

RHMS 302: Media Theory | Fall 2018

M 3:00-4:30p, TH 3:30-5:00pm in JRHH 205

Instructor: Melanie Kohnen

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Office: JRHH 368

Office hours:

Monday, 4:30-5:30pm

Thursday, 2:30-3:30pm and by appointment

Overview

This course introduces you to central concepts in media theory, addressing a diverse set of topics ranging from language, ideology, power, media industries, and audiences to cultural diversity/identities. You will discover the development and diversity in approaches to media theory through foundational texts that have shaped media theory/studies for decades and recent scholarly work that builds on these foundational texts. Indeed, many weeks start with a foundational text and end with an essay that was published in the last year or two. This juxtaposition of old and new allows to see why some concepts have endured and how they have been challenged and transformed over the years.

Required Texts:

- Kelly Sue and Valentine De Landro. *Bitch Planet, Vol. 1: Extraordinary Machine*. Image Comics, 2015.
- All other readings are available as PDFs on Moodle or via online sources provided by the library.

Assignments and Requirements (full assignment guidelines on Moodle):

Critical Responses (50%)

Reading and understanding theory is a marathon, not a sprint. Consequently, you will continuously engage with theory through written responses that are due every other week. While each response is short, the cumulative value of the responses makes them the most important assignment of the course. In other words, do not underestimate them.

Midterm Paper (20%)

You will write a midterm paper that builds on your critical responses and allows you to explore an area of media theory in more depth.

Final Video Project (20%)

You will create a 5-7min video that explains a central theoretical concept or profile an author we studied. In an accompanying statement, you document and analyze the choices you made while creating this video.

Participation (10%)

In-class discussions and group activities are important aspects of this course. Consequently, your participation in class is crucial to the overall success of the course. 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.

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.

Late assignments are graded down half a letter grade. I do not accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late.

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Critical Responses	Every other week	500
Participation	Ongoing	100
Midterm Paper	10/20	200
Final Video Project	12/01	200
Total		1000

Overall Evaluation Criteria:

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, 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

A Note on Laptops and Cell Phone Usage

We will collectively decide which technology policy to adopt for this 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

For information on what constitutes academic integrity, see the College's official policies here: <http://legacy.lclark.edu/dept/pathfind/academicinteg.htm> If you haven't already done so, take the tutorial on how to avoid plagiarism available here: <http://library.lclark.edu/reference/plagiarism/index.htm>

Accommodations

Please come and speak with me if you are having difficulties with the course material, readings, or assignments. I am also very happy to work with students who are in need of special accommodations. If you anticipate needing special accommodations, contact the Student Support Services Office to discuss your situation. That office will contact me, and we can take appropriate action to make sure all your needs are accommodated.

Week 1

09/06 First day of class

Week 2 Foundations I: Thinking about Popular Culture

09/10

- 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.

09/13

- Workshop: Reading and writing media theory

Week 3: Foundations II: Media as Meaning-Makers

09/17

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

09/20

- Warner, Kristen. "ABC's Scandal and Black Women's Fandom." In: Elana Levine (ed). *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*. U of Illinois Press, 2015: 32-51.

Week 4 Marxism + Ideology

09/24

- [Introduction to Karl Marx + his critique of capitalism \(10min video\)](#)
- Marx, Karl. "Base and Superstructure." In: *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 60.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In: *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 302-312.

09/25 A2

- Fiske, John. "Culture, Ideology, Interpellation." Excerpt from *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*. UNC Press, 1992.
- Examples:
[Gridlock after Garner Protesters Take to the Streets](#) (Dec 4, 2014)
[Thousands of Garner Protesters March Across NYC](#) (Dec 5, 2014)

Week 5 Hegemony and Hierarchies of Taste

10/01

- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Distinction." In: *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 498-508.

10/04

- Levine, Elena and Michael Z. Newman. "Legitimizing Television." *Legitimizing*

Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status. Routledge, 2011: 1-14.

Week 6: Brand Cultures

10/08

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. "Introduction: Branding the Authentic." In: [Authentictm: The Politics and Ambivalence in Brand Culture](#). (e-book) NYU Press, 2012: 1-14.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. [Nike, Colin Kaepernick, and the History of Commodity Activism](#). Vox, September 2018.
- [Twitter thread](#) by Minh-Ha T. Pham.

10/11 Fall break

Week 7: Media Archaeologies

10/15

- Excerpts from Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1927-1940. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999.
- Kittler, Friedrich. "The City is a Medium." *New Literary History* 27(4), Autumn 1996: 717-729.

10/18

- Mattern, Shannon. "Introduction: Ether/Ore," vii-xx; Ch. 1, "Waves and Wires: Cities of Electric Sound," 43-85. In: *Code+Clay, Data+Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- Mattern, Shannon. [Infrastructural Tourism](#). *Places Journal*, 2013.
 - Example: [Bundled, Buried & Behind Closed Doors](#), 2011. (video)

Friday, 10/19, 3pm: Shannon Mattern, "[Local Codes: Forms of Spatial Knowledge](#)"

Attendance at this talk is mandatory (it replaces our meeting during finals week). You will also have the chance to attend a seminar with Professor Mattern on Friday morning for extra credit.

10/20 Paper I due at 11:59pm on Moodle.

Week 8: Media Effects: Origins and Impact

10/22

- Excerpt from "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In: *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), 94-104.
- Ross, Alex. [The Frankfurt School knew that Trump was coming](#). The New Yorker, December 2016.

A brief intro to Adorno's work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YGnPgtWhsw>

10/25 No Class – Professor Kohnen attends the Fan Studies North America Conference

Week 9: Media Effects: Current Research

10/29

- Williams, "Effects, What Effects? Power and Influence of the Media"

11/01

- Introduction to Thiel-Stern, Shayla. *From the dance hall to Facebook: teen girls, mass media, and moral panic in the United States, 1905-2010*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2014.

Week 10: Media Industries

11/05

- Havens, Timothy and Amanda Lotz. Ch. 1. In: *Understanding Media Industries*, 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2017: 1-23.

11/09

- Beltran, Mary. [Fast and Bilingual: Fast & Furious and the Latinization of Racelessness](#). *Cinema Journal* Vol. 53, Issue1 (2013): 75-96.

Week 11 Gender

11/12

- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16:3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
- Recommended background reading (you may not use this for your response): "Psychoanalysis." In: *Television Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2002.
- Examples:
 - Rear Window, <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/proctorjen/clips/rwinclip1c.mov>
 - The Media Wizards, Are Women Still Objectified? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yl2Eh8swrEs>
 - Just for fun: [Parks & Rec & Laura Mulvey](#)

11/15

- bell hooks. "The oppositional gaze: black female spectators." In: *Reel to Reel: Race, Class, and Sex at the Movies*. Routledge, 2009.

Week 12 Sexuality

11/19

- Coppa, Francesca. [Women, Star Trek, and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding](#). *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2008).

- "Wait for It" (a Star Trek vid):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kodO5j5r1x0> ([lyrics](#))

11/22

Thanksgiving

Week 13 Race

11/26

- Degaldo, Richard. [Introduction](#) and [Power and the Shape of Knowledge](#). In: *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edition. NYU Press, 2012: 1-12; 98-121.

11/29

- Warner, Kristen. [In the Time of Plastic Representation](#). *Film Quarterly*, December 2017: 32-37

12/01 Video Project due at 11:59pm on Moodle.

Week 14 Comics and Resistance

12/03

- DeConnick, Kelly Sue and Valentine De Landro. *Bitch Planet, Vol. 1: Extraordinary Machine*. Image Comics, 2015.
- Video: Kelly Sue DeConnick, How to Make People Uncomfortable (And Still Get Paid), 2015

12/06

Bitch Planet, cont.

Week 15

12/10 Semester Wrap-Up