryan. University of Nebraska Press. 2004. 361-376.

April 13, 18, 20 (Plus, Day of Final)

Final Presentations