Description

Today, the mass media have become the primary means by which we perceive and act in the social world. The production of mass media however, takes place within an industry that is governed by certain rules. It is vital then, that we come to understand the complex processes of mass communication. These processes involve every sphere of the social world: economics, culture, politics and everyday life. The purpose of this course is to provide you with a set of critical concepts and theories with which you can ask a range of questions about the mass media and come to a more sophisticated understanding of how the media shape culture and society. We will look at the ideal role of the news media in a democracy, the limits of a privately owned media system, the role of advertising, public relations and corporate propaganda, and the function of media and communications in social movements.

Course Goals and Outcome

The main goal of this class is to help you become a critical consumer of mass media products. You will learn how to read media texts critically, understand how and why they take the shape and form they do, and what you can do to create a more democratic media system.

Course Requirements:

- **Readings** – It is essential that seminar participants come to class having read all course materials thoroughly for each session. Grounding our critical exploration in the readings is vital to the analytical success of this course – both in class discussion and in written assignments.

- **Class participation (15% of course grade)** – This is a seminar that depends upon your active participation in class discussion. Emphasis will be placed on critical analysis of the readings, which will be generated primarily through the articulation of thoughts and ideas in a seminar format. Students must be prepared to contribute critical comments grounded in the course readings at each session.

- **Facilitating Discussion (15% of course grade)** – Each week, a group of students will be responsible for providing a short analytic overview of the reading. Of greatest importance, facilitators should raise several key questions about the philosophical and theoretical perspectives evident in the readings, as well as the implications of these in reference to critical media studies. For each of these
student presentations, there must be a coherent and organized power point presentation as well as a handout. Students will sign up for presentations on the class wiki located on Sakia. **Please note that you do not have to write a reading response the week you present.**

- **Reading Responses (15% of course grade)** – All students will post written responses to the week’s readings by Tuesday evening at 9PM, and come to class having read other students’ comments. Contributions should include reflections on the readings and questions for class discussion. Points of discussion include (but are not limited to) the following: What are the key arguments made by the author? What assumptions are made? What ideological positions are evident? What possible perspectives are left out? What did you react to most strongly in the readings and why? Are there any possible points of argument left out of the readings? What questions remain for you in reference to the reading, and how could your classmates help you explore these questions? **Please note: You do not have to write a response on the week you present.**
  - Please upload your written responses to the course site. We will be using Sakai for the class. Go to [https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal](https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal) and log in using your Rutgers ID and password. On the site I will post announcements, assignments, readings, and so on. Please check regularly.

- **Malcolm Gladwell Midterm Assignment: (20% of course grade)**
- **Take-Home Final (35% of course grade)**

**Additional Rules and Information.**

- Cell phones must be turned off upon entering the classroom and may not be used in the classroom or during class time.
- Laptops may be used for note-taking only. No emailing or Web-surfing during class.
- Students must show up on time and stay for the duration of the class. During class, students should not engage in personal conversations, read newspapers, do crossword puzzles, or undertake other personal diversions unrelated to class activity.
- I will return all emails on a first-come, first-served basis. Do not assume that I have received your email. If I don’t reply, follow up with a phone call.

**Academic Integrity.** Plagiarism and cheating are, of course, forbidden, according to Rutgers University policy. Your are responsible for reviewing and obeying these policies. A lengthy statement of the policy is at [http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html](http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html).

On plagiarism, this statement (from [history.rutgers.edu/undergrad/plagiarism.htm](http://history.rutgers.edu/undergrad/plagiarism.htm)) appears in Rutgers University’s rules. Like all such rules, it applies to this class.

Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be promptly cited in the text or in a footnote. Acknowledgment is required when material from another source is
Information which is common knowledge, such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc., need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged. In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, only materials that contribute to one’s general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with the faculty member.

**Required Books**

1) *Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization and the UPS Strike*. Deepa Kumar. University of Illinois Press. 2007


**Please order books online**

**Book (B) or Online (O) at Sakai (https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal)**

**Required Books**

**Reading Schedule**

**I. Critical Concepts (6 weeks)**

9/4: Introduction

9/11: *The Medium is the Message?*
- Marshall McLuhan- “The Medium is the Message” in *The Anthropology of Media* pp. 18-26 (Online)
- Neil Postman *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Introduction, Chapters 1&2 (online)

*Screening: McLuhan's Wake*

9/18: Representation
- Chris Rojeck, “Representation and Ideology” in *Stuart Hall* 91-131 (online)
- Roland Barthes, “Myth Today.” In Media Studies Reader (online)
- *Screening: The True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams Documentary*

9/25: *Ideology*
- Terry Eagleton. “What is Ideology” *Ideology* (online)

10/2: Audiences
• Ien Ang: Dallas and the Ideology of Mass Culture, in Cultural Theory Popular Studies: A Reader, 265-274 (Online)
• Janice Radway, “The Institutional Matrix of Romance, The Cultural Studies Reader 564-576
• Another reading TBA

10/9 NO CLASS

10/16 Democracy, Media and the Public Sphere
• Craig Calhoun. Habermas and the Public Sphere. Chapter 1 (Online)
• Nancy Fraser. Rethinking the Public Sphere. The Cultural Studies Reader 518-536 (Online)
• John Street, “Remote Control? Politics Technology and Electronic Democracy. The Media Studies Reader (MR)

II. Mass Media (4 Weeks)

10/23: Ownership and Democracy
• Ben Bagdikian: Media Monopoly Chapters TBA(Online)
• Bob McChesney: Rich Media Poor Democracy. Media/Democracy Paradox 1-17 (Online)
• Eric Klinenberg Fighting for Air. Introduction pp. 1-17 (Online)
Screening Outfoxed
MIDTERM DUE

10/30: Journalism:
• Michael Schudson. “The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism.” Journalism (Online)
• Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent. "Manufacturing Consent" (Online)
Screening: Manufacturing Consent or The Myth of the Liberal Media
11/6: Advertising.
• Raymond Williams: Advertising the Magic System. The Cultural Studies Reader pp.410-423 (Online)
• Naomi Klein: No Logo. Chapters 1 & 2 (O)

Screening: No Logo

11/13: Mass Media:
• Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception. The Cultural Studies Reader pp. 31-41 (Online)
• Hortense Powdermaker. Hollywood and the USA. The Anthropology of Media 161-171 (Online)
Screening: Ways of Seeing

III. Information, Communication and the Contemporary Age (1 week)

11/20 New Media and Globalization:
• Manuel Castells: “An Introduction to the Information Age” The Media Studies Reader. 398-410
• Ien Eng. “In the Realm of Uncertainty,” The Media Studies Reader. (MR)
• David Morley and Kevin Robins. “Reimagined Communities.” The Media Studies Reader (MR)

11/27 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

IV. Alternative Perspectives (2 weeks)

12/4: Contesting Media Power
• Nick Couldry; James Curran Contesting Media Power. Chapter 3-“Beyond the Hall of Mirrors: Some Theoretical Reflections on the Global Contestation of Media Power” (Online)
• Deepa Kumar Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization and the UPS Strike. Chapters 2&6 Understanding the Corporate Media: A Dominance/Resistance Model; Retheorizing Resistance in Communication and Media Studies (OB)
Screening: A Little Bit of Too Much Truth (Un Poquita de Tanta Verdad)

12/11: Alternative Media and Social Movements
• John Downing. Radical Media. Chapter 3&4-“Social Movements, the Public Sphere Networks; Community Democracy Dialogue and Radical Media. (Online)
• Todd Wolfson, "The Cyber Left: Indymedia and the Contemporary Logic of Resistance" (Online)
• **Students Receive Take Home Exam**

**December 18: Take Home Exam is Due**
In his article *Small Change*, Malcolm Gladwell argues that because of new communication tools people are not able to make the types of social changes necessary to build a better world. He compares contemporary uses of Facebook to the lunch counter sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement and argues three interrelated things:

1) People cannot build the type of social relationships necessary (strong ties) to build real change, and instead rely on the convenience of weak ties.

2) Consequently, people are not involved with “high risk” activism or structural change and instead engage in “low risk” or “no risk” activism.

3) The organizational structures enabled by the Internet, decentralized networks, cannot build the power or allow for the type of leadership necessary to make structural change.

In a 5 page essay, respond to Gladwell’s article. Consider the above and other central points he makes and **analytically** corroborate or refute his argument. Please find **1-2 outside academic sources** or sources from this class to bolster your argument. Some good places to start are the academic articles he cites in his essay from Granovetter to Shirky and McAdam. Finally regardless of your position, find at least one real world event to strengthen your case.
Take Home Final

This will be a 12-15 page take home final. Write 10-12 pages, double-spaced with 1-inch margins on all sides (11 or 12 font). The questions for the take home will come from a mixture of student produced questions (submitted in November) along with other questions. The final will be given out on the last day of class and students will have one-week to answer two to three questions. The final is due on December 18th. Each question will have to incorporate five sources from the class readings, and there must be a total of ten sources from the class readings on the final.