

**New York University | Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
Media and Cultural Analysis, Spring 2015**

Course location: Silver 407

Course Time: MW 9:30-10:45AM

Instructor: Melanie Kohnen

Email: mek8@nyu.edu

Office location: 239 Greene St., Room 723

Office hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:00pm and by appointment

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to approaches and practices used to analyze the content, structure, and context of significant media in our society. Specifically, we will examine how the relationship among the production, form and content, reception, and cultural context make up what we call media. Throughout the semester, you will encounter various scholarly approaches to analyzing media; frequently, these approaches will complement each other, but at times, you will find them contradictory. Understanding why scholars have developed different and sometimes contradictory approaches to understanding media and its place in society is a central goal of this course.

In the first half of the semester, we will study approaches to analyzing the industrial and institutional structures of various media. Our central questions will be, how does the media industry produce texts and how do these texts shape and make culture? In the second half of the semester we turn to the question of representation and reception. How do media texts represent us and how do we engage with texts? We conclude the course by taking a look at comics. As final project, you will create your own digital comic book.

Required Texts:

- Wilson, G. Willow and Adrian Alphona. *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*. Marvel Now!, 2014. ISBN 978-0-7851-9021-9.
- All other readings are available online or as PDFs.

Assignments and Requirements:

Full assignment guidelines will be posted under Assignments on NYU Classes.

Tumblr

We will use Tumblr to share news, art, and activism about and involving the media. Everyone shares the same username and password—this means everyone also takes responsibility for curating the posts and reblogs that appear on our tumblr account. Each of you will take primary responsibility for our Tumblr for a week, but you should also contribute at any other time.

Pop Culture Exercise

Select a TV program or film and analyze it using the material we have studied during the first few weeks of the course.

Media Industries Exercise

Follow a trade industry publication and analyze how the media industry represents itself.

Media Annotation

Using a clip from a film or TV program, carry out a visual annotation and analysis of cultural diversity.

Comic Book Project

As culminating project for this class, you will create your own digital comic book.

Participation:

In-class discussions and group activities are important aspects of this course. Consequently, your participation is crucial to the overall success of the class. You are expected to keep up with the readings and come to class prepared for discussion. This means you should not only have completed the readings, but be ready to discuss and engage the reading's major arguments. During class discussions, I will frequently ask you to suggest passages that we should examine in more detail; you should be able to identify these passages quickly by either underlining, marking the page, or taking notes in advance of class.

Good participation means contributing thoughtful comments and questions that refer to readings, screenings, and core concepts during our class discussion. The quality of your remarks is at least as important as the quantity of your remarks. In addition to taking part in class discussions, you will participate in a number of in-class activities such as small group work, collaborative analyses carried out in shared Google docs, written responses to screenings, etc. Your performance during these activities counts toward your participation grade as well.

Assignment Schedule

If not specified otherwise, all assignments are due at 11:59PM on the due date.

Extensions are only available in the case of dire personal circumstances, and you must contact me at least 24 hours before the deadline. If you don't contact me 24hrs before the deadline and don't submit an assignment, you will not receive any points.

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Participation	Ongoing	100
Tumblr	Ongoing	100
Pop Culture Exercise	2/20/15	200
Media Industries Exercise	3/13/15	200
Media Annotation	4/24/15	200
Comic Book	5/15/15	200
Total		1,000

Grade Breakdown:

1,000 points = 100%

A = 94-100

A- = 90-93

B+ = 87-89

B = 84-86

B- = 80-83

C+ = 77-79

C = 74-76

C- = 70-73

D+ = 65-69

Overall Evaluation Criteria:

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer innovative insights, specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade for participation are consistently prepared for class, synthesize course materials effectively, and contribute insightfully.

B=Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly, but leans toward broad analysis rather than innovative perspectives. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague, tangential and/or features significant grammar and spelling mistakes. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis, and features misunderstandings of key concepts/theories. Classroom participation is inarticulate, superficial, and/or infrequent.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared, and off-topic.

F=Failed

This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

Course Policies:

A Note on Laptops and Cell Phone Usage

You are encouraged to bring an internet-enabled device to every class--all of our readings are available in digital formats, after all. It is your responsibility to monitor your use of the internet, texting, etc. in class. You should be mindful of where your attention is during class time (hint: it should be focused on the discussion that's happening among the people in the room). You should feel free to look up information online that is relevant to in-class activities and share this information with the class.

Absences

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester (if your unexcused absences exceed that limit, you put yourself at risk of failing the course). All other absences must be for valid, non-academic reasons, such as medical emergencies (confirmed by a doctor's note) or religious holidays.

If you miss class, it is your responsibility to catch up on the work we have done during class. Also note that showing up more than ten minutes late to class automatically translates into an unexcused absence for that class meeting.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you

- cheat on an exam,
- submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
- receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
- plagiarize.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, *without proper attribution*, you do any of the following:

- copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
- download documents from the Internet;
- purchase documents;
- report from others' oral work;
- paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
- copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Please consult Steinhardt's policy for more information:

http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity

Student Resources:

Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#), 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

Reading Schedule

Week 1-7: How does the media industry produce texts and how do these texts shape and make culture?

Week 1

01/26 Introduction and Course Overview

01/28

- Mittell, Jason. "[Why Television?](#)" In: *Television and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009: 1-11.
- Representation. In: *Television Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2002: 198-201.

Week 2 Foundations I: Thinking about Popular Culture

02/02

- Jenkins, Henry, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc. "The Culture That Sticks to Your Skin: A Manifesto for a New Cultural Studies." in: *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*. Duke, 2003: 1-25.

02/04

- Jenkins et al, continued.
- Complete homework assignment before class. See Announcements or this Tumblr post for details on what to do.

Week 3 Semiotics

02/09

- Semiology/Semiotics. In: *Television Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2002: 210-214.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In: *Culture, Media, and Language*. 90-103.

02/11

No Class—Professor Kohnen attends the [Connected Viewing Initiative](#) Meeting at UC Santa Barbara

Week 4 Ideology

02/16

Presidents' Day: No Class

02/18

- Fiske, John. "Culture, Ideology, Interpellation." Excerpt from *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*. UNC Press, 1992.

Pop Culture Analysis due on 2/20.

Week 5: Media Industry Studies

02/23

- Holt, Jennifer and Alisa Perren. Introduction: Does the World Really Need One More Field of Study?" In: *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*. 2009: 1-17.

02/25

- Caldwell, John. "Cultures of Production." In: Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren. *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*. 2009: 199-213.

Week 7: Investigating the Media Industry

03/03

- Mittell, Jason. [A Note on History](#). *Television and American Culture*, 10-12 (scroll down to refresh your memory on TV history).
- Mann, Denise. "When Television and New Media Work Worlds Collide." In: Denise Mann (ed). [Wired TV: Laboring Over an Interactive Future](#). Rutgers University Press, 2014: 1-10.
- In-class Activity: Identify three terms/concepts in the essay by Denise Mann that are unfamiliar to you

03/05

- Mann, Denise. "The Labor Behind the Lost ARG: WGA's Tentative Foothold in the Digital Age." *Wired TV: Laboring Over an Interactive Future*. Rutgers University Press, 2014: 118-140.

Week 6: Political Economy

03/10

- McChesney, Robert. "Introduction." In: *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. Monthly Review Press, 2008: 1-11.

03/12

- McChesney, Robert. "What is the Elephant in the Digital Room?" In: [Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy](#). The New Press, 2013: 1-22. (e-book)

Media Industry Analysis due on 3/13.

03/16+03/18: Spring Break

Week 8-13: How do texts represent us, and how do we engage with texts?

Week 8: Foundations II

03/23

- Mittell, Jason. "Approaches to Studying Identity." *Television and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Beltran, Mary. [Meaningful Diversity: Exploring Questions of Equitable Representation](#). *Flow* 12:07, 2010.

03/25

No Class: Professor Kohnen attends the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference

Week 9 Understanding Audiences

03/30

- Mittell, Jason. "Passive or Active, Influences or Effects." *Television and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

04/01

- Stein, Louisa. Introduction to *Millennial/Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*. Forthcoming from University of Iowa Press.
- Various authors, [It's a Fanmade World: From One Direction to Soderbergh, The Fan Culture Revolution](#). *New York Magazine*, March 2015.

Week 10: Analyzing Gender

04/06

- Psychoanalysis. In: *Television Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2002: 180-185. (PDF)
- Mulvey, Laura. [Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema](#). Screen 16:3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

04/08

- Levine, Elana. "Grey's Anatomy: Feminism" in [How to Watch Television](#). NYU Press, 2013: 139-148.
- Petersen, Anne Helen. [Beyonce, Feminism, Ambivalence](#). (also available as PDF) *Celebrity Gossip, Academic Style*, February 2013.

Week 11: Analyzing Sexuality

04/13

The Celluloid Closet. (in-class screening)

04/15

Doty, Alexander. "Introduction." In: *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*. Routledge, 2000: 1-8.

Week 12: Analyzing Race

04/20

- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. "Racial Formation." In: *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. Routledge, 1994: 57-69.

04/22

- Yano, Christine R. "Tasting America: The Politics and Pleasures of School Lunch in Hawai'i." In: [Eating Asian America](#): 30-52. (e-book)

Media Annotation due on 04/24.

Week 13 Intersections

04/27

- Wilson, G. Willow and Adrian Alphona. *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*. Marvel Now!, 2014.
- Kompare, Derek. [Comics Move to Big Screen and Beyond](#). Media Industries Project, January 2015.
- McGlynn, Anthony. [Why Kamala Khan is the most important superhero in the world](#). *The Mary Sue*, December 2014.
- Riesman, Abraham. [Meet G. Willow Wilson, the Muslim Woman Revolutionizing Superhero Comics](#). *Vulture*, March 2014.

04/29

- Kompare, Derek. [Comics Move to Big Screen and Beyond](#). Media Industries Project, January 2015.
- Polo, Susana. [The Hawkeye Initiative](#). *The Mary Sue*, December 2012.

Week 14 Making Comics

05/04

Comics workshop: content

(featuring: Ms. Marvel Vol. 2, Hawkeye Vol. 1, Ultimate Spider-man, Astonishing X-Men, Rocket Raccoon, Bitch Planet, Love and Rockets, Fun Home)

05/06

Comics workshop: Form

McCloud, Scott. Excerpts from Chapter 2, "The Vocabulary of Comics" and Chapter 4, "Blood in the Gutter". In: *Understanding Comics*. Harper-Perennial, 1994. (PDF)

Week 15

05/11

Course wrap-up

Digital Comic Book due on 5/13.