New York University
Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Interdisciplinary Seminar:
This Mediated Life,
An Introduction to Media Studies
IDSEM-UG 1752-001
Fall 2013
194 Mercer, Room 207
Thursday 6:20 – 9:00 p.m.

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Office Hours: Thursday 4 – 6 p.m. and by appointment
1. Course Description:
This interdisciplinary seminar will provide an intensive and comprehensive introduction to the study of mass media. Utilizing wide ranging critical and theoretical methodologies, the course will consider how media alternately reflects and forms our sense of politics, economics, class, race, gender, sexuality and citizenship. The course will be concerned with questions such as: What function does mass media serve for society? How does a media saturated cultural environment shape our sense of ourselves? Through which processes does media produce a way to perceive the world, our identity and the social order? How do media texts socialize us into perceiving our society, its structures and institutions? How do mass media forms delineate, disseminate and naturalize prevailing social and political ideologies and ways of seeing the world? In what manner might media provide a means to challenge cultural and political hegemony? Readings will be drawn from Berger’s *Media Analysis Techniques*, Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture*, Levinson’s *New New Media* as well as the anthologies *The Media Studies Reader* and *Gender, Race and Class in the Media* and the course will include excerpts from the films *The Dark Knight*, *The Matrix*, *The Truman Show*, and *Wag the Dog*, television shows *60 Minutes*, *Family Guy*, *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *The X-Files*, radio programs *Amos ‘N Andy*, *Burns and Allen*, *This American Life* and *The War of the Worlds*, as well as a selection of other media forms, including blogs, graphic novels, newspapers, magazines, music videos, social media sites and video games.

2. Course Objectives:
The course has several objectives:
   a. To provide a broad and critical introduction to the study of mass media, popular culture and emerging digital media.
   b. To provide students with a comprehensive introduction to many of the influential theories associated with the study of mass media.
   c. To provide students with tools to enable their critical consumption and production of mass media texts and technologies.
   d. To provide students with methodologies for situating mass media products and technologies within a broad historical, cultural and ideological context.
3. Required Texts:
Ouelette, Laurie *The Media Studies Reader* New York: Routledge, 2011

Reserve Articles as indicated on the syllabus. Articles will be available through the Reserve Readings desk at Bobst Library.

4. Required Assignments:
Please be advised that the reading load for this course is quite heavy, though the number of assignments will vary from week to week. Even though discussions may not draw on the reading directly, it is imperative that you complete them in a timely manner. The variety and range of readings are deliberately designed to enhance your understanding of the films and the topic of each weekly class.
Readings due for a given week are to be done before the class meets. Additional readings may be assigned during the semester and placed on reserve in Bobst Library or on the course’s NYU Classes site.

Writing Policies and Requirements:
There are two types of papers for this course: short response journal entries and essay length papers. Please be advised that you must submit your work in person; papers sent via email or posted through the course NYU Classes site cannot be accepted!

Essay Assignments:
1. Short “Response” Papers:
   Each week, beginning with the second, the student will be asked to submit a “response” to a question posted by the instructor to the course NYU Classes Site. You will be asked to do one of the following: provide your interpretation or view of an assigned reading, or to apply the theory advanced by a given author to a film, TV Show or other cultural artifact you have seen or has been screened in class.

   These responses are to be three - four pages in length and will be collected each week at the beginning of class. They are not meant to be scholarly essays or research papers – they are merely your personal reactions to the instructor’s question or suggestion. In other words, these are an unofficial
dialogue between you, the screenings, your colleagues and the readings. You may write in an informal, conversational voice if you choose. They will not be graded. In order to receive full credit, you need only to complete five short responses in a conscientious manner.

Each short essay will be worth 19 points towards response paper component of the final grade. Partial credit for inadequately completed entries will be awarded at the discretion of the instructor. An essay may receive 1, 3 or 5 points as partial credit.

As your response essay is so brief, it is imperative that you do not summarize the plot of a film nor summarize the author’s argument (unless directed to do so) nor provide detailed descriptions of scenes. You may provide cursory description only if necessary to clarify your position. The purpose of these assignments are merely to permit you to reflect upon course materials, dialog with the theoreticians and attempt to apply their ideas to cultural productions.

2. The second written assignment is a four-five page short paper on either a well-known or popular social media or website or a print advertisement. Students will be provided with a list of media artifacts and asked to select one for the purposes of the assignment. For their essay, students will be required to analyze the media product according to a series of questions provided by the instructor and in light of one of the assigned readings. A student may select a website or advertisement not listed on the assignment sheet but will be required to receive the instructor’s permission in advance. The essay will be due September 26th.

3. The third writing assignment is a short essay, an analysis of a single media production in greater detail than in the response papers. Your critique must be formulated in terms of class discussions and lectures and related to one of the assigned readings. You may select a film, TV show or other popular culture text not discussed in class, but the instructor must approve the topic in advance. The paper is to be between seven and ten double spaced typewritten pages. The midterm essay is due no later than October 17th. You may submit it earlier if you like. Students who submit papers at least one week prior to the October 14th deadline will be afforded the option to rewrite and revise their work.

4. The fourth writing assignment is a longer, analytical essay and single sustained argument regarding a popular culture text consider to be in Bad Taste. Your discussion of the texts(s) in the must be related to, and discussed in tandem with the themes of the course. This final paper will require an explicitly developed and stated thesis, bibliographic research, and close analysis of the text(s) utilizing one of the theoretical methods covered in class.
The analytical essay is to be no less than ten and no more than fifteen (10-15) double spaced, type written pages. You will be required to submit a brief three – four sentence description of your project for the instructor’s approval by November 14th. This project proposal is considered part of the assignment. Failure to submit a proposal means that you have not completed the assignment and your grade will be reduced by a fraction. The final essay is due no later than December 5th. Students who submit papers at least one week prior to the December 5th deadline will be afforded the option to rewrite and revise their work.

**Brief Media Artifact Presentation:**
As part of the course requirements, you are obligated to present to the class a popular culture text (of any kind) that you would consider to be representative of a trend, recent or historical, in the development of media. **This is not optional.** Beginning October 24th students will be asked to give a brief (5-10) presentation of their Media Artifact and explain how it exemplifies some aspect of popular culture. The presentation may be related to either the short response papers, or the longer essay assignments. Students will be asked to follow instructions provided on a separate handout.

5. **Other Course Policies and Requirements:**
Students are expected to come to class prepared, having completed the assigned readings and ready to participate actively. Attendance in class is required and essential; attendance will be taken each week – it is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet. Since class participation is such an integral part of the course, the policy regarding attendance is both clear and strict. More than three absences will seriously jeopardize your ability to pass the class. If you miss more than three classes, the highest participation grade you can receive is a B-.

Students who miss more than five classes will be strongly encouraged to withdraw from the course and will receive a class participation grade of F. Please be on time! Habitual lateness will impact your class participation grade, as each three instances of lateness will be counted as an absence. In addition, if a student leaves class before it concludes, their departure will be counted in the same way as lateness, i.e. each three early exits will also be counted as an absence.

Participation in discussions is also a crucial aspect of the class. Students are expected to participate regularly. We all have opinions, theories, ideas and concerns about popular culture, and students are expected to share theirs in the class context in light of assigned course materials. Even if you attend every class, if you do not contribute, you cannot receive a class participation grade higher than B.

Screenings are an integral component of the course and students are required to watch all the titles on the syllabus, even if they have seen them in the past. *Due to*
the difficulty in obtaining materials, the instructor reserves the right to change the screenings without prior notice; screenings also may be adjusted according to the interests, needs and dictates of the course. Please be advised that some of the films, video segments to be screened, and other media will include content that is graphic in nature in terms of sexuality and violence. Please notify the instructor if you have concerns regarding the content of screenings.

Written assignments must be completed as scheduled. Late work will be accepted only at the discretion of the instructor and only in cases of documented medical or family emergency. Students are required to notify the instructor if circumstances will not permit the timely completion of course work. A heavy course load or work for other classes is insufficient reason for missing class or submitting work late. An incomplete will be granted only in the most extreme instances, will require sufficient documentation and are strongly discouraged.

Written work that is plagiarized will result in immediate failure. There Will Be Absolutely No Exceptions! No Excuses! If you are unclear on the parameters regarding citation of sources or use of the Internet please speak with the instructor.

There is absolutely no eating allowed in class, though you may bring beverages! There will be a 10 - 15 minute break at the halfway mark of the class meeting; please utilize that time period for eating. Please turn off your cellular phone or, at the very least, change the mode to vibrate. Texting, surfing the Internet, or conducting chats during class and screenings is not only rude and disrespectful it will significantly impact your class participation grade. Students who habitually text their friends, receive phone calls or spend class time searching websites will receive a class participation grade no higher than D. This is your only warning!

6. Grading Policies:
15% Attendance and Participation
10% Short Paper Response Assignments
10% Short Essay on New Media, due September 26th.
20% 7 - 10 Page Mid-Term Essay, due October 17th.
30% 10 - 15 Page Final Essay (5% of the grade includes a written final paper proposal), due December 5th.
5% Media Artifact Presentation

7. Academic Integrity And Plagiarism:
There are few academic matters more serious than plagiarism. Any written work for a college course must be wholly original, or it needs to be cited correctly. If
you take any idea from an outside source, whether it is a website, DVD commentary track, book or another media form, you must indicate where you obtained that information. Copying anything off of the Internet without noting the source is considered plagiarism! If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the instructor before submitting your work. Do not assume something is common knowledge unless it would be blatantly obvious to anyone with even a passing knowledge of the subject. For instance, that Homer Simpsons is one of the protagonists of the long-running animation sitcom The Simpsons is widely known by people even if they have never seen the show; in contrast, an interpretation of The Simpsons, or how Homer’s character has been utilized to introduce issues of race, class and gender in American society is not common knowledge.

Copying materials from website and books without noting where it can be found and verified by another individual is considered plagiarism; it is not research! (Properly sourcing materials is research, using it without attribution is plagiarism.) Since plagiarism is a violation of New York University’s Policy on Academic Integrity, not to mention dishonest and a form of fraud, work that is plagiarized will result in immediate failure for the assignment. No excuses and no exceptions! You will receive an F for any direct copying from websites, even if it is only a few sentences! A second violation will result in an F for the course and the Dean of Students being notified.

Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Website if you are unclear on what constitutes Academic Integrity. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website @ http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html
Weekly Schedule:

Unit One: Foundations
Week One: September 5th
Welcome to The Matrix
   Screening:
      *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (J. Mallon, 1996) 73 min.

Week Two: September 12th
Everywhere A Sign: Semiotics, Memes and Visual Grammar
   Screening (Excerpts):
      *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999)
      *Independence Day* (R. Emmerich, 1996)
      *South Park: Faith Hilling* (T. Parker, 2012)
      *Videodrome* (D. Cronenberg, 1983)
   Readings:
      2. D. Kellner “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 7 - 17.

Week Three: September 19th
I’ll Buy That For A Dollar: Advertising & Political Economy
   Screening (Excerpts):
      *Idiocracy* (M. Judge, 2006)
      *Quiz Show* (R. Redford, 1994)
      *Saturday Night Live*
   Readings:
      1. A. Berger, Chs. 3 & 7.
      2. S. Jhally “Image Based Culture” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 199 - 204.
      4. L. Ouellette “Inventing the Cosmo Girl” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 221 - 234.
Unit Two: Ideology
Week Four: September 26th
What Lies Beneath: Genres and the Social Function of Storytelling
Screening (Excerpts):
  Burns And Allen (Radio Broadcast)
  Family Guy: PTV (D. Provenmire, 2005)
  Sealab 2021: Tinfins (Reed & Thompson, 2002)
  The Simpsons: Itchy & Scratchy & Marge (J. Swarzwelder 1990)
  The War of the Worlds (Radio Broadcast) (O. Welles, 1937)
Readings:
  1. A. Berger, Ch. 2.
  2. G. Lipsitz “Popular Culture” in Media Studies Reader, p. 45 - 56.
  6. C. Jordan “Marketing Reality to the World” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 459 - 466.

Week Five: October 3rd
Screening (Excerpts):
  60 Minutes
  NBC Nightly News
  Network (S. Lumet, 1975)
  Wag the Dog (Barry Levinson, 1997)
Readings:
  1. A. Berger, Chs. 4 & 8.
  6. J. Lull “Hegemony” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 33 - 36.

Week Six: October 10th
Making Meaning out of Nothing At All: Popular Culture and Obsolescence

Screening:

- NBC Dateline
- Music Videos
- This American Life
- The Today Show.

Readings:

1. A. Berger, Ch. 6.
2. L. Ouellette “Take Responsibility for Yourself” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 487 - 496.

Week Seven: October 17th

Of Rags and Riches: Class, Economics and Media

Screening:

- The Biggest Loser
- The Dark Knight Rises (Christopher Nolan, 2012)

Readings:

4. S. Cobb “Mother of the Year” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 127 - 136.
5. T. Fahy “One Night In Paris (Hilton)” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 301 - 306.

Unit Three: The Politics of Media - Who Programs You?

Week Eight: October 24th

Performing Gender: Femininity, Masculinity and Celebrity Culture
Screening:

*A Face in the Crowd* (E. Kazan, 1957)
*Keeping Up With the Kardashians*
*Sex in the City: Are We Sluts?* (N. Holofscener, 2000)

Readings:

2. M. Rogers “Hetero Barbie?” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 71 - 75.
3. J. Gerhard “Carrie Bradshaw’s Queer Postfeminism” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 75 - 80.

Week Nine: October 31st

**Representing Race: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Representation**

Screening:

*The Amos And Andy Show*
*Coffey* (J. Hill, 1973)
*The Lone Ranger* (Radio Broadcast)
*X-Men* (B. Singer, 2000)

Readings:

1. S. Hall “The Whites of the Their Eyes” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 81 - 84.

Week Ten: November 7th

**Searching For ID-entity: Representing Sexuality**

Screening:

*Crash* (D. Cronenberg, 1996)
Readings:
1. T. Rose “There are Bitches and Hoes” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 321 - 326.
3. M. Pratt “This is the Way We Live” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 337 - 348.
4. C. Moore “Resisting, Revisiting, and Dancing Through” in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, p. 531 - 540.

Week Eleven: November 14th

**Nerds, Fanboys, Pajama Clad Bloggers: Fandom and Subcultures**

Screening:

*X-Files: Jose Chung’s From Outer Space* (R. Bowman, 1996)

Readings:
Unit Four: Digital Media: You Can Take It With You

Week Twelve: November 21st

What A Wonderful Global World!: Internet and Identity

Screening:

Strange Days (K. Bigelow, 1999)

Readings:

1. H. Jenkins, Convergence Culture, Ch. 4.
2. P. Levinson, New New Media, Chs. 1 & 2.

Week Thirteen: December 5th

If A Tree Falls in the Forest and it’s Not On Facebook Did It Make A Sound?

Screening:

The Social Network (D. Fincher, 2010)
South Park: Over Logging (T. Parker, 2005)

Readings:

2. P. Levinson, New New Media, Chs. 3 & 4.
3. K. Montgomery “Born To Be Wired” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 419 - 426.
4. D. Boyd “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites” in Gender, Race, and Class In Media, p. 409 - 418.

Week Fourteen: December 12th

Synergy or Cynicism: Convergence Culture(s)/This Mediated Life?

Screening:

The Truman Show (P. Weir, 1998)

Reading:

1. H. Jenkins, Convergence Culture, Chs. 3 & 5.
2. P. Levinson, Chs. 6 & 7.