

COM 327: Critical Approaches to Communications Media
Condensed course syllabus
January 8, 2013

Overview

When:

Spring 2013

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30-2:45

Where:

Caldwell Hall, G108

Instructor:

Dr. Nicholas Taylor

Assistant Professor of Digital Media

Department of Communication, NCSU

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Office: 225 Winston Hall

Office hours available upon request

Teaching assistant:

Emily McKeown

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Office hours are 45 minutes after class, Tuesdays & Thursdays

The course website, at <http://com327ncsu.wordpress.com>, has the most up-to-date info.

Description

"We drive into the future using only our rear view mirror" (Marshall McLuhan)

"Report: 90% of Waking Hours Spent Staring at Glowing Rectangles" (The Onion)

Communications media not only affect how we send and receive messages; they alter the ways we view, think about, talk about, and move through the world. They shape how we relate to, (mis)understand, and share experiences with each other. Media make us.

Building on the theoretical foundations developed in COM 250 and on the research methods surveyed in COM 240, COM 327 provides students in the Communication Media Concentration with more in-depth

understandings of some important theories and perspectives developed in and for the critical analyses of media.

Throughout the course, we will engage with key critical approaches to communications media -- including political economy, surveillance studies, cultural studies, feminism, queer theory, post-colonialism, and critical ethnography -- in order to explore some of the defining characteristics of our technologically-mediated society. Throughout, we will explore what all these "critical" approaches have in common: each offers us ways of understanding how our experiences with communications media are shaped by institutions, policies, ideas, and interests that are often invisible to us in our day-to-day lives. The course will include a combination of lecture, discussion of media clips and artifacts, and in-class activities carried out in small groups. Emphasis will be on the use of digital media as not just objects of critical analysis, but as tools for producing and sharing critical analyses.

The basic format of the course is by units: each unit focuses on a specific theme and uses a particular critical theory / approach to explore that theme.

Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be capable of the following:

- Identify and compare different critical approaches to communications media;
- Have a greater appreciation for the role of media industries in shaping our everyday lives;
- Be able to interpret (and appreciate) media texts, from games to film to tweets, using critical theoretical perspectives;
- Understand and articulate the communicational affordances and constraints of different media technologies;
- Formulate and carry out your own 'critical making' project.

Coursework

See the website for an extended breakdown of these assignments.

Participation & quizzes: 15 marks

Each class will begin with a quiz based on the readings. Come to every class and do all the readings for the highest mark.

Portfolio assignment #1 (due Jan. 22): 10 marks

“Go Meta”. Compare 2 articles, from different critical approaches, that deal with the same franchise.

Portfolio assignment #2 (due Feb. 26): 10 marks

“Power Map”. Conduct a (small-scale) political economic study of a media franchise, using Prezi.

Group presentation: 10 marks

In groups of 3, deliver a 15-minute presentation focusing on 1 article from that day’s readings.

Mid-term (in class on Feb 28): 15 marks

Choose 1 from 4 possible questions and write an essay-form response to it.

Final project: 40 marks

Work in pairs to make a multimedia text. It should make use of course themes/readings to explore how communications media and media industries shape our lives.

Proposal evaluations (in class on January 31): 5%

Come to class with a 2-page proposal for your final project. Review 2 other project proposals.

Presentations (in class on April 23 & 25): 5%

Each pair will present their final project. Presentations should be no longer than FIVE minutes!

Write-up (due May 9): 10%

Write a report (minimum 7 pages) that provides the background to your multimedia text.

Final product (due May 2): 20%

Schedule

Links to all readings are available at <http://com327ncsu.wordpress.com/com-327-schedule/>.
You are responsible for reading each of the articles/pieces before that day's class.

January 8-15: Theoretical Foundations

January 8: Introductions

January 10: Communication as Culture

January 15: "New" Media

January 17-29: Identity and Representation

January 17: Reading Culture

January 22: Cinema and the Gaze

Portfolio Assignment #1: Go Meta is due by midnight!!

January 24: Colonialism and Imperialism

January 29: Playing with Ourselves

January 31: Peer Review of Final Project Proposals

February 5 - 7: The Surveillance Society

February 5: Watching me watching you

February 7: "I agree"

February 12 - 21: Globalization, Ownership & the New Media Industries

February 12: Political Economy and Mass Media

February 14: Working for Play

February 19: Global Haves and Have-nots

February 21: Let's be Friends

Guest lecture by Emily McKeown, TA for COM 327

February 26-28: Review & Midterm

February 26: Midterm review

Assignment #2: Power Map due before midnight on Tuesday, February 26!

February 28: Midterm

Midterm will be written in class on Thursday, February 28!

March 5-7: Spring Break!

March 12-19: Copyright and Production

March 12: Ownership and Appropriation

March 14: Piracy

Guest lecture by Christopher Kampe, PhD student in the CRDM program!

March 19: Owning Play

March 21-26: Media and the Military

March 21: Covering War

March 26: Wargames

March 28: Spring Holiday

April 2-18: Cybercitizenship

April 2: 4Chan: Forum and Function

April 4: Misogyny and Homophobia Online

April 9: Identity and Online Gaming

April 11

Guest Lecture by TL Taylor, for Com Week!

April 16: Activism On & Offline

April 18: Activism On & Offline cont'd

April 23 & 25: Final Presentations!

May 2: Final Projects due!

May 9: Final Project write-ups due!