

THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES

MEDIA, SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

“We cannot evade media presence, media representation. We have come to depend on our media, both printed and electronic, for pleasure and information, for comfort and security, for some sense of the continuities of experience, and from time to time also for the intensities of experience.” (Silverstone, *Why Study the Media?* 1999, pp. 1-2).

Much hype surrounds the media: their liberating and empowering potential, their educational role and their responsibility for true public deliberation, their overwhelming presence in our lives and their irresistible seductiveness. Yet, at the same time, suspicion and criticism of the media are growing. Television is often accused of “dumbing down” culture, of offering nothing but poor entertainment, escapism and diversion, rather than creating a meaningful, critical public debate. Global media corporations are depicted as the new missionaries of capitalism and cultural imperialism, promoting commercial values while denigrating journalism and culture. The Internet is said to increase levels of loneliness and erode any sense of community. The global coverage of suffering is seen to create “compassion fatigue” and alienation. The media are sexist, we are told. And so on and so forth. In short, the media have a pervasive social presence that deserves close scrutiny, and media literacy is now as significant as traditional literacy.

The goal of the proposed course is to offer theoretical tools for thinking critically about the media, by analysing its relationship with social, cultural, historical, political and economic processes and structures. It will examine the centrality, power and influence of media as institutions, industries, texts and technologies.

The first part of the course will examine key theoretical debates concerning media and communications: Frankfurt School’s critique of the “culture industries” and its implications for media power, the role of the media in the creation and sustainment of a public sphere, medium theory inspired by McLuhan, the emergence of new media, and media and globalization. The second part of the course will focus on issues of media representations, especially (but not only) news coverage. The discussion will tackle media representations of gender, suffering and war and conflict. The course will conclude with a critical discussion of the ethical and moral impact of the media in contemporary culture and society.

Course Structure

This course will consist of seminar discussions. There will be readings assigned for each week, which students will be expected to have done all before the class (see below). Students will also be expected to do class presentations based on the assigned readings, as indicated by the teacher. Students are encouraged to show examples of media materials in their presentations (e.g. video clips, advertisements, newspaper articles etc.). The presentations will be allocated in the first seminar.

Key Texts

Silverstone, R. *Why Study the Media?* (1999).
Thompson, J. B. *The Media and Modernity* (1995).

Assessment

Students are required to do **one class presentation** and write **two essays of not less than 2,500 words each.**

Course Outline

Seminar 1

Introduction – Why Study the Media?

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why Study the Media?*
Chapter 1 (pp. 1-12) & Chapter 2 (pp. 13-18)

Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity.*
Chapter 3 (pp. 81-118).

Seminar 2

Media and Power: The Frankfurt School Critique

Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M (1972) *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception in Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Seabury Press, pp. 120-167.

Available at:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>

Seminar 3

Media and the Public Sphere: Public Service Broadcasting and Talk Shows

Boyd-Barrett, O. (ed.) (1995). *Approaches to Media: A Reader.*
Chapter 28 by Habermas (pp. 235- 244)

Livingstone, S., and Lunt, P. (1994) *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate.* Chapter 2 & 3 (pp. 9-69). London: Routledge

Seminar 4

The Medium is the Message

McLuhan, M. (2001[1964]). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London: Routledge. 'The medium is the message' and 'media hot and cold' (pp. 3-35).

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why Study the Media?*
Chapter 3 (pp. 19-27).

Williams, R. (2003 [1974]). *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Routledge. 'The technology and the society' (pp. 1-25) and 'Effects of the technology and its uses' (pp. 121-138).

Seminar 5

What's New about New Media?

Orgad, S. (2009). Mobile TV: Old and New in the Construction of an Emergent Technology. *Convergence*, 15 (2): 197-214.

Silverstone, R. (1999). Introduction: what's new about new media? *New Media & Society*, 1(1): 10.

Seminar 6

Media and Globalisation & Media Imperialism

Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity*. Chapter 5 (pp. 149-178).

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why Study the Media?*
Chapter 12 (pp. 105-113).

Seminar 7

Media and Representation

Hall, S. (ed) (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*.
Chapter 1. London: Sage.

Seminar 8

Media and Gender

Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the Media*
Chapter 1: Gender and the Media (pp. 7-41)
Chapter 3: Advertising and Postfeminism (pp. 73- 112).

Seminar 9

Media Representations of Suffering

Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial*. Chapter 7: *Images of Suffering* (pp. 168-195).
INSTEP London Media Course

Moeller, S. (2006). Regarding the pain of others: Media, bias and the coverage of international disasters. *Journal of International Affairs*, 59 (2): 173-196.

Bentley, T. & Stedman, J. (eds) (2001). *The Moral Universe*. London: Demos.
Essay by Bauman (pp. 51-56).

Seminar 10

Media, War and Conflict

Cottle, S. (2006). *Mediatized Conflict*. Chapter 5: War Journalism (pp. 74-99).

Andén-Papadopoulos, K. (2009). Body horror on the internet: US soldiers recording the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Media, Culture & Society*, 31: 921-938.

Seminar 11

Conclusion: The Moral Impact of the Media

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why Study the Media?*
Chapter 16 (pp. 143-154).

Silverstone, R. (2007). *Media and Morality*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 1: Morality and the Media (pp. 1-24).