JMC 315-1 Media Criticism
(Spring 2017 11:45-12:40 MWF Hawthorne 101)

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Texts:
• Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era*
• Arthur Asa Berger, *Media Analysis Techniques* (5th ed.)
• Nicholas Carr, *The Shadows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*
• Brooks Jackson & Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Unspun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation*
• Jennifer Pozner, *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*
• Newspapers, magazines, websites, television shows and commercials, other assigned readings

Note-taking & laptops:
You are free to use a laptops to take notes – until someone abuses the privilege by checking email, social media, or any other irrelevant internet site. At that time laptops will be banned for the entire class for the rest of the semester.

*On the other hand,* you should think carefully about whether your laptop is the best way to take notes. If you want to actually learn the material, writing notes by hand (and then writing them into your computer at home) will probably be more effective. But the choice is yours – at least until someone abuses the privilege.

Though it shouldn’t have to be pointed out, your phone should be off and put away during class time and no texting is permitted.

Grades:
Based three short analysis papers (50 points each), a final paper (100 points), a final exam (50 points), quizzes/exercises (10 points each); reading responses (10 points each, always due on Monday; see guidelines below). Missed exercises cannot be made up. No extra credit will be given. Two 10-point grades will be dropped.
By the end of the semester you should:

- Have improved observation skills regarding mass media (and probably elsewhere)
- Have improved critical thinking skills in regard to mass media messages
- Be able to evaluate mass media messages from a variety of academic and professional perspectives (i.e., sociological, political, and/or aesthetic perspectives) – in other words, apply critical methods to the real world
- Be able to rationally and clearly articulate your mass media arguments, using appropriate terminology (doing away with, “I don't like it… I don't know why; I just don’t.”)
- Be familiar with basics of how mass media operate and why they do what they do

This course meets the Whitworth University Humanities requirement. Courses in Humanities introduce students to the rich tradition of humane letters. Study focuses on the embodiment of human experience, thought, and values through the scrutiny of text and symbol. Upon completion, students should be able to:

- apply analytical skills in order to understand and appreciate intellectual and creative human endeavors
- understand the connection of text or symbols to the history, the culture, or the development of the product itself
- understand that the meaning of text, symbol, or event can be affected by the interpreter.

This course also will focus on the following departmental goals:

2. **Demonstrate writing skills required to excel in an entry-level communications-related job and/or graduate school.**
   Students will be able to gather information and present it clearly, concisely, accurately, coherently and creatively to a target **audience**. Students will present information both to more formal academic and to mass audiences. Students will demonstrate careful, honest and imaginative work at each stage of the writing process: in generating ideas, gathering and organizing information, and revising their work.

5. **Demonstrate critical thinking skills required to excel in the intellectual, professional and personal dimensions of life.**
   Students will be able to apply higher level thinking skills to human communication situations. Higher level thinking skills include: application of communication principles in the classroom and beyond; analysis of the parts, organization, arrangement, relationships and principles of communication; synthesis of parts of communication to produce unique communication messages; and evaluation of communication by making appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative judgments of communication; practice defining, resolving and defending sound ethical decisions.
Understand fundamental historical, theoretical, sociological, and legal concepts underlying communication.
Students will be able to assess and explain the significant of primary historical and contemporary influences shaping communication. Students will be able to critically examine and analyze the effects of technological developments. Students will be able to articulate the value of free expression for communication professionals and for our democratic society.

Reading responses:
- Eleven total
- Due at the beginning of class each Monday – place it on the table on your way into class
- Up to two (typed, double-spaced, normal fonts) pages each; if more than one sheet, please have pages stapled together (before you arrive at class)
- Worth ten points each, graded on a zero-five-ten-point basis (“0” for not doing it or turning it in late; 5 points for weak effort; 10 points for good effort)
- Describe central ideas of all of that week’s reading (up to four chapters), paraphrased in your own words – do not merely repeat the words and phrases in the reading. The intent is to measure your understanding of the reading.
- Apply the central idea(s) of all of that week’s reading to your own life. The intent is to help you better understand course content by exploring the relationship between the reading and your own media/life experience. You might do this in a number of ways, including:
  - Giving your own relevant examples (not the ones in the text) of media that illustrate the author’s point
  - Giving examples of your own media usage behaviors that illustrate the author’s point
  - In cases where the author makes statements without exploring the “why,” going ahead and doing so – if you agree (or disagree) with the author, explain why
  - Giving examples of how the main points agree or disagree with what you’ve read/heard elsewhere in the class
- Any one reading response might focus on just one of the ideas suggested above, might employ several of these ideas, or might go off in a different direction. The point is to demonstrate critical processing of the readings. In some cases, that may take more than one reading of the material.

Quizzes/exercises:
These may come at random intervals, based on lecture/discussion, in-class videos and course texts (10 points each). Lectures and discussion are designed to supplement, not to repeat, information in the texts.
Three analysis papers:

- Each of these papers is worth 50 points.
- Each should be no more than 3 pages (typed, double-spaced with normal fonts).
- Each will critically analyze (using any one) a media “text” (commercial, show, etc.); see below for details and due dates.
- You must use one of the analytical perspectives discussed in readings and/or class for each (semiotics, neo-Aristotelian, Marxist, etc.).
- You must use a different analytical perspective for each paper.
- Write tightly, but be sure to describe the “text” well enough that the reader can understand the relevant points.
- Your interpretation of the text may then be different from what mine would be, but that’s OK – as long as your interpretation is well supported with examples from the media “text” and appropriate references to class texts (with citations).
- A critical analysis is not the same thing as an editorial opinion or a review, either of which tends to focus on your opinion of the quality of a media presentation and whether your reader should like that presentation. For the sake of these three assignments, your opinions don’t matter. Likewise, don’t waste space discussing how things “ought to be” – discuss how they are.
- Be sure to consider such factors as the following when/where appropriate to your method of analysis: What is the overt message (or messages)? What messages are implied? How does the writer and/or designer use various elements such as language and art to promote those messages? How do the writers and/or director use various elements – such as language, props (apparel, furnishings, tools, etc.), characters (age, ethnicity, gender, "history," etc.), setting (locations, background, lighting, etc.), sound (voices, music, background noise, silence, etc.). Are the implied messages consistent with the overt message? If not, which is more dominant, and why?
- Grammar and spelling errors will affect your grade.
- I encourage use of the Writing Lab.

First analysis paper (Note: You may vary the order of these, as long as you turn one in on each due date):
In no more than 3 pages, critically analyze a single newspaper or magazine story, print advertisement or web site. Include a photocopy of the item that you critique.

Second analysis paper:
In no more than 3 pages, critically analyze – using a different analytical perspective than you used with your previous paper – a single TV commercial or music video. You probably should watch it more than once (record it or use YouTube).

Third analysis paper:
In no more than 3 pages, critically analyze – using a different analytical perspective than you used with either of your earlier critical papers – a 30- or 60-minute television news or entertainment program show. You probably should record the show or find it online, and watch segments of it more than once.
Final paper
Using *The Shadows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* and *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*, write a paper of about 8 to 10 pages. The topic is up to you, but a good paper (i.e., a paper that gets a good grade) will do the following:

- Demonstrate a thorough reading and understanding of both books
- Demonstrate an understanding of media issues discussed throughout the semester
- Incorporate a thoughtful perspective – not necessarily one of the formal methods discussed in class, but one that shows the synthesis and application of ideas in a way that you could not have done before the class began
- Go beyond mere description/discussion of the books, and demonstrate deep consideration of one or more issues of importance to the world in which we live
- Support claims with multiple sources (probably at least eight, beyond course texts and lectures) and independent evidence (quotes, statistics, content analysis, interviews) rather than simply relying on personal opinion
- Use proper citation, spelling and grammar

Unlike with the analysis papers, with this paper you may (if you want) discuss how things “ought to be” – though with such an essay you should demonstrate both how that desired goal is different from what now exists and why the status quo is a problem. For example, if you don’t like the amount of violence in cartoons, discuss the possible effects on the audience of its use, and support your claims. This assignment may make your brain hurt (that’s not a bad thing, in this case), and I encourage you to start the reading early so that you can reflect upon it in a meaningful way.

**Grading rubric for final 100-point paper:**

____/20 points (maximum): Demonstrated a thorough understanding of both supplemental texts

____/20 points: Demonstrated an understanding of media issues discussed throughout the semester

____/15 points: Incorporated a thoughtful perspective – not necessarily one of the formal methods discussed in class, but one that shows the synthesis and application of ideas in a way that you could not have done before the class began

____/15 points: Went beyond description/discussion of the books, and demonstrated deep consideration of issue(s) of importance to the world in which we live

____/15 points: Supported claims with multiple sources (probably at least eight, beyond course texts and lectures) and independent evidence (quotes, statistics, content analysis, interviews) rather than simply relying on personal opinion

____/15 points: Structural elements – proper citation, spelling & grammar, etc.
Final exam:
Bring a blue book to class. You will be asked to use an assigned analytical perspective to write a critique of some media “text” presented on the day of the exam.

Writing/assignment tips:
1. When you use media outside of class, even just for fun, think about how to apply the concepts from class.
2. Start assignments early, so you have plenty of time to deal with unexpected problems. Remember that the school’s library resources are limited, and your classmates will be using many of the same materials that you want to use.
3. Spend plenty of time thinking before you begin writing. Work things over in your head and perhaps on paper; outline if necessary.
4. To help the narrative flow, make comparisons/contrasts clear while grouping related ideas. For example, in your final paper, don’t essentially write a short paper about each of the two books, then tack the two papers together.
5. **Cite your sources** where relevant in the text, using proper APA, MLA or Chicago Style annotation.
6. Provide interesting specific examples. This makes your paper more interesting, and demonstrates how thoroughly you have studied the material.
7. Use specific terms. What’s “young” for you, for example, may not be “young” for your grandparents.
8. Make your copy error-free. Proofread, forward and back. To do this well, of course, you should finish early.
9. If you have a question, ask. Please don’t do poorly on a paper because you did not fully understand the assignment.
10. Learn from what you’ve done before. Read each paper carefully when you get it back, then again before you start your next paper. Try to make sure you don’t repeat shortcomings.
11. Perhaps most important, try to think of each assignment as an opportunity to learn, rather than as my way of keeping you busy or making you suffer. I am subjecting you to this research and writing – and myself to this reading and grading – because active learning is more productive (and usually more fun) than passive learning.

Quantity of time for class preparation:
The time spent in class preparation may be just as important as the time spent in class itself, and each class is a valuable part of your education. Therefore, expect to average six to nine hours each week for preparation time and homework for a three-credit course. The syllabus outlines due dates for assignments. Please schedule your prep time anticipating that items for this class may come due at the same time as items for other classes. The quantity of time spent preparing for each class generally correlates to the final grade earned.
Academic honesty:
“Please note that I take extremely seriously the university’s policy on the need for academic honesty in all your work. I refer you to the Whitworth Catalog, and the current Student Handbook, where guidelines on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are spelled out. Any form of dishonesty in an assignment will lead to a zero on the assignment, and I reserve the right to give a grade of F for the course as well.” Anyone caught cheating should expect to fail the course. If you’re not sure if something is academically dishonest, it probably is – check with the student handbook (or me) if in doubt. You must properly cite sources you use. Plagiarism is defined by Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary as to steal or pass off the ideas or words of another as one’s own, or to use a created production without crediting the source. The Penguin Handbook also has a section on plagiarism.

Special circumstances:
Whitworth University is committed to providing its students access to education. If you have a documented special need that impacts your ability to learn and perform to your potential in the classroom, you will need to contact the Educational Support Office (ESS) in Student Life to identify accommodations that are appropriate. Students must contact ESS each term in order to have accommodations implemented (i.e. active). Services are not retroactive.

Contact Information
Katie McCray, Coordinator for Educational Support Services
Phone: 509.777.3380
Email: kmccray@whitworth.edu

Title IX:
Whitworth University faculty members are committed to the well-being of each student. It is common for students to discuss non-course related issues with faculty and, when possible, faculty will keep such conversations strictly confidential. However, because federal law views faculty members as mandated reporters of any incidents of sexual misconduct, if a student informs a faculty member of an issue of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or discrimination, the faculty member is required by federal law to bring it to the attention of the Title IX Coordinator, Rhosetta Rhodes. The Title IX Coordinator will make the student aware of all options and resources available to them under Whitworth University policies and under the law.

There are Whitworth University employees whom federal law does not view as mandatory reporters, to whom a student could speak without the conversation being reported to the Title IX Coordinator. These include counselors in Counseling Services and any of the university chaplains on the staff of Campus Ministries.

Contact Information
Rhosetta Rhodes, Title IX Coordinator, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students
Phone: 509.777.4536 Email: titleixcoordinator@whitworth.edu Counseling Center: 509-777-3259; Schumacher Hall.
Non-discrimination:
Whitworth University is committed to delivering a mission-driven educational program that cultivates in students the capacity to engage effectively across myriad dimensions of diversity. Whitworth University is committed to the fair and equal treatment of all students in its educational programs and activities. The University does not discriminate against students based on race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability and complies with all applicable federal or state non-discrimination laws in its instructional programs.

Fair and equal treatment:
Whitworth University professors strive to treat all students fairly and equally, applying the same rigorous standards and expectations to each of our students and working to invite students from all backgrounds into the challenges and rewards of our academic disciplines. Students who have concerns about classroom fairness should contact Dr. Randy Michaelis, McEachran Hall 218, 509.777.4402, rmichaelis@whitworth.edu.

Safety:
Whitworth University care about your welfare in the event of an emergency. During the first week of this course, please familiarize yourself with the safety information posted in this classroom.

Tentative schedule
While structure has its uses in aiding learning (and you will see many examples of how structures helps create meaning in mass media) flexibility also is a virtue. Becoming comfortable with some degree of ambiguity should be one of the goals of your liberal arts education. With that in mind, we’ll attempt to follow a course of discussion that is effective rather than dogmatic. If it takes longer to discuss a topic than expected, we’ll continue with that section and catch up or cut later elements as necessary. Also, in this rapidly changing media world, events may arise that are worthy of timely discussion.
Regardless, assigned reading should be done before the class meeting for which it is assigned (and reading responses – indicated as “RR” below – are due then, remember). Most of the readings are from textbooks (not necessarily in order); one is on Blackboard.

2/3 Introduction, syllabus, get acquainted,
(Berger Epilogue for Monday – no reading response)

2/6-2/10 Observation: Why Media Criticism?

2/13-2/17 Semiotics (Berger Ch. 1, 5 & 6); RR #1 due Monday, Feb. 13

2/20-2/22 Marxist analysis (Berger Ch. 2 & 8; RR #2); no class Friday.
Psychoanalytic analysis (Berger Ch. 3 & 7; RR #3)

Sociological analysis (Berger Ch. 4 & 9; RR #4); first analysis paper due Friday, March 10

Neo-Aristotelian analysis (Taflinger chapter via Blackboard; RR #5)

Unspun (Jackson & Jamieson, Introduction & Ch. 1-4; RR #6)

SPRING BREAK

Unspun, continued (Jackson & Jamieson, Ch. 5-8 & conclusion; RR #7); second analysis paper due Friday, April 7

iCulture (Andrejevic Ch. 1 AND 2; RR #8); no class Good Friday.

Business (Andrejevic Ch. 4; RR #9 due Wednesday; no class Monday)

War (Andrejevic Ch. 6; RR #10); third analysis paper due Friday, April 28

Politics (Andrejevic Ch. 7; RR #11)

Global media; hegemony Entertainment media; uses and gratifications; final paper due Friday, May 12

Catch-up; exam review; your topics*

Friday, 5/19, 8-10 a.m.: BLUE BOOK FINAL EXAM; No early final without written permission

*Your interests/topics: This primarily is a class in critical analysis, but I also want to be sure to answer questions you may have about the mass media. If something you want to know about the media isn’t on the syllabus or discussed in class before then, submit the topic to me by Monday, May 8, and we’ll discuss it during the last class. And of course you should always feel free to bring up relevant questions/topics throughout the semester.

A final word: This is one of my favorite classes to teach, and many former students have called it one of their favorites. The course will often be casual in nature, and we should have some fun – but fun does not mean easy. This is an upper-division communication class, and the workload and expectations will reflect that.