

# Critical media studies

Comm 5211

Prof. Gil Rodman

rodman@umn.edu / 612.626.7721

office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 10-11:15a, W 10-11:30a, and by appointment

# Syllabus

Fall 2009

## Course description and objectives

This is a graduate level foundation course that offers a survey of major concepts, theories, scholars, and debates in critical media studies (CMS). The specific topics and readings on our docket necessarily map out the contours of the field with very broad strokes. Each of our weekly subtopics could be (and, somewhere on this campus, probably is) the subject of a full-length seminar of its own -- and each of *those* seminars is still likely to be a survey of the major contours of that subtopic. As such, this course doesn't pretend to provide an exhaustive introduction to every significant scholar, idea, or school of thought that matters to CMS. Ideally, however, this course will give you the sort of general acquaintance with the history and breadth of CMS that will help you decide which direction to take your own research as you delve more deeply into the field.

## Grading policy

Presumably, you're enrolled in this course because you genuinely want to learn about critical media studies, and so you're motivated by something other than the desire to add an (other) A to your transcript -- and that's the way it should be. With this in mind, my default assumption is that it's counter-productive for me to make you worry about how your work for this course translates into a letter grade. As of Day One, you begin the course with an A. If you show up for all our class meetings, participate intelligently in our discussions (both in class *and* online), and complete the required writing assignment(s) in satisfactory and timely fashion, you'll keep that A. That being said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades. Under such unfortunate circumstances, your grade will be calculated using the following formula:

Attendance/participation	10%
Discussion questions	10%
Topic paper	20%
Book review/presentation	30%
Research proposal/workshop	30%

## Readings

All of our required readings will be made available in PDF format. [Reminder: department policy does *not* allow students to use the copier in 270 Ford to print these PDFs. Sorry.]

## Course blog

We will conduct a significant amount of discussion and course business online. Full details on how to access and contribute to our course blog are available on a separate handout. Among other things, the blog will serve as:

- a central "bulletin board" for official course announcements and major course handouts
- the primary place where you will submit your written work for the course
- a discussion space for continuing and/or augmenting our in-class conversations
- a space for mutual support and feedback with respect to your course-related research and writing

Ideally, the blog should function as a space that's serious enough for people to share more extended thoughts on the course material than it may be possible to share in person, but simultaneously casual enough for people to post textual fragments, "in progress" ideas, and jovial interaction.

## Attendance/participation

Despite the large size of our group, our weekly meetings will be oriented around seminar-style discussions, rather than formal lectures. As such, your primary responsibility each week will be to show up prepared to contribute thoughtfully and productively to our conversations about the assigned readings. You are not expected to demonstrate perfect and immediate mastery of the issues raised by our readings -- questions and requests for clarification are certainly welcome contributions to our conversations -- but you are expected to participate in our conversations actively and regularly. I'll chime in often enough (and at enough length) that you'll certainly get my take on our readings, but this course will not be a spectator event for any of us.

## Discussion questions

We have 12 weeks of scheduled reading this semester (15 Sep-1 Dec). For at least 10 of those 12 weeks, you should post 2-3 discussion questions related to those readings to the course blog by 2:30 pm the day before the class meeting where we're scheduled to discuss those readings. Exactly what those questions should consist of will vary from topic to topic (and from student to student), but you should be aiming for questions that can serve as productive jumping-off points for our in-class discussions: i.e., questions that readily lead the group as a whole into deeper exploration of issues raised by the readings, rather than straightforward informational questions or background/contextual questions that only I am likely to have anything to say about in response.

## Topic paper

You'll write a brief paper for one of the eleven weekly topics from 22 Sep-1 Dec (we will divide these up during our second class meeting). Your paper will provide a general summary of the topic in question (think "Wikipedia entry" and aim for ~1000-1500 words), plus a bibliography of 15-20 major sources above and beyond those already on our syllabus. Topic papers are due two weeks after the class meeting where the topic in question is discussed, and should be posted directly to the course blog.

## Book review/presentation

By 22 Sep, you will turn in a list of three CMS books (in order of preference) on which you'd be willing to report to the rest of the class. The books listed at the end of this syllabus are suggested titles for this paper/presentation, and I can't guarantee that all of them will be readily available to you. If some other CMS title interests you more, you should include full citation information for it in your listed of preferences.

If you want to review/present on a title not on that list, please do not choose an edited collection, since crafting a coherent argument about a disparate collection of essays (even related ones) is probably far more work than this particular assignment requires. Communication Studies students should not select books written by past or present members of the Communication Studies faculty. Journalism students should not select books written by past or present members of the Journalism faculty.

Based on the class's lists of preferences, I will make formal book review assignments by 29 Sep. Insofar as the class's interests make this possible, I will do my best to give everyone their first choices. The date for your presentation will be assigned at the same time that book assignments are finalized.

Your review should consist of both a brief summary of and a critical commentary on your assigned book -- with a heavier emphasis on the latter. Your review should be posted to the course blog two weeks before your presentation date, so that your classmates have a fair opportunity to read it in advance of your presentation. The precise content of your presentation will vary depending on the book in question and the nature of your review. The amount of class time for which you'll be responsible will depend on what our final enrollment is, but you can probably count on having about 15 minutes. When planning your presentation, you should assume that your audience has read your review, so don't plan to come in and just read what you've written. You should also assume that your audience will already have questions to ask about your review, so make sure to leave some of your allotted time for discussion.

## Research proposal/workshop

Your major project for this semester will be to craft a proposal for a critical media studies research project of your choosing. Ideally, your chosen project will be one that you're willing to pursue in the future, but that's not a formal requirement for this assignment. Regardless of whether you envision this as a real or hypothetical project for your own scholarly career, you should still work under the assumption that you're trying to design a *feasible* project.

Major deadlines for this project are as follows:

Preliminary 1-on-1 meeting	6 Oct
Abstract (250-500 words)	20 Oct
Full-length proposal (2500-3000 words)	15 Dec
In-class group workshopping	22 Dec (10:30a-12:30p)

## Miscellaneous

- If you feel sick, do *not* come to class, especially if your symptoms are flu-like. This is the University's official policy with respect to a possible outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate individual student needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. Please note that, by University policy, my ability to make such accommodations requires you to provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) or official documentation (for disabilities) in advance.
- If you wish to, you may make audio recordings of our class meetings, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or audio recordings of our class meetings, however, is strictly prohibited.
- As some of you may already know, I'm the founder/manager of CULTSTUD-L: a cultural studies listserv that has more than 2200 subscribers from over 40 countries around the world. You're welcome to join the listserv, but are under no formal obligation to do so. If you're interested, you should read the list's FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) first to (1) find out how to subscribe and (2) learn the basic rules of conduct for the list. The FAQ is available online here: <http://www.comm.umn.edu/~grodman/cultstud/>

## Reading/assignment schedule

### **8 September**                      **First day**

no readings

### **15 September**                      **Introductions and overviews**

Raymond Williams, "Defining a Democratic Culture"

James W. Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication"

John Durham Peters, "The Problem of Communication"

Elihu Katz, John Durham Peters, Tamar Liebes, and Avril Orloff, "Shoulders to Stand On"

Sarah Banet-Weiser and Herman Gray, "Our Media Studies"

Gilbert B. Rodman, "Critical Media Studies: Six Books and a Modest Manifesto"

### **22 September**                      **The "mass culture" debates / The Frankfurt School**

#### **DEADLINE -- book review preferences**

Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture"

Herbert J. Gans, "The Critique of Mass Culture"

Lawrence Grossberg, "Teaching the Popular"

Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'"

Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music"

Bernard Gendron, "Theodor Adorno Meets the Cadillacs"

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

**29 September Political economy**

Dallas W. Smythe, "On the Political Economy of Communications"  
Dallas W. Smythe, "On the Audience Commodity and Its Work"  
Herbert I. Schiller, "The Corporate Capture of the Sites of Public Expression"  
Vincent Mosco, "What Is Political Economy?"  
Robert W. McChesney, "U.S. Media at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century"

**6 October Marxism, ideology, and hegemony**

**DEADLINE -- research proposal meeting**

Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"  
Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State"  
Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'"  
Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture and the 'Turn to Gramsci'"  
Lawrence Grossberg, "Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation"  
Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture"

**13 October Semiotics**

Roland Barthes, "Myth Today"  
Stuart Hall, "The Determinations of Newsphotographs"  
Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* [selections]  
Judith Williamson, "Three Kinds of Dirt"  
Richard Dyer, "The Light of the World"

**20 October Audiences**

**DEADLINE -- research proposal abstract**

Martin Allor, "Relocating the Site of the Audience"  
Ien Ang, "(Not) Knowing the Television Audience"  
Janice Radway, "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects"  
Lawrence Grossberg, "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics"  
Virginia Nightingale, "What's 'Ethnographic' About Ethnographic Audience Research?"  
David Morley, "Theoretical Orthodoxies: Textualism, Constructivism and the 'New Ethnography' in Cultural Studies"  
S. Elizabeth Bird, "Imagining Indians: Negotiating Identity in a Media World"  
Sarah Banet-Weiser, "The Nickelodeon Brand: Buying and Selling the Audience"

**27 October Gender, sexuality, and feminism**

Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other"  
Lana Rakow, "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy Its Due"  
Lisa McLaughlin, "Feminist Communication Scholarship and 'the Woman Question' in the Academy"  
Carol A. Stabile, "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance"  
Constance Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture"  
Lisa Henderson, "Justify Our Love: Madonna and the Politics of Queer Sex"  
Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*"

**3 November Race and ethnicity**

Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream* [selections]  
bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination"  
Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media"  
Stuart Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies"  
Herman S. Gray, "Jazz Tradition, Institutional Formation, and Cultural Practice"  
Gilbert B. Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words: Eminem and the Cultural Politics of Authenticity"  
Carol A. Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains: Gender, Race, and Crime News in US Culture* [selections]

**10 November History**

James W. Carey with John J. Quirk, "The History of the Future"  
George Lipsitz, "Precious and Communicable: History in an Age of Popular Culture"  
Gilbert B. Rodman, "Making a Better Mystery Out of History: Of Plateaus, Roads, and Traces"  
Kathy Roberts Forde, "Journalism, Libel Law, and the Problem of Facts"  
Jonathan Sterne, "Hello!"  
Charles R. Acland, "Residual Media"  
Haidee Wasson, "Electric Homes! Automatic Movies! Efficient Entertainment!: 16mm and Cinema's Domestication in the 1920s"

**17 November Technology**

James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph"  
James W. Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"  
Raymond Williams, "The Technology and the Society"  
Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer* [selections]  
Carolyn Marvin, "Dazzling the Multitude: Original Media Spectacles"  
Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "In Novel Conditions: The Cross-Dressing Psychiatrist"  
Jonathan Sterne, "A Machine to Hear for Them: On the Very Possibility of Sound's Reproduction"  
Gilbert B. Rodman, "The Net Effect: The Public's Fear and the Public Sphere"

**24 November Intellectual property / Convergence**

Henry Jenkins, "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence"  
Henry Jenkins, "Buying Into *American Idol*: How We Are Being Sold on Reality Television"  
Mark Andrejevic, "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother: Reality TV in the Era of Digital Capitalism"  
Ted Striphas, "E-Books and the Digital Future"  
Lawrence Lessig, "Piracy"  
Laikwan Pang, "Copying *Kill Bill*"  
Gilbert B. Rodman and Cheyanne Vanderdonckt, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3: The Regulation and Recirculation of Affect"

**1 December Cultural studies**

**DEADLINE -- book review I**

Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies"  
John Frow and Meaghan Morris, "Introduction" [*Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*]  
Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name (One More Time)?"  
Lawrence Grossberg, "Mapping Popular Culture"  
Constance Penley, "From NASA to *The 700 Club* (With a Detour Through Hollywood): Cultural Studies in the Public Sphere"  
Lauren Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency"  
Gilbert B. Rodman, "Elvis Culture"

**8 December Presentations I**

**DEADLINE -- book review II**

**15 December Presentations II**

**DEADLINE -- full-length draft of research proposal**

**22 December Workshop for research proposals (10:30a-12:30p)**

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### Suggested books for review/presentation

1. Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (U. of Minnesota Press, 2004)
2. Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Duke U. Press, 2003)
3. Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (U. of North Carolina Press, 1985)
4. Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Indiana U. Press, 1987)
5. Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003)
6. Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (U. Press of Kansas, 2007)
7. Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (Routledge, 1985)
8. Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (Routledge, 1995)
9. Ben Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Beacon, 2004)
10. Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule!: Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship* (Duke U. Press, 2007)
11. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (Methuen, 1987)
12. S. Elizabeth Bird, *For Enquiring Minds: A Cultural Study of Supermarket Tabloids* (U. of Tennessee Press, 1992)
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