

COMS 643: Cultural Studies of News

Winter 2010

Mondays 1:35-4:25

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Course Description: While the study of news has occupied a central place in the field of Communication, it has remained in a rather marginalized position within Cultural Studies-oriented scholarship, despite its cultural significance and the current state of crisis around the dwindling futures of national and city newspapers. After the publication of a few classic cultural studies from the 1970s, such as Stuart Hall et. al.'s *Policing the Crisis*, Hall's ideological analyses of news and news photography, or Stanley Cohen and Jock Young's collection *The Manufacture of News*, most cultural studies scholarship has tended to focus its analysis on "entertainment" media and its conventions of representation, rescuing it from the trash heaps into which so many cultural critics used to throw popular culture. In other parts of Communication Studies, however – including public opinion research, media effects studies, social psychological and "deviance" scholarship, and some political economic analyses – news media are still taken to be the *only* really significant or important media institutions for stories and information about the world, though rarely stated so directly. The hyper-commoditization of the news strengthens this latter position for many critics.

In the current context, how might cultural studies scholars attend to and respond to the rapidly changing environments in which news and journalism are practiced? How do the tools of Cultural Studies help us to see the current and historical conjunctures in which news is made and circulates? How is news practice one of the defining features of modernity and conceptions of the nation? How are news media, their histories and their technologies of production and dissemination so central to maintaining social order but also mark some of its changes? How has news making confounded the breezy divisions drawn between "entertainment" and "information," "fiction" and "fact" in ways that call into question some of the distinctiveness so characteristic of our ideas of news? Why, for instance, do so many audiences treat Comedy Central's "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" or "The Stephen Colbert Report" as sources of news precisely *because* they offer explicit critiques of news and world events?

We will consider these questions and several others over the course of the seminar in order to interrogate and define what constitutes cultural studies of news making and imaginatively open it up its objects of study. Along the way, seminar participants will read classic and selected recent studies of news making and journalistic practice from a Cultural Studies perspective, in addition to some other key texts.

Course Readings: All of the course texts except for the books we are reading have been prepared in pdf format and can be found on our WebCT site for the course. You have access to this site via your McGill accounts (go to: www.mcgill.ca/webct, login in, and select our course, COMS 643). In addition to the readings available in pdf form, five required books have been ordered and will be available for purchase at Paragraphe bookstore at the corner of McGill College and Sherbrooke Streets. A sixth book, *Policing the Crisis*, is available on reserves at Redpath Library, and is

also available via various online used booksellers---it is long out-of-print, but copies can still be found online. All books have been placed on three-hour reserve at the Redpath Library reserve desk.

Required books:

- Benedict Andersen (2006/1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Steven Classen (2004). *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Peter Fritzsche (1996). *Reading Berlin 1900*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stuart Hall et al. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- Carol Stabile (2006). *White Victims, Black Villains: Race, Gender and the History of U.S. Crime News*. New York: Routledge.
- Richard Terdiman (1985). *Discourse and Counterdiscourse*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Course Assignments: The following writing and presentation assignments constitute the whole of required work over the seminar.

Discussion Facilitation [20%]: Student-led discussions will comprise a good portion of our seminar time over the semester. Each enrolled participant will lead class discussion one time during the semester by presenting a **2-3 page discussion paper** that offers a critique of the assigned reading if the discussion is of a book, or in the case of seminar meetings where we have read several shorter pieces, the paper should address two pieces---the point of which is to begin putting them into critical dialogue. The paper should not summarize the reading(s), but instead should indicate one or two specific ideas and a passage (or two) from the text(s) that shaped your response. What interested you? What perplexed you? What seemed particularly significant? What seemed right on? What seemed problematic? Why? At the end of your short paper, pose two questions directed at beginning a discussion based upon your response. Questions can range from what a particular passage means to the relation between previous readings and the current ones under discussion. The purpose is to foster discussion, to understand the concerns and assumptions that guide each text, and begin to synthesize ideas. While it is the discussion facilitator's job to open up and direct discussion from the outset, it is everyone's shared responsibility to engage in conversation and to insure that they are lively and respectful.

Response papers need to circulate before seminar, with enough time to enable everyone to read them in advance of seminar. After a short lecture I will give at the beginning of seminar, the presenter will perform the paper out loud, and offer any additional explanation that she or he sees fit to contextualize the response. Presenters must send a copy of the response paper to WebCT by Sunday at 5pm.

Sign up for presentation days will be held at the first seminar meeting. If you run into a scheduling problem around a presentation date for which you have signed up, it is your responsibility to find another seminar participant with whom to switch presentation dates.

Media Demonstration [10%]: In our seminar meetings we will also have a "viewing/reading" of a media document presented by one of our seminar participants. This will not be the same person who leads discussion; each enrolled seminar participant will do a demonstration one time during the term. The goal of the media demonstration is to offer further material for discussion, and to experiment with different possibilities for how to construct news and/or journalism as objects of study, or as parts of other objects of study as research materials. During the demonstration, the *demonstrator* will introduce the media object to us, explain why it has been chosen, and offer a question about the media object

that engages with the issues/ideas in one or more of our week's readings. Examples can be drawn from your own research, but they do not have to be. They can come in any of a number of forms: be they news stories, news photography, alternative news formats, other "non-fiction" media, radio shows, and documentary media, among others. Please keep the audiovisual materials you will use to no more than 15 minutes in duration (if they include video clips, for instance), so that we have adequate time for discussion.

**Please note: if you have any particular AV needs beyond that which is available in our seminar room, let me know by the Sunday night before seminar so that I can insure that your technology needs can be met before Monday afternoon's seminar.

Sign up for demonstrations will be held at the first seminar meeting. If you run into a scheduling problem around a demonstration date, it is your responsibility to find another seminar participant with whom to switch demonstration dates.

Seminar Paper Proposal [20%]: On **Monday February 29th**, seminar participants will turn in a 5-page seminar paper proposal. The proposal should indicate which of the four seminar paper options you have chosen (see below). In the proposal, clearly describe your paper, the research/reading you plan to undertake and the questions of a theoretical nature that you seek to answer, if applicable. Also address why and how the proposed paper will be significant and/or interesting. Include a bibliography of the works you have consulted – it should reflect the preliminary research and additional reading you have done on the topic.

Seminar Paper [50%]: The course will culminate with a 20-25 page seminar paper. Seminar papers should not greatly exceed this page limit. The seminar paper will be due on **Monday April 19th**, in hard copy only. Comments will be provided, and will be left for you in your student mailbox, unless we have worked out another option.

There are four options for the seminar paper.

Option #1: Literature review. In this option, your task is to familiarize yourself with an area of news or journalism study. The review should include a description of the area of news/journalism study you have chosen, a discussion of key texts and how they define and delimit their object of study (be critical but also recognize what their methods and object construction accomplish), blind spots or limitations of the existing literature, and ways that scholars can expand on and/or open up study in the area. The literature review should not consist only of negative critique – consider how this area of scholarship could be useful.

Option #2: Application/Analytic paper. In this option, your task is to choose a set of news representations, news/journalism practices, or other set of objects and, drawing from the conceptual tools in our seminar texts and others that are applicable, do an analysis of your chosen object of study. Unlike a literature review, you will not be expected to do a full work-up on an area of scholarship, but you will be expected to: 1) do some additional outside reading, 2) analyze your chosen news representations/practices/other objects, and 3) comment, where applicable, on the course readings you use as a result of your analysis using their conceptual and analytic tools.

Option #3: Revision of a current project or paper. This option enables you to develop and significantly revise a current or former project around this course. The revision must truly be significant, meaning that the final paper offers a substantially different analysis than the original. Revisit your research materials. Conduct additional literature reviews, and engage directly with our course readings. This is a particularly good option for those of you looking

to revise a paper you have written for eventual conference presentation and/or publication, but it is not limited to this purpose.

Option #4: If you feel constrained by your choices in Options 1-3, you can propose an alternative to me, as long as it directly engages the course, our readings, and what we've been talking about.

Expectations and Policies: There are several expectations that I have of you as participants in a graduate seminar. I expect that you will: attend every seminar meeting and come prepared to discuss each of our readings, turn in your seminar work on time, and openly communicate about anything of concern to you in the course (e.g. if you know you will have trouble meeting a deadline or if there is anything that will prevent you from fully participating in the seminar).

Discussion Etiquette: Discussion makes up a great percentage of our time in class. Following a few basic discussion guidelines will help insure that this time is productive, enlightening and fun.

1. Work to create a shared climate of friendly and lively discussion. Please try to avoid personal attacks, jabs, and grand standing behaviors as much as possible.
2. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. Please grant your fellow seminar participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not.
3. Avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us -- in addition to using our well-honed skills in critique.
4. Wait your turn – do not interrupt others.
5. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.
6. You each bring interesting experiences to the classroom, and you are encouraged to bring up your experience when it is relevant to class discussion (and when you feel comfortable doing so). Everyone's personal experience deserves respect. But if you bring up your experience in class, it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation. Experience and anecdote are also not equivalent to evidence.

Grading: As a student at McGill, you have the right to turn in work that is written in French. All lectures, seminar discussions, presentations and demonstrations will be conducted in English.

Your final grade for the semester will be based on the quality and clarity of your performance in presentations, demonstrations, and your written work. If you turn in work late, you may not receive written comments from me and your grade could be reduced. If I deem your work unsatisfactory, I may ask you to do it again. Taking an incomplete or "K" grade for this course is greatly discouraged, unless you have a truly exceptional reason that can be supported by documentation.

How to Interpret Graduate-Level Grades:

A:	Good work
A-:	Satisfactory
B+:	There is a problem with what you submitted
B:	There is a substantial problem with what you submitted

- B-: Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
- C+ or lower: Officially considered a “fail” by the Graduate Studies Office.

Auditors: If you would like to audit this class, you will be held to the same policies and guidelines for etiquette explained here.

Statement on Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Semester Schedule

Monday January 4: Introduction to Course

Review syllabus, discuss assignments/readings/seminar format, and commence first lecture on mapping the field of news study and why do *Cultural Studies* of and through news.

Section I: News and the Imagination of Nation and Community

Monday January 11: News, Place and Nation

Benedict Anderson (2006/1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Recommended: Javier Sanjinés (2007). “The Nation: An Imagined Community?” *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3): 295-308.

Steve Wilely (2004). “Rethinking Nationality in the Context of Globalization” *Communication Theory* 14(1): 78-96.

Arjun Appadurai (1990). “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” *Public Culture* 2(2): 1-24.

Calhoun, Craig (1991). Indirect relationships and imagined communities: Large-scale social integration and the transformation of everyday life. In Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman (eds.). *Social Theory for a Changing Society*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Dayan, Daniel (1998). Particularistic media and diasporic communications. In Tamar Liebes, James Curran, and Elihu Katz (eds.). *Media, Ritual, and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Mohanty, Chandra (1991). Cartographies of struggle: Third world women and the politics of feminism. In Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (eds.). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Monday January 18: Transport, Circulation and the Cultural Infrastructures of News

Michael Warner (2002). “Publics and Counterpublics” *Public Culture*.

James Carey (1988). “Communication as Culture” and “Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph” in *Communication As Culture*.

Clive Barnett (2004). “Neither Poison nor Cure: Space, Scale and Public Life in Media Theory” in Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (ed.). *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*. London: Routledge, 58-74.

Richard John (1995). *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Selections.

Recommended:

- Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli (2003). "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition" *Public Culture* 15(3): 385-397.
- James Carey (1997/1996). "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communication Research" In Eve Munson and Catherine Warren (eds.). *James Carey: A Critical Reader* (14-33). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Friday January 22: Public Talk "What is a Newspaper?"

Laura Murray, "What is a Newspaper? Archives and Recent Court Cases in Dialogue" Room 202 New Chancellor Day Hall, 12:30-2:00 pm.

Monday January 25: News and the City

Peter Fritzsche (1996). *Reading Berlin 1900*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Monday February 1: The Public Bodies of News

- Michael Warner (1992). "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject" in C. Calhoun, Ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. MIT Press.
- Barbie Zelizer (1992). "Covering the Body' by Telling the Assassination" In *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (49-66). University of Chicago Press.
- Rachel Hall (2006) "Missing Dolly, Mourning Slavery: The Slave Notice as Keepsake" *Camera Obscura* 21(1): 71-103.
- Carrie Rentschler (2010). "Trauma Training and the Reparative Work of Journalism" *Cultural Studies* 24:1. Available online ahead of print version at:
<http://mclink.library.mcgill.ca/sfx?id=doi:10.1080%2F09502380903215275>.

Section II: Policing the Crisis and Its Legacies

Monday February 8: Policing the Crisis (no presentations)

Stuart Hall et al. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. New York, NY: Holmes & Meier.

Recommended:

- Special issue of *Crime, Media & Culture* on Policing the Crisis, 2009. Available on WebCT.
- Carol Stable (2001). "Conspiracy or Consensus? Reconsidering the Moral Panic" *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 25: 258-278.

Monday February 15: A Cultural History of Crime News

- Carol Stable (2006). *White Victims and Black Villains: Race and Gender in U.S. Crime News*. New York: Routledge.
- Stuart Hall (1984). "The Narrative Construction of Reality" *Southern Review* 17: 3-16.
- Larry Grossberg (2006). "Does Cultural Studies have Futures? Should it? (Or What's the Matter with New York?): Cultural Studies, Contexts and Conjunctures" *Cultural Studies* 20(1): 1-32.

Monday February 22: Reading Week

**Monday February 29: Watching Jim Crow (no presentations)
Seminar Paper Proposals Due**

Steven Classen (2004). *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Monday March 1: Crime, Disaster, and the News Construction of Race and Place

Carol Stable (2007). "No Shelter from the Storm" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106(4): 683-708.

Aurora Wallace (2008). "Things Like This Don't Happen Here: Crime, Place and Real Estate in the News" *Crime, Media, Culture* 4(3): 395-409.

Dylan Rodriguez (2007). "The Meaning of 'Disaster' under the Domination of White Life" *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race and the State of the Nation* (133-156). Cambridge, MA: South End Collective.

Jared Sexton (2007). "The Obscurity of Black Suffering" In *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race and the State of the Nation* (120-132). Cambridge, MA: South End Collective.

Marita Sturken (2001). "Desiring the Weather: El Nino, the Media, and California Identity," *Public Culture*, 13(2), 161-189.

Section III: News Culture, World Making and the Practices of Journalism

Monday March 8: Journalism and News Audiencing as (Failed) Witness

John D. Peters (2001). "Witnessing," *Media, Culture and Society* 23(6), 707-723.

John Ellis (2009). "What Are We Expected to Feel? Witness, Textuality and the Audiovisual" *Screen* 50(1): 67-76.

Susan Sontag (2004). "Regarding the Torture of Others" *New York Times Magazine*, May 23.

Barbie Zelizer (2002) "Photography, Journalism and Trauma," in B. Zelizer and S. Allan (Eds.). *Journalism after September 11*. London: Routledge, 48-68.

Jasbir Puar (2005). "On Torture: Abu Ghraib" *Radical History Review* 93(13): 13-38.

Recommended:

Stuart Hall (1973). "On the Determinations of News Photographs," in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (Eds.). *The Manufacture of News*. 53-85.

Judith Butler (2005). "Photography, War, Outrage" *PMLA* 120(3): 822-827.

John Ellis (2000). *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Carrie Rentschler (2009). "From Danger to Trauma: Affective Labor and the Journalistic Discourse of Witness." In *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, ed. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (152-175). Palgrave Macmillan.

Monday March 15: News Culture as a Site of Struggle

Richard Terdiman (1985). "Introduction: On Symbolic Resistance," "Newspaper Culture: Institutions of Discourse; Discourse of Institutions" and "Counter-Images: Daumier and *Le*

- Charivari*” in *Discourse and Counterdiscourse*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 25-81, 117-197.
- Stuart Hall (1981). “Notes on Deconstructing “The Popular”” in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 227-240.
- Anne Cronin (2006). “Rags and Refuse: The Newspaper, Empire, and Nineteenth Century Commodity Culture” *Cultural Studies* 20(6): 574-598.
- John Nerone (2009). “To Rescue Journalism from the Media” *Cultural Studies* 23(2): 243-259.
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/ftinterface~db=all~content=a908923073~fulltext=713240930>
- Barbie Zelizer (1993). “Journalists as Interpretive Communities,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10, 219-237.

Recommended:

- Larry Grossberg (1986). “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10:45-60.

Monday March 22: Journalism and World-Making

- Chris Atton (2003). “What is alternative media?” *Journalism* 4(3): 267-272.
- John Downing (2003). “Audiences and Readers of Alternative Media: The Absent Lure of the Virtually Unknown” *Media, Culture & Society* 25: 625-645.
- Lauren Feldman (2007). “The News About Comedy: Young Audiences, *The Daily Show*, and Evolving Notions of Journalism” *Journalism* 8(4): 406-427.
- Mark Deuze (2006). “Ethnic Media, Community Media and Participatory Culture” *Journalism* 7(3): 262-280.
- Pablo Bockowski (2007). “Vicarious Experiences: HoustonChronicle.com’s Virtual Voyager” in *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Selections from Andi Ziesler and Alison Piepmier (2009). *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*. New York University Press. (will be available later)

Recommended:

- Graham Meikle (2002). “alt.media” and “Open Publishing, Open Technologies” in *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet*. London: Routledge, 59-112. (will be available later)
- Douglas, Susan J. (2008) “Does Textual Analysis Tell Us Anything about Past Audiences?” In Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Explorations in Communication and History*, 66-76. New York: Routledge.

Monday March 29: “Tabloid Culture” (no presentations)

Special guest lecture by Alison Jacques, Ph.D. candidate in Communication Studies

- S. Elizabeth Bird (1992). “Writing the Tabloid,” in *For Enquiring Minds*. University of Tennessee Press, 79-106.
- Churchill, David S. (2004) “Mother Goose’s Map: Tabloid Geographies and Gay Male Experience in 1950s Toronto.” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 6 (September): 826-52.
- Örnebring, Henrik, and Anna Maria Jönsson (2004). “Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: A Historical Perspective on Tabloid Journalism.” *Journalism Studies* 5(3): 283-295.
- Will Straw (2004). “Traffic in Scandal: The Story of Broadway Brevities.” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (fall): 947-71.
- Alison Jacques (2009). Dissertation Proposal on *Justive Weekly*.

Monday April 5: Easter Holiday

Monday April 12: Journalism Studies meets Cultural Studies

Barbie Zelizer (2004). "When Facts, Truth and Reality are God-Terms: On Journalism's Uneasy Place in Cultural Studies" *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1(1): 100-119.

Barbie Zelizer (2008). "How Communication, Culture, and Critique Intersect in the Study of Journalism" *Communication, Culture & Critique* 1(1): 86-91.

Jeffrey P. Jones (2009). "Believable Fictions: Redactional Culture and the Will to Truthiness" In B. Zelizer (ed). *The Changing Faces of Journalism: Tabloidization, Technology and Truthiness* (127-154). London: Routledge.

John Hartley (1999) "What Is Journalism? The View from under the Stubbie Cap" *Media International Australia* 90: 15-33.

Special 10th anniversary issue of *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* on "The Future of Journalism" June 2009, 10:3. Available on WebCT.

Selections from the inaugural issue of *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* on "What is Journalism Studies?" Readings by James Carey, S. Elizabeth Bird, Jean Chalaby, John Hartley, Linda Steiner, Charles Whitney and Ellen Wartella, and Michael Schudson. Available on WebCT.

Monday April 19: Seminar Papers Due