

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies

MDIA 103 Popular Media Culture

Trimester 1, 2008

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the study of popular media culture, with reference to the relationship between cultural theory and selected popular media forms. Particular attention is paid to issues relating to production (of meaning, of texts) and consumption (active audiences, taste). The course critically examines the production and consumption of popular media culture in society.

Lecturers

Dr. Geoff Stahl (Course Coordinator)

42-44 Kelburn Parade, Rm. 112

Office Hours: Wednesday 10-12 AM, or by appointment

Phone: 463-5233 ext. 7472

Email: geoff.stahl@vuw.ac.nz

Dr. Joost de Bruin

42-44 Kelburn Parade, Rm. 207

Office Hours: Wednesday 1-3 PM, Friday 1-2 PM

Phone: 463-5233 ext. 6846

Email: joost.debruin@vuw.ac.nz

Postal Address

Department of Media Studies
42-44 Kelburn Parade
School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington 6005
Aotearoa-New Zealand

Tutors

Siv Jansson:	SivJansson@aol.com
Steve Perrin:	steve.perrin57@btopenworld.com
Brannavan Gnanalingam:	brannavan@gmail.com

[Office hours for tutors and rooms for each tutorial will be announced shortly.]

Course Format

Once weekly, two-hour lecture
Once weekly tutorial (to begin Week Two)

Meeting Time and Location

Tuesday, 2-4 PM
HM 206

Tutorials

Tutorials are held on Wednesday and Thursday.

Students are to register for tutorials through S-Cubed.

Students will be expected to discuss each week's readings in a group setting. Keeping up with readings is therefore an important part of your commitment to the course. Debating and discussing the lectures as well as the readings in a tutorial setting is key to the course and Media Studies generally. Details about the assignments for the course will also be discussed in the tutorials.

Tutorials begin in the second week of class and are **mandatory**. If you are unable to attend, you must supply your tutor with a medical certificate or equivalent.

Course Aims and Objectives

- This course is designed to introduce students to issues and ideas that relate to popular culture and the various forms it takes in the media.
- Culture and the media are defined broadly here, which will allow the student to explore issues that relate to both the production and consumption of popular media texts.
- The course will concentrate on examples of how certain media studies theories are put into practice, by way of specific examples.
- The students will be introduced to differing approaches in order to provide an overview of some of the issues which define media studies and its relation to popular culture.
- Students will be expected to understand and put into use critical terms and concepts they are presented with in the course.
- The ultimate goal of the course is to increase the students' media competency by exposing them to a variety of perspectives on popular media culture.

Course Texts

There is one required text for MDIA 103, in the form of a course reader. This is available from Student Notes (ground floor of Student Union building). All students are required to have this with them, both in class and in tutorials.

Course Assessment

There are three pieces of assessment:

1) 1st Assignment: Close Reading (30%)

Due: Friday, April 11th @ 4 PM

The first assignment will be a reading report, in which students are expected to choose a reading from their course reader and write a synopsis of the author's main argument, highlighting key concepts and terms. Word count: 1000-1200 words.

2) 2nd Assignment: Case Study (30%)

Due: Friday, May 16th @ 4PM

Using one of the course's key concepts, which you will also define, analyze one media text (a television episode, an advertisement, a film, a CD, a website, etc.). Word count: 1200-1500 words.

Each assignment will be 1000-1200 words, and will include a bibliography (not included in word count), of which no more than 20% can be Internet sources.

Please note that Wikipedia is not an appropriate academic source.

The papers are expected to be proper research assignments and should demonstrate that the student has created and supported a thesis with a well-thought out argument. All assignments are to be written in essay format. Please take care with grammar and spelling. Proofread your essays before handing them in. Any questions regarding the assignments can be taken up on Blackboard or in your tutorials.

3) Final Exam (40%)

Date: To be announced

All information regarding the course will be made during class, and announcements will also be made on Blackboard. Please be sure to check Blackboard regularly.

Lateness: Written assignments must be handed on the due date. Penalties will be 5% per day (including weekends, which will be 10%), unless a medical certificate, or equivalent, is supplied.

Assessment Criteria

The following are the standards by which assignments (essays, reading reports, etc.) are graded in Media Studies. Take some time to read this section before you begin your written assignments and read it once more, when you're done.

A+ (85-100%)

Excellent work showing sophisticated and independent thought. Superior analysis, comprehensive research, good theoretical or methodological understanding and impeccable presentation.

A (80- 84%)

Work is distinguished by their clarity of thought and argument. Question is answered skilfully, is meticulously structured and the argument is convincing. Demonstrates sophisticated comprehension of the topic, a familiarity with scholarship & research in the area, and a clear understanding of related theoretical issues. A high standard of critical analysis. Presentation and organization are excellent with correct use of citation conventions when required.

A- (75- 79%)

Work of a high standard: ideas could be of 'A' quality material but the overall effect was undermined by limitation or inconsistency in one area. It could also be 'A' material that was flawed by the quality or consistency of its technical presentation, research support, or theoretical understandings. Demonstrates independent thought, good writing skills, effective selection/structuring of material, and a general clarity and sense of purpose.

B+ (70% - 74%)

Work which exhibits a good standard of research and of writing. Contains some perceptive analysis, and effective research, preparation and planning. This work may demonstrate insight and perception but this standard is not maintained through the whole work. The argument, technical quality, and other elements may be inconsistent in quality. May require greater integration of theoretical or empirical analysis. Demonstrates some independence of thought.

B (65% - 69%)

Consistently good work and still above average. May demonstrate strong analysis, theoretical reading or contextual knowledge, but without integrating these elements into a balanced argument. May be well researched and documented but in the 'B' range there could well be a deficiency in some aspect of research or understanding. May have problems with technical presentation, structure, argument and/or research.

B- (60% - 64%)

Good work but may not be consistent and thus falls short of 'B' quality in one or more respects. In this grade area the work will have exceeded the standard expected for passes at this level. Question is satisfactorily answered and has been appropriately informed by research, but there is less attention to the detail and complexity of issues. There may be problems with the essay structure, the writing style, the selection of material or the argument. There may also be problems with presentation, expression, and grammar.

C+ (55% - 59%)

The essay is limited in achievement due to an overall incapacity for independent research or thought – hence it will tend to demonstrate a reliance on lecture material. Work in the C range will have paid insufficient attention to critical sources and not be widely researched. Work in this category may have deficiencies in structure and organization, the quality of argument, and/or the writing style.

C (50% - 54%)

Satisfactory completion of set tasks only. Basic engagement with the subject matter, and lacking in critical analysis or a considered conceptual approach. May be poorly planned and constructed, with serious problems of clarity and expression. May not have used or have acknowledged an appropriate range of sources. May be purely descriptive. There may be some significant problems with writing, research or organization.

D (40% - 49%)

Misses the point of the exercise or has failed to respond adequately to it. The work is deficient in important respects to the extent that it cannot be regarded satisfactory at this level. A 'D' grade essay may contain some elements of attaining a pass grade.

E (0% - 39%)

This category implies that the essay is well below the achievement minimum (in a range of respects) for work at this level. A E essay will demonstrate not one, but several of the 'D' essay's deficiencies - it may be well short of the prescribed length, badly written, poorly conceived, ill structured, hastily prepared, full of technical or other inaccuracies, and/or lacking in even a basic understanding of the concepts.

Presentation of Written Work

All written work must be in an acceptable academic format. In Media Studies, students taking the first year courses (and MDIA 201) will receive the Media Studies Essay Guidelines, a document which you should consult throughout the term. In it, you will find helpful information on how to go about essay writing, along with tips on where to go to research your assignments.

Late work submitted without an extension will be counted, as long as it is received within one week of the due date. Such work will, however, be penalised and there will be a lack of comments on your assignment. Students who are prevented by illness (or exceptional circumstance) from submitting work during the last three teaching weeks of the course should apply for extensions (see above). However, the University does not permit us to accept any work after the end of the examination period and students who cannot complete their work by this date for medical or similar reasons should consult the aegrotat provisions in the Calendar.

Mandatory Requirements

The minimum course requirements, which must be satisfied, include completion of all in-term assessment pieces by the required date and attending tutorials.

All three assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Failure to satisfy the course requirements will leave you with a fail grade. If you are concerned that you might be unable to meet these requirements see the convenor as soon as possible.

Using the Course Reader

A good habit to start in your first year is taking notes as you read. As one of the first assignments will be a close reading, you should get as much practice in as early as possible.

When doing a reading, make notes in the margins of the article, on a notepad or even onto your computer (always remember to note the page number in the article). Highlight key ideas, terms and concepts. Do the same for those ideas, terms and concepts you are having trouble with. Think of examples, or even counter examples, that might prove or disprove the author's thesis. Have a look at the bibliography where possible as this can provide you with other readings you might want to use in your assignments.

If you start doing this from your first reading, your tutorials and all your assignments will come much easier to you. Your ideas will come into focus in ways that will serve your essay writing and critical thinking skills well.

Forming Study Groups and Using Blackboard

We would like to encourage students to begin working with other students as soon as possible. Think about forming study groups. You can book a room at the library for this purpose. You can meet once a week, or at your discretion, to talk about issues relevant to the course.

Blackboard should also be used to discuss issues, concepts, terms that you might find complicated. We would recommend working through examples to tease out some of the ideas in the readings. We encourage debate and discussion wherever possible as this helps ideas sink in, and sees them put to good use in contexts outside the classroom.

GENERAL UNIVERSITY STATUTES AND POLICIES

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the *Victoria University Calendar* available in hardcopy or under "about Victoria" on the Victoria homepage at:

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/calendar_intro.html

Information on the following topics is available electronically under "Course Outline General Information" at:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/newspubs/universitypubs.aspx#general>

- Academic Grievances
- Student and Staff Conduct
- Meeting the Needs of Students with Impairments
- Student Support

Course Readings List:

You are expected to do the readings **before** the lecture and be prepared to discuss them in tutorials.

Week One: Introduction

Williams, Raymond. "Culture," "Media," "Popular," in Keywords, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 87-93; 203-204; 236-238.

Week Two: Ideology (Television)

Hartley, John. "Ideological State Apparatuses," "Ideology," in Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (Third Edition), New York: Routledge, 2002, pp.102-106

Storey, John. "What is Popular Culture?," in An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture (Second Edition), Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998, pp. 1-20.

Week Three: Signification/Hegemony (News)

Thwaites, Tony, Lloyd Davis and Warwick Mules. "Cultural Signs," in Introducing Cultural and Media Studies, London: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 9-47.

Hartley, John. "Hegemony," in Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (Third Edition), New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 99-100.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding," in Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords, Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, eds., New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 166-176.

On-Line Resource (recommended but not required):

Semiotics:

<<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem01.html>>

Encoding/Decoding:

<<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem08c.html>>

Week Four: Discourse (Advertising)

Hartley, John. "Discourse," in Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (Third Edition), New York: Routledge, 2002, pp.73-75.

Woods, Nicola. "Come and Get It: The Discourse of Advertising," in Describing Discourse: A Practical Guide to Discourse Analysis, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 1-45.

Week Five: Subjectivity/Identity (Popular Music)

Hartley, John. "Subjectivity," in Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (Third Edition), New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 221-223.

Shuker, Roy. "Identity," in Popular Music: The Key Concepts (Second Edition), New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 142-143.

DeNora, Tia. "Music and Self-Identity," in The Popular Music Studies Reader, Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, Jason Toynbee, eds., New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 141-147.

Kassabian, Anahid. "Would You Like Some World Music With Your Latte? Starbucks, Putumayo and Distributed Tourism" in Twentieth Century Music 2 (1) 2004, pp. 209-223.

Week Six: Audiences (Television)

O'Sullivan, Tim, Brian Dutton and Philip Rayner. "Audiences," in Studying the Media: An Introduction (Third Edition), London: Arnold, 2003, pp. 112-139.

Hills, Matt. "Fandom and Fan Studies," in Tele-Visions: An Introduction to Studying Television, Glen Creeber, ed., London: BFI, 2006, pp. 100-106.

BREAK

Week Seven: Media, Space, Time and Technology (Various Media)

McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message," in Media Studies: A Reader, Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, eds., New York: New York University Press, 2004, pp. 38-43.

Straw, Will. "Embedded Memories," in Residual Media, Charles Acland, ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 3-15.

*Recommended on-line reading (but not required):
Marshall McLuhan, "The Playboy Interview" at <
<http://heim.ifi.uio.no/~gisle/links/mcluhan/pb.html>>

Week Eight: Representation and the Media (Television/Advertising)

Branston, Gill and Roy Stafford. "Questions of Representation," in The Media Student's Handbook (Fourth Edition) London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 141-163.

Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, Stuart Hall, ed., London: Sage, 1997, pp. 223-234; 249-253; 257-261; 269-274; 277-279.

Gill, Rosalind. "Gender in Advertisements," in Gender and the Media, Cambridge: Polity, 2007, pp. 78-82.

Week Nine: National Identity and Place (Film/Sport)

Jones, Deborah and Karen Smith. "Middle-Earth Meets New Zealand: Authenticity and Location in the Making of *The Lord of the Rings*," in Journal of Management Studies, 42 (5), 2005, pp. 923-945.

Volkerling, Michael. "Sport as Culture: Passion and Possibility," in Sport in New Zealand Society, Chris Collins, ed., Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2000, pp. 65-82.

Week Ten: Networks and New Media (Myspace/Facebook/Youtube)

Castells, Manuel. "Virtual Communities or Network Society," in The Internet Galaxy, London: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 116-136.

Murray, Sue. "Digital Images, Vernacular Photography, and Our Shifting Notions of Everyday Aesthetics," in *Journal of Visual Culture* (forthcoming, 2008), pp. 1-22.

Week Eleven: Review