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Media Criticism

CMST 325 | online



Montclair State University

School of Communication and Media

This course builds on concepts introduced in *Theorizing Communication and Media Arts* (CMDA 210) in order to provide students with an opportunity to become better versed in the dominant theories and methods of different schools of media criticism. Throughout the course students will apply these paradigms to conduct in-depth analyses of a range of media artifacts and institutions. 3 hours lecture.

Course Description

In the prerequisite *Theorizing Communication and Media Arts* (CMDA 210) course, you learned theoretical approaches to media, including political economy, semiotics, visual aesthetics, psychoanalysis, effects and reception, feminism, cultural studies, Marxism, and postmodernism theories. In this course you will explore, understand, and effectively apply the various schools of media criticism by reading, watching, discussing and writing a wide range of media artifacts. The course focuses on the methodology (theory + method) behind producer studies, textual analysis, and audience and reception studies. You will deepen your understanding of narrative, aesthetic, and stylistic principles that constitute the languages of media. The semester culminates in your production of an original piece of media criticism. Note that this course does *not* promote a particular political viewpoint, but instead challenges you to critically and systematically *inquire* of media. In other words, **it does not teach you what to think, but how to think. Thus, media criticism is not a destructive weapon but rather a constructive tool.**

Zoom ID# 996 8718 7153



Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Apply theories of communication to a variety of media artifacts (i.e., object, oral, performative, written, print, electronic, digital, broadcast, interactive, etc.).
- Gain exposure to the breadth and depth of approaches to media criticism through numerous specific examples.
- Critically analyze media texts in their social, political and historical contexts.
- Identify ideological messages across media forms through an increased awareness of rhetorical devices, cinematic techniques and the problems of selection and omission.
- Competently conduct your own research and critical interrogations of media texts.
- Communicate ideas effectively and with sensitivity to a variety of audiences.
- Demonstrate effective use of communication tools and media platforms.
- Demonstrate intermediate level of qualitative and quantitative research writing including proper citation.
- Demonstrate communication proficiency appropriate for meeting personal and professional needs.

This course is offered in both Hawk**SYNC** & Hawk**ASync** modes.

There are both synchronous and asynchronous components to provide you with the most flexibility, based on your strengths and preferences as a learner. This course is compressed into a 4-week session (and it passes quickly). Anticipate approximately 2.5 hours of daily instruction (Monday through Thursday) plus about 2-3 hours of daily workload beyond that. To lighten the load, I have composed *critic clouds* that consist of groups of 3-4 students. I encourage you to work together. You will find your cloud in Canvas > People > Groups.

Required Textbook:

Orlik, P.B. (2016) **Media Criticism in a Digital Age: Professional and Consumer Considerations**. New York: Routledge. (ISBN: 978-1138913189)

- You will have daily assigned reading from this text.
- Short quizzes and blog prompts will hold you accountable for completing the reading.
- Each critic cloud will be responsible for presenting selected key ideas from a chapter within the text. Consult the calendar for details.

Reliable, high-speed internet access.

You will need sufficient bandwidth to participate via audio/video. We will view media texts synchronously through Zoom, which requires up-to-date software and operating system specs. Check the Office of Information Technology web site for details.

Respondus Lockdown Browser.

This software is required to take the quizzes within Canvas. For instructions on how to install it and use it on your device, go to: [\[https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=879213189\]](https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=879213189)

A working knowledge of WordPress or other blog software.

It is your responsibility to acquire a basic working knowledge of these free, web-based tools, as they are required for assignments on which your final course grade is based. A basic knowledge includes creating hyperlinks and embedding images and video



Additional Required Materials

Live online sessions occur on Zoom **Mon-Thurs from 12:00-2:00pm**. Links to the recordings will appear in Canvas shortly thereafter for you to access, as needed.

Performance Assessments:

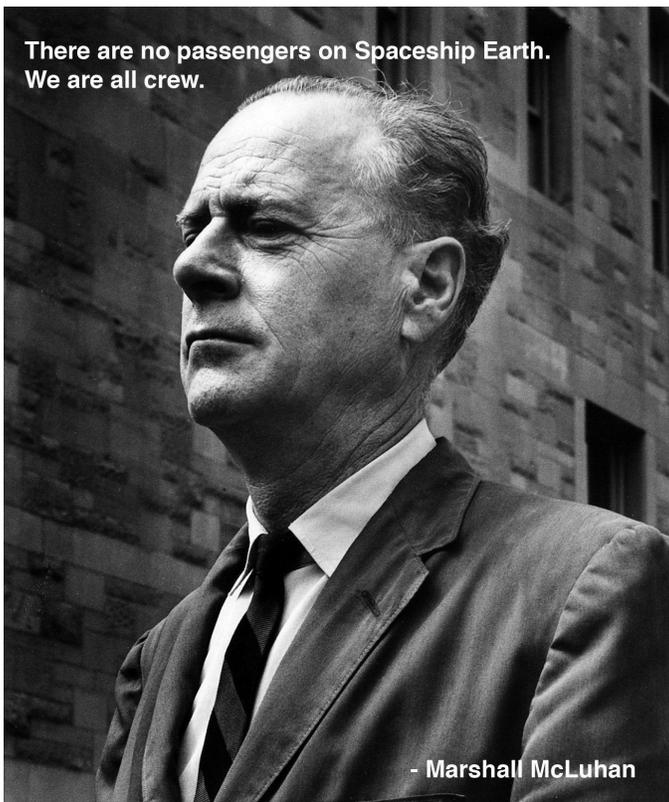
MEDIA STUDIES BLOG (100 points). The textbook reading and online discussions are designed to help you develop the skill of critical reflection. Evidence of your learning will be reflected in a blog that you will build and maintain for the duration of the course. Each of the blog posts will be structured according to a specific prompt assigned at the end of each session. Each post should be between 300-350 words in length and include hyperlinks and images as needed to illustrate your idea(s). As a safety net, you have until Friday 11:59pm EST to submit all your blog posts for that week. This deadline is firm, so plan accordingly.

QUIZZES (150 points). You will be quizzed post-facto on the assigned reading and class session. Every quiz is administered through Canvas Lockdown Browser (see above) and is open-note with a limited completion time. The quizzes will be accessible at the end of every synchronous class session and you have until Friday 11:59pm EST to complete all the quizzes for that week. I encourage you to complete them daily, if possible, so as not to fall too far behind.

CLOUD PRESENTATION (25 points) Your critic cloud will be assigned a specific chapter from the textbook for which you will prepare a unique and illuminating (group) presentation for your peer critics. This will attest to your ability to wrestle with complex ideas, pose insightful questions, and collaborate with others.

MEDIA CRITIQUE (125 points) The culminating assignment of the course is a written essay accompanied by a multimedia visual aid that represents your knowledge and skills in media criticism. The media "text" that you will critique is your choice: It might be in any particular format (i.e., a popular television show, a radio program or podcast, website, social network platform, variants of advertising, print media, etc.) that lends itself to analysis on all three levels of media criticism discussed during the semester.

There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth.
We are all crew.



- Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan theorized that when faced with new technologies or structures, humans cling to the concepts of the most recent past and thus look at the present through a rearview mirror. Looking to the past is not necessarily wrong, but McLuhan's point is that it is a sorely insufficient guide for navigating into the future.

See McLuhan, M., & Fiore, Q. (1967). *The medium is the message: An inventory of effects*. Bantam Books.

McLuhan, M. & Parker, H. (1968). *Through the vanishing point: Space in poetry and painting*. Harper and Row.

photo courtesy of alchetron.com

Performance Expectations:

All written work should adhere to university standards for writing (see specifics at <http://www.montclair.edu/dean-of-students/handbook/writing-standards/>). You are responsible for citing/attributing the source of all work (including quotes, videos, images, and logos) that you use as part of your work in this course. Consult the 7th edition of the APA Style Guide on how to produce college-level writing (Go to <http://www.apastyle.org>).

I expect you to do your own work for this course, work independently, and give credit for all materials used in your research. As a university student, digital citizen, and a future professional in the workplace, you are responsible for knowing and adhering to the university policies on academic honesty, including citation of all source materials. All students who engage in dishonest acts such as cheating and/or plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary action, which includes failure of the course and possible expulsion from the university. You are solely responsible for understanding what constitutes a violation of academic honesty. Go to: <https://www.montclair.edu/policies/student/student-conduct/academic-honesty/>

Montclair State University is committed to maintaining an environment that is inclusive and free of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

MSU welcomes persons from all racial, ethnic, social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Behavior that violates the civil and statutory rights of any individual or group, or interferes with any individual or group's ability to benefit from, or contribute to, the employment, educational, and/or cultural opportunities provided by the University constitutes a violation of University policy and will not be tolerated.

Online Etiquette

Make sure you have a recognizable head shot loaded in your Canvas and Zoom profiles.

As a general rule, you should have your video camera activated during synchronous class sessions. However, given that our individual physical circumstances vary, it is acceptable for you to intermittently mute your camera during class, should you have the need. Beware of falling in the multitasking trap, however (see below).

Be aware of your microphone during class session and use mute as the default.

Please make an effort to fully participate in synchronous class sessions and critic cloud breakout sessions. The collective "we" is what comprises the learning community.

As MIT neuroscientist Earl Miller explained in an interview with NPR, most people are actually quickly shifting their attention from one task to another when they think they are doing two or three or eight things at once. That constant change of focus makes our brain less functional, not more. Learn more at <http://www.digitalresponsibility.org/perils-of-multitasking>



Grading Standards

The following evaluation criteria are applied to all oral, written, and digital assignments that comprise the course of study. Major assignments will be accompanied by more detailed assessment rubrics:

A—Demonstration of superior work. Work demonstrates deep and detailed understanding of material; is logically developed and academic in tone and approach. Sources used are cited appropriately and in accordance with APA style guidelines. Creativity or special insights are evident, and work is free from spelling, grammatical, and/or formatting errors.

B—Very good work. Work demonstrates a clear understanding of the material and provides relevant details that ground theory in practice. Work reflects appropriate tone and approach for college-level work and displays coherent organization, addresses the purpose of the assignment. Work is relatively free from spelling, grammatical, and/or formatting errors.

C—Satisfactory work. Work, for the most part, demonstrates understanding of material and provides a few relevant details. Work displays a basic level of organization, mildly addresses the purpose of the assignment, and contains spelling, grammatical, and/or formatting errors.

D—Unsatisfactory work. Student work displays a severe lack of understanding of material and provides little or no relevant detail. The work is poorly organized, does not meet the purpose of the assignment, and contains numerous spelling, grammatical, and/or formatting errors.

F—Work is neither satisfactory nor complete. Student work displays no understanding of material and provides no detail. The work lacks organization, does not meet the purpose of the assignment, and does not adhere to spelling, grammatical, and/or formatting guidelines.

94-100%= A	84-86%= B	74-76%= C	64-66%= D
90-93%= A-	80-83%= B-	70-73%= C-	60-63%= D-
87-89%= B+	77-79%= C+	67-69%= D+	59% or below= F

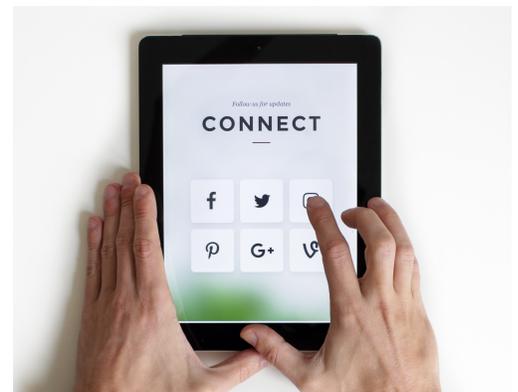
Help & Resources

Feeling lost or overwhelmed? If you are experiencing stress to the extent that is interfering with your ability to cope with this course and/or normal every day tasks, *please seek help.* At Montclair State University, all counseling services are free, voluntary and confidential. You can call (973) 655-5211 or go to <https://www.montclair.edu/msu-cares/>

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

It is important for those students with a documented disability to have the appropriate university staff communicate that information to me. This confidential information may afford modification of testing, or other class requirements. For more information, go to: <https://www.montclair.edu/disability-resource-center/about-our-services/> or call (973) 655-5431.

Need Technology Assistance? The Office of Information Technology provides loaner laptops and other services for students to be able to complete their coursework. Submit a university Help Desk ticket (helpdesk@montclair.edu). For assistance with WordPress conduct a YouTube search for tutorials.



Session Calendar

DATE	TOPIC + READING	ASSIGNMENTS
Week 1		
M 7/13	Course Intro & Orientation	Quiz #1 Cloud Act.
T 7/14	The Essence of Criticism (ch 1)	Quiz #2 Blog #1
W 7/15	Critical Functions (ch. 2)	Quiz #3 Blog #2
R 7/16	The Comm Process (ch. 3)	Quiz #4 Blog #3
Week 2		
M 7/20	Ways of Meaning Making (ch. 4) Critic Cloud 1 Presentation	Quiz #5 Blog #4
T 7/21	Tonal & Talent Ingreds (ch. 5) Critic Cloud 2 Presentation	Quiz #6 Blog #5
W 7/22	Stage-Molding Ingreds (ch. 6) Critic Cloud 3 Presentation	Quiz #7 Blog #6
R 7/23	Business Gratifications (ch. 7)	Quiz #8
Week 3		
M 7/27	Consumer Gratifications (ch. 8) Critic Cloud 4 Presentation	Quiz #9
T 7/28	Depiction Analysis (ch. 9) Critic Cloud 5 Presentation	Quiz #10 Blog #7
W 7/29	Structural Analysis (ch. 10) Critic Cloud 6 Presentation	Quiz #11 Blog #8
R 7/30	Ethics and Values (ch.11)	Quiz #12 Blog #9
Week 4		
M 8/3	Aesthetics and Art (ch. 12) Critic Cloud 7 Presentation	Quiz #13 Blog #10
T 8/4	Logic of Aesthetic Form (ch. 13) Critic Cloud 8 Presentation	Quiz #14
W 8/5	Composite Criticism (chapter 15)	Quiz #15
R 8/6	Media Critique	

All assignments are due in Canvas **no later than Friday 11:59pm EST** in the week in which they are listed in the calendar.

Course Rhythm:

Complete the reading in the textbook prior to the date specified. It's a sprint and not a walk, as the readings are lengthy and dense. Glean important concepts and move on.

HawkSYNC (OPTION #1)

Enter the Zoom classroom (Meeting ID **996 8718 7153** + password) a few minutes before noon (Mon through Thurs). Mute your mic, but activate your video camera. Participate in real time. Take the quiz after the class session, then work on crafting a blog post or completing the corresponding assignment for that session. Work according to the daily calendar to keep on schedule.

HawkASYNC (OPTION #2)

Complete the readings as your schedule allows during the week. Then log into Canvas to access the links to the recorded class sessions that correspond to the topics/dates. Submit your quizzes and blog post URLs any time prior to Friday 11:59pm EST.

If Canvas marks a submission as "late" then it will not be accepted for grading. **Make sure to adhere to submit well before the deadline and anticipate snafus.**



Vanessa E. Greenwood, Ph.D.
School of Communication and Media

Virtual Office Hours:
Monday through Thursday
2:30-3:00pm & by appointment

Zoom Meeting ID: **589 624 8622**
(for office hours only)

Best method of contact:
greenwoodv@montclair.edu