

# Comm 5211: Critical media studies

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office hours (Ford 284)  
TuTh 10-11a, Th 230-330p and by appointment

## Course description and objectives

This is a graduate-level survey of major methods, concepts, theories, scholars, and debates in critical media studies (CMS). Each of our major subtopics could be the subject of a full-length seminar of its own -- and each of those seminars would still provide only a broad overview of the subtopic in question. As such, we will map out the contours of the field using very broad strokes. This course doesn't pretend to be an exhaustive introduction to every methodology, scholar, idea, or school of thought that matters to CMS. Ideally, however, this course will give you a general familiarity with the field that will allow you to decide which direction to take your own research program.

## Readings

The required book is available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union.

- Michael Kackman & Mary Celeste Kearney (eds.), *The Craft of Criticism*

Other required readings can be found on the course Canvas site.

## Canvas

If you're on the roster, you should already have access to the course's Canvas site. Log in to the U's main Canvas page (<https://canvas.umn.edu/>) and select "COMM 5211" from either the Dashboard or the Courses menu. We will use Canvas for several things this semester:

- access to our required non-book readings
- a course blog where you will contribute discussion questions about the course material
- a forum for mutual support and feedback with respect to your final research proposal
- occasional business-related announcements about the course

More information on Canvas can be found at:

- <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701> [text-based guide]
- <https://community.canvaslms.com/videos/1124-canvas-overview-students> [video tutorial]

[N.B.: There are Canvas smartphone apps (search for "Canvas Student") for both iPhone and Android, though these are probably not the most efficient way to use Canvas on a regular basis.]

## Grading policy

Presumably, you're enrolled in this course because you genuinely want to learn about critical media studies, rather than because you need to fulfill distributional requirements or pad out your schedule with "empty" credit hours. As such, I'm assuming that grades are not a primary incentive for you. If anything, grades may be counterproductive, since they encourage you to focus on numbers (e.g., how do I turn an 89 into a 90?), rather than on the substantive issues at the core of the course. With this in mind, you should assume that successfully completing the requirements for this course will earn you an A as a final grade. That said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades.

## Attendance/participation

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 productively to our conversations about the assigned readings. I do not expect you to demonstrate perfect and immediate mastery of the issues raised by our readings -- questions and requests for clarification are perfectly welcome contributions -- but I will expect you to be an active and regular participant in our ongoing dialogue. I'll chime in often enough (and at enough length) that you'll certainly get my take on our readings, but this course is not designed to be a spectator event.

## Discussion questions (DQs)

We have 14 weeks of scheduled reading this semester (11 Sep-11 Dec). For *at least 10* of those weeks, you should post 2-3 DQs to the course Canvas site *by 5:00 pm the day before* the relevant class meeting. Exactly what your DQs should look like will vary from topic to topic (and from student to student), but you should aim for questions about our readings that serve as productive jumping-off points for our in-class discussions.

### Technical instructions

- Use the “Discussions” link in the lefthand menu of the course Canvas site to create and read DQs.
- Post a new DQ using the “+Discussion” button in the upper righthand corner of the page.
- Comment on an existing DQ using the “Reply” link beneath that post’s box.

## 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 that reflects your own media-related research interests. Major deadlines for this project are as follows:

25 Sep	1-on-1 meeting
2 Oct	250-500 word abstract
13 Dec (10:30a)	Full-length (4000+ words) proposal draft
20 Dec (10:30a-12:30p)	Group workshoping

Abstracts and final proposal drafts should be posted to the appropriate threads pinned to the top of the Discussions section of the course Canvas site.

## Miscellaneous

- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students’ needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities) with enough lead time for accommodations to be arranged.
- University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the January 2018 policy statement (see <http://policy.umn.edu/hr/sexualharassment>). In my role as a University employee, I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office that addresses these concerns. Questions or concerns about sexual harassment should be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (274 McNamara).

## Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed in advance of the dates listed. Except for chapters from the Kackman/Kearney book (which are marked with asterisks below), all readings are available on the course Canvas site.]

### 4 Sep Day one

no readings

### 11 Sep Introduction and overview

\*Michele Hilmes, “Foreword”

\*Mary Celeste Kearney, “Introduction, or How to Cook an Artichoke”

Raymond Williams, “Defining a Democratic Culture”

James W. Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication”

John Durham Peters, “The Problem of Communication”

Sarah Banet-Weiser & Herman Gray, “Our Media Studies”

Kelly Gates, “Media Studies Futures, Past and Present”

John Frow & Meaghan Morris, “Introduction”

Lawrence Grossberg, “Cultural Studies: What’s in a Name (One More Time)?”

Gilbert B. Rodman, “Cultural Studies: What It Is”

**18 Sep            Texts**

- \*Ron Becker, "Ideology" (chapter 1)
- \*Rosalind Gill, "Discourse" (chapter 2)
- \*Jason Mittell, "Narrative" (chapter 3)
- \*Mary Beltran, "Representation" (chapter 8)
- Lawrence Grossberg, "Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation"
- Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'"
- Stuart Hall, "The Narrative Construction of Reality"
- Roland Barthes, "Myth Today"
- Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* [selections]
- Judith Williamson, "Three Kinds of Dirt"

**25 Sep            Political economy / Policy  
DEADLINE -- 1-on-1 meeting**

- \*Patrick Burkart, "Political Economy" (chapter 10)
- \*Bill Kirkpatrick, "Media Policy" (chapter 11)
- Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"
- Eileen R. Meehan, "Gendering the Commodity Audience: Critical Media Research, Feminism, and Political Economy"
- Robert W. McChesney, "U.S. Media at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century"
- Sarah Banet-Weiser, "The Nickelodeon Brands: Buying and Selling the Audience"
- Jonathan Sterne, "There Is No Music Industry"
- Tony Bennett, "Putting Policy Into Cultural Studies"
- Bill Kirkpatrick, "Vernacular Policymaking and the Cultural Turn in Media Policy Studies"
- Des Freedman, "Media Policy Fetishism"

**2 Oct              Production  
DEADLINE -- 250-500 word abstract**

- \*Timothy Havens, "Production" (chapter 22)
- Mark Deuze, "Media Professions in a Digital Age"
- John Thornton Caldwell, "Industrial Reflexivity and Common Sense"
- John Thornton Caldwell, "Para-Industry, Shadow Academy"
- Janice A. Radway, "A Certain Book Club Culture"
- Vicki Mayer, "The Places Where Audience Studies and Production Studies Meet"
- Helen Morgan Parmett & Scott Rodgers, "Re-Locating Media Production"
- Helen Morgan Parmett, "Site-Specific Television as Urban Renewal: Or, How Portland Became *Portlandia*"
- Scott Rodgers, "Digitizing Localism: Anticipating, Assembling and Animating a 'Space' for UK Hyperlocal Media Production"
- Ergin Bulut, "Glamor Above, Precarity Below: Immaterial Labor in the Video Game Industry"
- Nick Dyer-Witheford, "App Worker"

**9 Oct              Audiences**

- \*Jessa Lingel & Mary L. Gray, "Ethnography" (chapter 14)
- \*Matt Hills, "Audiences" (chapter 15)
- Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"
- Stuart Hall, "Reflections Upon the Encoding/Decoding Model"
- Martin Allor, "Relocating the Site of the Audience"
- Ien Ang, "(Not) Knowing the Television Audience"
- Jonathan Gray, "New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non-Fans"
- S. Elizabeth Bird, "Imagining Indians: Negotiating Identity in a Media World"
- Virginia Nightingale, "What's 'Ethnographic' About Ethnographic Audience Research?"
- David Morley, "Theoretical Orthodoxies: Textualism, Constructivism and the 'New Ethnography' in Cultural Studies"

### **16 Oct History**

\*Michael Kackman, "History and Historiography" (chapter 21)  
James W. Carey with John J. Quirk, "The History of the Future"  
George Lipsitz, "Precious and Communicable: History in an Age of Popular Culture"  
Meaghan Morris, "History in Cultural Studies"  
Gilbert B. Rodman, "Cultural Studies and History"  
Jonathan Sterne, "Hello!"  
Charles R. Acland, "Residual Media"  
Stella Setka, "Bastardized History: How *Inglorious Basterds* Breaks Through American Screen Memory"

### **23 Oct Race / Ethnicity**

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"  
bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance"  
Richard Dyer, "The Light of the World"  
Carol A. Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains* [selections]  
Ien Ang, "On Not Speaking Chinese: Diasporic Identifications and Postmodern Ethnicity"  
Jo Littler, "#Damonspaining and the Unbearable Whiteness of 'Merit'"  
Heather Ashley Hayes & Gilbert B. Rodman, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Film"  
Safiya Umoja Noble, "A Society, Searching"

### **30 Oct Gender / Queerness**

Pamela Hill Nettleton, "Brave Sperm and Demure Eggs: Fallopian Gender Politics on YouTube"  
Pamela Hill Nettleton, "Domestic Violence in Men's and Women's Magazines: Women Are Guilty of Choosing the Wrong Men, Men Are Not Guilty of Hitting Women"  
Constance Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture"  
Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*"  
Mary Celeste Kearney, "Pink Technology: Mediamaking Gear for Girls"  
Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention"  
Isaac N. West, "Queer Perspectives in Communication Studies"  
Jack Halberstam, "Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos, and the Wild"  
Lisa Henderson, "Love and Money, Queerness and Class"  
Mary L. Gray, "There Are No Queers Here"

### **6 Nov "Difficult" objects**

\*Cynthia Chris, "Authorship and Auteurism" (chapter 9)  
\*Amanda Ann Klein, "Genre" (chapter 16)  
\*Jonathan Gray, "Intertexts and Paratexts" (chapter 17)  
\*Suzanne Leonard & Diane Negra, "Stardom and Celebrity" (chapter 18)  
Zlatan Krajinina, Shaun Moores, & David Morley, "Non-Media-Centric Media Studies: A Cross-Generational Conversation"  
Mia Consalvo, "When Paratexts Become Texts: De-centering the Game as Text"  
Richard S. Dyer, *Stars* [selections]  
Julie Wilson, "Star Testing: The Emerging Politics of Celebrity Gossip"  
Gregory J. Seigworth, "Everyday Life Is Always Somewhere Else"  
Gregory J. Seigworth, "Sound Affects"  
Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers"

### **13 Nov Globalization**

\*Shanti Kumar, "National/Transnational/Global" (chapter 20)  
Edward W. Said, "Islam and the West"  
Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities"  
Ien Ang, "Doing Cultural Studies at the Crossroads: Local/Global Negotiations"  
J. Macgregor Wise, "Culture and the Global"  
Susan J. Douglas, "The Turn Within: The Irony of Technology in a Globalized World"  
*Cinema Journal* forum, "Decolonizing Media Studies"  
Raka Shome, "When Postcolonial Studies Meets Media Studies"

## **20 Nov            Sound / Music**

\*Jacob Smith, "Sound" (chapter 6)

\*Norma Coates, "Popular Music" (chapter 23)

Jonathan Sterne, "A Machine to Hear for Them: On the Very Possibility of Sound's Reproduction"

Michael Bull, "The Seduction of Sound in Consumer Culture: Investigating Walkman Desires"

Simon Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music"

Susan McClary & Rob Walser, "Start Making Sense: Musicology Wrestles With Rock"

Gilbert B. Rodman, "Elvis Culture"

Lawrence Grossberg, "Reflections of a Disappointed Popular Music Scholar"

Joy V. Fuqua, "Home on Home Box Office: Sound, Home, and Disaster in Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* and David Simon's *Treme*"

## **27 Nov            Technology**

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

Raymond Williams, "The Technology and the Society"

Jennifer Daryl Slack & J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer* [selections]

James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph"

James W. Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"

Carolyn Marvin, "Dazzling the Multitude: Original Media Spectacles"

Jonathan Sterne, "Format Theory"

Andrew Ross, "Technology and Below-the-Line Labor in the Copyright Over Intellectual Property"

David Hesmondhalgh & Leslie M. Meier, "What the Digitalisation of Music Tells Us About Capitalism, Culture and the Power of the Information Technology Sector"

## **4 Dec              Digitalization**

\*Madhavi Mallapragada, "New Media" (chapter 24)

\*Matthew Thomas Payne & Nina B. Huntemann, "Games and Gaming" (chapter 25)

\*Eric Freedman, "Software" (chapter 26)

Jonathan Sterne, "Thinking the Internet: Cultural Studies Versus the Millennium"

Ted Striphas, "E-Books and the Digital Future"

Lawrence Lessig, "Piracy"

Laikwan Pang, "Copying *Kill Bill*"

Siva Vaidhyanathan, "The Googlization of Us"

Chris Ingraham & Joshua Reeves, "New Media, New Panics"

Kate Crawford, "Following You: Disciplines of Listening in Social Media"

Benjamin Burroughs, "House of Netflix: Streaming Media and Digital Lore"

## **11 Dec            Space(s) and place(s)**

\*Victoria E. Johnson, "Cultural Geography" (chapter 19)

Lynn Spigel, "Object Lessons for the Media Home: From Storgewall to Invisible Design"

Haidee Wasson, "Electric Homes! Automatic Movies! Efficient Entertainment!: 16mm and Cinema's Domestication in the 1920s"

Rolien Hoyng, "Place Brands, Nonbrands, Tags and Queries: The Networks of Urban Activism in the Creative City Istanbul"

Vicki Mayer, "Hollywood South: Structural to Visceral Reorganizations of Space"

Helen Morgan Parmett, "Media as a Spatial Practice: *Treme* and the Production of the Media Neighborhood"

Meaghan Morris, "Things to Do With Shopping Centers"

Will Straw, "The Newsstand in Montreal's Central Station"

**13 Dec            NO CLASS**  
**DEADLINE: Full-length proposal draft (10:30a)**

**20 Dec            Workshop for proposal drafts (10:30a-12:30p)**