

# Why Media Matter

Winter 2009

HREL 39200  
Tues/Thurs 10:30-11:50am  
Swift Hall Room 403

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12-2

Why do media matter? It is hardly controversial to suggest that the analysis of media should be a priority for the human sciences. But, in approaching media, what precisely is our object of study? Is it to be sought in the structure of institutions? In the signification of texts? Perhaps in the actions of individuals? Or even, somehow, in the totality of society itself? The central term in the problem—namely, ‘media’—seems curiously overdetermined, and so ambivalent. One finds for instance that, in the singular, the *medium* tends either to be idealized as an inert conduit for the transmission of a substantialized message (communication) or, alternatively, decried as the source of ideological distortion (alienation). The medium is implicitly extrinsic to its content. But we have also been told that it participates in the very substance of that which it conveys (‘the medium is the message’). We have learned that novels and newspapers provided the ground on which national communities were first imagined. And yet, in the plural, *the media* comprise that mysteriously unified agent that is said to mollify the masses through commodification and individualization. Media are at once the locus of grass roots organization and the perpetuation of bourgeois *mythologie*. They facilitate both the exercise of Public Reason as well as the effects of discursive infantilization. As an organ of free speech, the media are a bastion of democracy. As an instrument of the Culture Industry (or the Military Industrial Complex, Big Oil, *etc.*) they act as handmaiden to Capital. Seemingly, it is—or they are—simultaneously a metaphysical category, an institution, an instrument and an agent. It would behoove us to disentangle these associations. For as the Oxford philosopher and historian, R.G. Collingwood, once said of the various theories of Man, treatment of any one of them would easily fill a book. But which if any might help us to elucidate the social import of their ostensible object? This course offers a practical introduction to key developments in cultural and media studies as a first step toward trying to answer this question.

## Course Requirements

- Complete and careful reading of all course material.
- Regular attendance and active participation in discussion.
- Three short papers of 1000, 1500 and 3000 words, as below (approx 20-25 pages in total). The due dates for these papers are listed below in the schedule. Please plan accordingly.
- All work **must** be submitted on time; no incompletes will be granted for this course, except on grounds of major life disruption.

## Course Materials Available at the Seminary Cooperative Bookstore

- Barthes, R. (1972 [1957]) *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- *V is for Vendetta* (DVD).

## Additional Course Materials Available Through Chalk Website

- Althusser, L. (1971 [1970]) ‘Ideology and ideological state apparatuses’. *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. B Brewster (trans.). London: New Left Books. Pp. 121-176.
- Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso. Pp. 1-46.
- Morson, G.S. and C. Emerson (1990) Chapter 9 (‘Chronotopes’). *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Barthes, R. (1977 [1964]) 'The photographic message'. *Image, music, text*. S. Heath (trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Baudrillard, J. (1988 [1968]) 'The system of objects'. In M. Poster (ed.) *Jean Baudrillard: Selected writings*. Oxford and Cambridge: Polity Press and Blackwell.
- Clark, L.S. (2003) 'The "funky" side of religion: An ethnographic study of adolescent religious identity and the media'. In J. Mitchell and S. Marriage (eds.), *Mediating religion: Conversations in media, religion, and culture*. London: Continuum Press.
- Fiske, J. (1989) 'News readings, news readers'. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) 'The study of philosophy'. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds. & trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart. Pp. 323-77.
- Hall, S. (1980) 'Encoding/decoding'. In: *Culture, media, language; Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-1979*, eds. S. Hall et al. London: Hutchison.
- Hall, S. (1996) 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies'. D. Morley and K.H. Chen (eds.) *Stuart Hall; Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. London & New York: Routledge. Pp. 262-75.
- Hartley, J. (1992) 'Invisible fictions'. *Tele-ology: Studies in television*. London: Routledge.
- Hirschkind, C. (2006) 'Cassette ethics: Public piety and popular media in Egypt'. B. Meyer & A. Moors (eds.) *Religion, media, and the public sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hobart, M. (2000) 'The end of the world news: television and a problem of articulation in Bali'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 3(1): 79-102.
- Hobart, M. (n.d.) 'Strictly for masochists; An appendix on articulation'. Unpublished appendix to Hobart 2000.
- Horkheimer, M. and T.W. Adorno (2001 [1944]) 'The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception'. *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Continuum.
- Morley, D. (1992) 'Toward an ethnography of the television audience'. *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. London: Routledge.
- Said, E.W. (1997 [1981]) 'The Iran story'. *Covering Islam; How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. New York: Vintage Books.

### **Background Reading on Cultural and Media Studies and Related Issues**

- Ang, I. (1996) *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1989) *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.
- van Ginneken, J. (1998) *Understanding global news; A critical introduction*. London: Sage.
- Hartley, J. (2003) *A short history of cultural studies*. London: Sage.
- Grossberg, L., C. Nelson & P. A. Treichler (eds., 1992) *Cultural studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Morley, D. & K. Chen (eds.) *Stuart Hall; Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. NY: Routledge.
- Nightingale, V. (1996) *Studying audiences: The shock of the real*. New York: Routledge.
- O'Sullivan, T. et al. (eds., 1994) *Key concepts in communication and cultural studies*. Second Edition. London & New York: Routledge.
- Poster, M. (1995) *The second media age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Turner, G. (1990) *British cultural studies: An introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- de Vries, H. & S. Weber (eds., 2001) *Religion and media*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wiggershaus, R. (1995) *The Frankfurt School: Its history, theories, and political significance*. M. Robertson (trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

### **1. Course Introduction: Why Do Media Matter?**

Tuesday, January 6

### **2. 'Religion and Media' in America**

Thursday, January 8

#### Required text:

- Clark, L.S. (2003) 'The "funky" side of religion: An ethnographic study of adolescent religious identity and the media'. In J. Mitchell and S. Marriage (eds.), *Mediating religion: Conversations in media, religion, and culture*. London: Continuum Press.

#### Opening questions:

- What is religion and when (or why) is it 'funky'?
- What were Clark's primary concerns? Do they reflect broader debates on religion, media and society?
- What is the referent for the term 'media'? And why do media matter?

#### Further reading:

- B. Meyer & A. Moors (2006) 'Introduction'. In B. Meyer & A. Moors (eds.) *Religion, media, and the public sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Pp. 29-51.
- Hoover, S.M. (2003) 'Religion, media and identity: Theory and method in audience research on religion and media'. In J. Mitchell and S. Marriage (eds.), *Mediating religion: Conversations in media, religion, and culture*. London: Continuum Press. Pp.1-28.

### **3. Culture and the Idea of Authenticity**

Tuesday, January 13

#### Required text:

- Horkheimer, M. and T.W. Adorno (2001 [1944]) 'The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception'. *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Continuum.

#### Opening questions:

- When is authenticity?
- What is the culture industry? And how is it related to the rest of social life?
- Who or what is the subject of alienation? And how is emancipation related to the work of criticism?
- How, if at all, are Horkheimer and Adorno relevant for a critique of contemporary American society?

#### Further reading:

- Benjamin, W. (1968) 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'. *Illuminations; Essays and reflections*. Hannah Arendt (ed.). New York: Schocken Books.
- Jay, M. (1973) *The dialectical imagination: A history of the Frankfurt School and The Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. Berkeley, LA & London: University of California Press.

#### **4. Myth Today**

Thursday, January 15

##### Required text:

- ‘Myth today’ and selections. Barthes, R. (1972 [1957]) *Mythologies*. NY: Hill & Wang.

##### Opening questions:

- What is ‘myth’? And why did Barthes call it a ‘system of communication’?
- What is the nature of the relationship between Nature, History and criticism?
- What are the leading myths of our times? And to what extent are they susceptible to analysis in the terms described by Barthes (inoculation, the privation of history, identification etc.)?

##### Further reading:

- Hawkes, T. (1997) *Structuralism and semiotics*. London: Routledge.
- Young, R. (1981) ‘Post-structuralism: An introduction’. *Untying the text; A post-structuralist reader*. Boston, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Part I, Harland, R. (1987) *Superstructuralism: The philosophy of structuralism and poststructuralism*. London and New York: Methuen.

#### **5. The Consumer Society**

Tuesday, January 20

##### Required text:

- Baudrillard, J. (1988 [1968]) ‘The system of objects’. In M. Poster (ed.) *Jean Baudrillard: Selected writings*. Oxford and Cambridge: Polity Press and Blackwell.

##### Opening questions:

- What is consumption and how is it related to the social order?
- What does it mean to describe consumer objects as ‘a system of signs’?
- When is freedom? (And how do you know?)

##### Further reading:

- Baudrillard, J. (1988 [1968]) ‘Consumer society’. In M. Poster (ed.) *Jean Baudrillard: Selected writings*. Oxford and Cambridge: Polity Press and Blackwell.
- Poster, M. (1990) ‘Baudrillard and TV ads’. *The mode of information: Poststructuralism and social context*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

#### **6. Mini-Conference I: Media and the Myth of Freedom**

Thursday, January 22

The question for a short-response paper will be distributed in class on Tuesday, January 20. Your written response will be due online (details TBA) Wednesday, January 21, *no later than 8pm*. You should read carefully and be prepared to discuss posts from all other members of the class.

## **7. TV News: A Masculine Soap Opera?**

Tuesday, January 27

### Required text:

- Fiske, J. (1989) 'News readings, news readers'. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.

### Opening questions:

- What is the news and how is it related to other genres of television programming?
- What might it mean to assert that 'the story writes the journalist'?
- What is 'objectivity'? Why did Fiske argue 'bias' makes for an inadequate critique of news coverage?

### Further reading:

- Galtung, J. and M. Ruge (1981) 'Structuring and Selecting News'. In S. Cohen and J. Young (eds.), *The Manufacture of News*. London: Constable.
- Hartley, J. (1988) *Understanding news*. London: Routledge.
- Hobart, M. (2007) 'Round up the usual suspects: Some radical implications of Indonesian and Euro-American media coverage of "terrorist" attacks.' In: Nossek, H. and Sreberny, A. and Sonwalkar, P., (eds.), *Media and political violence*. Cresskill, NJ : Hampton Press.

## **8. Politics and the Philosophy of Praxis**

Thursday, January 29

### Required text:

- Gramsci, A. (1971) 'The study of philosophy'. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds. & trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart. Pp. 323-77.

### Opening questions:

- Who are the intellectuals?
- What is common sense? What is the philosophy of praxis? And why does it matter?
- What is the nature of the relationship between scholarship and the rest of life? Between criticism and politics? Knowledge and power?

### Further reading:

- Gramsci, A. (1971) 'The intellectuals'. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds. & trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Chapter 3 in Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony and socialist strategy; Towards a radical democratic politics*. London and New York: Verso.

## **9. On Ideology and Interpellation**

Tuesday, February 3

### Reading:

- Althusser, L. (1971 [1970]) 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses'. *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. B Brewster (trans.). London: New Left Books. Pp. 121-176.

### Opening questions:

- What are ISAs and how do they work?
- Why might *interpellation* be important for an account of media and their social significance?
- How did Althusser explain the relationship between social structure and human agency?

### Further reading:

- Chapter 2, Macdonell, D. (1986) *Theories of discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Parts I & II, Harland, R. (1987) *Superstructuralism: The philosophy of structuralism and poststructuralism*. London and New York: Methuen.

## **10. Structure, Violence and the Limits of Denotation**

Thursday, February 5

### Required text:

- Barthes, R. (1977 [1964]) 'The photographic message'. *Image, music, text*. S. Heath (trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.

### Opening questions:

- What is the theory of media underpinning Barthes' account of 'the photographic message'?
- What was he trying to accomplish by differentiating between photographic denotation and connotation?
- For Barthes, what was the significance of 'truly traumatic photographs'? And how should we interpret this?

### Further reading:

- Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Barthes, R. (1981) *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Introduction and Chapter 1, Žižek, S. (2002) *Welcome to the desert of the real! Five essays on September 11 and related dates*. London & New York: Verso.

## **11. Chronotopes or How to Take the Textual Metaphor Seriously**

Tuesday, February 10

### Required text:

- Chapter 9 ('Chronotopes') from Morson, G.S. and C. Emerson (1990) *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

### Opening questions:

- How is the configuration of space, time and agency related to the interpellation of subjects?
- Can a chronotopic analysis be used to develop further Fiske's interpretation of the news as 'masculine soap opera'?
- Did mainstream television news coverage of the recent US elections have a consistent chronotope?

### Further reading:

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) 'Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel'. *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. M. Holquist (ed), C. Emerson & M. Holquist (trans). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Rorty, A. (1976) 'A Literary Postscript: Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals'. *The identities of persons*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fox, R. (2006) 'Strong and weak media: On the representation of 'terorisme' in contemporary Indonesia'. *Modern Asian Studies*. 40(4): 993-1052.

## **12. Media Session: America Held Hostage**

Thursday, February 12

### Required text:

- Said, E.W. (1997 [1981]) 'The Iran story'. *Covering Islam; How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. New York: Vintage Books.

**NB:** The question for Tuesday's short-response paper will be distributed in class today.

## **13. Mini-Conference II: Covering 'Terrorism'**

Tuesday, February 17

**NB:** The question for a short-response paper will be distributed in class on Thursday, February 12. Your written response will be due online (details TBA) Monday, February 16, *no later than 12 noon*. You should read carefully and be prepared to discuss posts from all other members of the class.

## **14. Encoding/Decoding**

Thursday, February 19

### Required text:

- Hall, S. (1996) 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies'. D. Morley and K.H. Chen (eds.) *Stuart Hall; Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 262-75.
- Hall, S. (1980) 'Encoding/decoding'. In: *Culture, media, language; Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-1979*, eds. S. Hall et al. London: Hutchison.

### Opening questions:

- What is the purpose of intellectual work?
- Why, and precisely how, do media matter for the work of cultural studies?
- Under what conditions do the processes (or practices?) of encoding and decoding become accessible to scholarly analysis?

### Further reading:

- Part I, Ang, I. (1996) *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Nightingale, V. (1996) 'Encoding/decoding'. *Studying audiences: The shock of the real*. New York: Routledge.

## **15. Desperately Seeking the Audience**

Tuesday, February 24

### Required text:

- Excerpt from: Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso. Pp. 1-46.
- Hartley, J. (1992) 'Invisible fictions'. *Tele-ology: Studies in television*. London: Routledge. Pp. 101-18.

### Opening questions:

- Did Anderson account adequately for the social and historical significance of media?
- What precisely is 'imagination'? And how might Anderson's argument be developed further?
- What is the referent for the phrase 'the audience'? And why does it matter?
- What is precluded, and what becomes possible, as a consequence of Hartley's critique?

### Further reading:

- Ang, I. (1991) *Desperately seeking the audience*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Morley, D. & C. Brunson (1999) *The Nationwide television studies*. London & NY: Routledge.
- Nightingale, V. (1996) *Studying audiences: The shock of the real*. New York: Routledge.

## **16. Television and Ethnography**

Thursday, February 26

### Required text:

- Morley, D. (1992) 'Toward an ethnography of the television audience'. *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. London: Routledge.

### Opening questions:

- On what grounds did Morley respond to Hartley and Fiske? Was his argument convincing?
- What claims are being made for 'ethnography'? And to what end?
- What did Morley (1992: 170) mean when he argued that Hartley was 'confus[ing] a problem of epistemology with one of ontology'? And what must one assume in order to sustain this position?
- What is the object of study in 'media studies'?

### Further reading:

- McQuail, D. (1997) *Audience analysis*. Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: Sage.
- Hobart, M. (2006) 'Just talk? Anthropological reflections on the object of media studies in Indonesia'. *Asian journal of social science*. 34(3): 492-519.

## **17. Religion, Media, (Counter)Public**

Tuesday, March 3

### Required text:

- Hirschkind, C. (2006) 'Cassette ethics: Public piety and popular media in Egypt'. B. Meyer & A. Moors (eds.) *Religion, media, and the public sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Pp. 29-51.

### Opening questions:

- What is the nature of the cassette sermon as a medium?
- Under what conditions was the 'Islamic counterpublic' intelligible as an object of knowledge?
- How might Hirschkind's analysis be compared with arguments from Morley, Fiske and Hartley on the nature of 'the audience'?

### Further reading:

- Habermas, J. (2001) 'The public sphere: An encyclopedia article.' Durham, M.G. & D.M. Kellner (eds) *Media and cultural studies*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Eickelman, D.F. & J.W. Anderson (eds, 1999) *New media in the Muslim world: The emerging public sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lynch, M. (2005) *Voices of the new Arab public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East politics today*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**18. Articulating Media and Society**

Thursday, March 5

Required text:

- Hobart, M. (2000) ‘The end of the world news: television and a problem of articulation in Bali’. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 3(1): 79-102.
- Hobart, M. (n.d.) ‘Strictly for masochists; An appendix on articulation’. Unpublished appendix to Hobart 2000.

Opening questions:

- What is articulation? And how does Hobart differentiate between the account offered by Hall and that of Laclau and Mouffe?
- Under what conditions do ‘media’ make for a coherent object of study?
- What are the implications of recognizing scholarship itself as a form of articulation?

Further reading:

- Laclau, E. (1990) ‘The impossibility of society’. *New reflections on the revolution of our time*. New York: Verso.
- Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony and socialist strategy; Towards a radical democratic politics*. London and New York: Verso.
- Slack, S.D. (1996) ‘The theory and method of articulation in cultural studies’. D. Morley and K.H. Chen (eds.) *Stuart Hall; Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. London & New York: Routledge.

**19. Mini-Conference III: Media, Politics and the Social**

Tuesday, March 10

**NB:** The question for your final paper will be distributed in class on Thursday, March 5. A rough draft will be due online on **Monday, March 9, no later than 12 noon**. You should read carefully and be prepared to discuss posts from all other members of the class.

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**FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE IN MY EMAIL INBOX**

**(rfox@uchicago.edu)**

**NO LATER THAN 3PM ON FRIDAY, MARCH 13**

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