

THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES

MEDIA, SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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“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. Twitter and Facebook are said to have blurred traditional boundaries between public and private and create new forms of sociability and intimacy. 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 debates concerning media and communications: media power, the role of the media in the creation and sustainment of a public sphere, social media and their implications for the private-public boundaries, and the growing centrality and pervasiveness of surveillance and self-surveillance facilitated through communications technologies and big data. 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, and celebrity culture and their changing nature in the contemporary social media age. The course will conclude with a critical discussion of the ethical and moral impact of the media in today’s 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** of 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 and submission deadlines

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

The first paper is due on **Thursday 29 October** and should be submitted to the teacher at the beginning of the seminar.

The first essay should address one of the following questions:

1. What types of power do the media exercise? Provide examples to support your answer.
2. Does the internet constitute an effective public sphere in the Habermasian sense?
3. Social media blur the boundaries between private and public and the consequences of this are very negative. Do you agree? Discuss by referring to theory and examples.

The final paper is due no later than **Thursday 10 December** and should be submitted to your teacher and the INSTEP London office.

The final essay should address one of the following questions:

1. To what extent do contemporary media representations challenge gender stereotypes?
2. Bauman (2001) argues that the media give us “artificial eyes”. Do you agree, and to what extent, if at all, can the media also give us “artificial hands” to act in relation to distant suffering?
3. What are the dangers of the ‘connectivity culture’ that Sherry Turkle describes in her book *Alone Together*, and can you recognise any of them in your own experience and/or challenge some of the observations she makes?
4. The benefits of surveillance that social media and big data facilitate outweigh their limitations and dangers. Critically discuss.

Course Outline

Seminar 1

Introduction – Why Study the Media?

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

Dueze, M. (2012). In *Media Life*. Cambridge: Polity
Chapter 2: Media today (pp. 33-66).

Seminar 2

Media and Power

Thompson, J. (1995) *The Media and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, pp. 10-17.

Seminar 3

Media and the Public Sphere

Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (2013). Media studies' fascination with the concept of the public sphere: critical reflections and emerging debates. *Media, Culture Society*, 35 (1): 87-96.

Senft, M. (2013). Hating Habermas: On Exhibitionism, Shame & the Life on the Actually Existing Internet. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/theresa-senft/hating-habermas-on-exhibitionism-shame-the-life-on-the-actually-existing-internet/582094155172016>

Seminar 4

Social media, identity and intimacy

Turkle, S. (2012). Chapter 9 'Growing up tethered' (pp. 171-186), in *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from ourselves*. New York: Basic Books.

Seminar 5

Communication technologies, surveillance and self-surveillance

Crawford, K., Lingel, J., and Karppi, T. (2015). Our Metrics, ourselves: a hundred years of self-tracking from the weight scale to the wrist wearable device. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18 (4-5): pp. 479-496.

Morozov, E. (20 July 2014). The rise of data and the death of politics. *The Observer*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jul/20/rise-of-data-death-of-politics-evgeny-morozov-algorithmic-regulation>

Seminar 6

Media and Representation

Orgad, S. (2012). *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, pp. 17-33. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Seminar 7

Media and Gender

Bates, L. (2014). *Everyday Sexism*. London: Simon & Schuster. Chapter 6: Women in the Media (pp. 182-211).

Seminar 8

Media Representations of Suffering

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

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 9

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 10

Celebrity culture

Marshall, P. D. (2005). Intimately intertwined in the most public way. *Journalism: Critical issues*.

Turner, G. (2010). *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn*. London: Sage. Chapter 1: Ordinary celebrities (pp. 12-32).

Seminar 11

Conclusion: The Moral Impact of the Media

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

Turkle, S. (2012). Conclusion 'Necessary conversions (pp. 279-296) , in *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from ourselves*. New York: Basic Books.