

## **Media Theory and Criticism**

### **Communication 201 - 001 - Media Theory and Criticism**

Meeting Time: Wednesday 4:15 PM - 6:45 PM

Mundelein 503

### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the study of a range of media from a theoretical, critical and interpretive perspective.

\*This course reviews critical and cultural theories such as cultural studies, gender studies, semiotics and other methods of textual analysis.

\*Students taking the course should be able to understand and apply media/textual analysis theories and methods to specific media systems and texts such as cinema, TV shows or video Games.

The format for each class will consist of a presentation/discussion, screening of a film/text, and discussion. Assigned readings and screenings must be completed on time to facilitate the class discussions of the readings and the analysis of the media. Informed class participation is an important part of this class.

### **Faculty**

Jeff Harder, MFA

Office: Lewis Towers 908\*

E-mail: [jharder@luc.edu](mailto:jharder@luc.edu)

Office Hours: Tues. 1-2 (LSC/IC Cafe), Wed. 1-2 (IC Cafe), and Thurs. 4-5 (IC Cafe), and by appointment.

**The syllabus and course materials are available on Sakai.**

## Primary Texts

Available online from LUC Libraries.

*Media Theory For A Level: The Essential Revision Guide* (online)

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam (online)

## On Reserve - Cudahy Library

*Critical Media Studies: An Introduction* by Brian L Ott and Robert L. Mack (online)

*A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* by Antony Easthope

*Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* by Peter Barry

*Cultural Studies* by Lawrence Grossberg

*Cultural Studies* by Fred Inglis

*Cultural Studies* by Kevin Gonzalez

*Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* by Stuart Hall,

*Essays in Media and Cultural Studies: In Translation* by Graeme Turner

*Mythologies* by Roland Barthes\*

*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Edited by Stuart Hall

*The Routledge Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory* by Simon Malpas

*Way of Seeing* by John Berger

## Online Texts

Available online from LUC Libraries.

*A Companion to Cultural Studies* by Toby Miller (online)

*Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* by Robert Allen

*Cultural Studies: A Practical Introduction* by Michael Ryan\*

*Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham (online)

*Misfit Sister: Screen Horror As Female Rite of Passage* by Sue Short (online)

*Myth and Meaning* by Claude Levi-Strauss (online)

*New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* by Michele Aaron (online)

*Plato's Political Philosophy: The Cave* by Roger Huard (online)

*The Republic by Plato*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (online)

*The Post-Colonial Reader* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin

*Questions of Method in Cultural Studies* by Mimi White and Jame Schwoch (online)

*The Institutional Cultures of Postcolonial Studies: Representing the Field In Academic Fiction and Hip Hop* by Liam O'Loughlin (online)

## **Films and Videos**

*The Merchants of Cool* (2004) by Barak Goodman (DVD-CLR)  
*Manufacturing Consent – Noam Chomsky and the Media* (1993) Mark Achbar (Kanopy)  
*The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2013) by Sophie Fiennes (Kanopy)  
*The Matrix* (1999) by Lana and Lilly Wachowski (DVD-CLR)

## **Evaluation**

### **Grading Scale**

100-94 = A, 93-91 = A-, 90-89 = B+, 88-84 = B, 83-81 = B-, 80-79 = C+, 78-74 = C, 73-71 = C-, 70-69 = D+, 68-64 = D, 63-61 = D-

### **Assignments**

Discussion/Participation: +0 - 3 points  
2 Exams 25 % each  
2 Text Analysis Papers 25 %  
Final Exam 25%

Students are expected to be actively engaged in class discussions and to complete the assigned readings and screenings prior to class.

Late work will be penalized one full letter grade for each day the assignment is late. An unexcused absence from an exam will result in a grade of zero for that exam.

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism and/or any other form of academic dishonesty such as cheating on an exam will be penalized and could result in a failing grade for the class. (Refer to University “Statement on Plagiarism”)

SOC Statement on Academic Integrity

<https://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/soc/pdfs/resourceforms/School%20of%20Communication%20Statement%20on%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf>

Use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) will be considered a violation of the plagiarism and academic integrity policy and will result in failure of the assignment and potential failure of the course. All thinking, writing, and creative content should be your own.

### **University Policy Statement On The Use of AI.**

"To maintain our culture of excellence and integrity, students are not to use AI assisted technology in the classroom unless they are specifically authorized to do so by their faculty for an assignment, a test, a quiz, or any deliverable that will be graded."

### **Attendance**

Consistent attendance is a requirement of this course. Students who miss more than two classes should expect a grade penalty of one full letter grade on the final grade for the class. Please notify me if you must miss class for a legitimate reason. Students who miss screenings are responsible for viewing the films on their own. All films are on reserve in the library or available online.

When classes are held on Zoom, students are expected to have their cameras on and be on screen during class and exams.

The Use of all video recordings will be in keeping with the University Privacy Statement below:

### **Privacy Statement**

Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within

the context of the class will be shared beyond the classroom. As such, recordings of instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students registered for the course and only during the period in which the course is offered. Students will be informed of such recordings by a statement in the syllabus for the course in which they will be recorded. Instructors who wish to make subsequent use of recordings that include student activity may do so only with the informed written consent of the students involved or if all student activity is removed from the recording. Recordings, including student activities that have been initiated by the instructor, may be retained by the instructor only for individual use.

**\*Students are prohibited from recording and sharing online any portion of the class.**

**Monitor your university email on a daily basis.**

### **Film/Media Screenings**

Take notes during the screenings. This will aid you in watching the film critically.

Questions

concerning the films screened for the class will be part of the exams.

### **Graphic Content**

Some films screened for class may contain violence, sex, nudity, strong language, and/or content that may be disturbing to some students. Contact me before a scheduled screening if you have concerns about a specific film.

**No use of phones during class. Turn off your phones during class.**

## **Managing Life Crises and Finding Support**

Should you encounter an unexpected crisis during the semester (e.g., securing food or housing, addressing mental health concerns, managing a financial crisis, and/or dealing with a family emergency, etc.), I strongly encourage you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students by submitting a CARE referral (LUC.edu/csaa) for yourself or a peer in need of support. If you are uncomfortable doing so on your own, please know that I can submit a referral on your behalf – just email me or schedule a meeting with me during office hours. To learn more about the Office of the Dean of Students, please find their websites here: LUC.edu/dos or LUC.edu/csaa  
Phone number: 773-508-8840. Email is [deanofstudents@luc.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@luc.edu).

## **STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY CENTER (SAC)**

If you have a special circumstance that may have some impact on your coursework and for which you may require accommodations, please contact the SAC as soon as possible. Formal arrangements must be made through the office before course adjustments can be made. Additional information about the services available at Loyola, including eligibility for services, is on the SAC website: <https://luc.edu/sac/sacstudents/>.

## **Tentative Course Schedule**

**You will be notified if any changes are made to the class schedule.**

**8/30**

**Week 1**

**Introduction to Course.**

**Defining Critical and Cultural Studies**

**Ideology – The Myth of the Cave**

Readings:

*Plato's Political Philosophy: The Cave* by Roger Huard Chapter 1 (online)  
*The Allegory of the Cave, Republic, VII*, translated by Thomas Sheehan (Sakai Resources)  
\**Critical Media Studies*, Chapter 1, Introducing Critical Media Studies

Viewing:

*The Plastic Feminism of Barbie* <https://youtu.be/RToUZJ0l7Pk>

*The Conformist* (1970) by Bernardo Bertolucci (excerpt)

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=conformist+movie++myth+of+cave+scene](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=conformist+movie++myth+of+cave+scene)

*The Matrix* (1999) by Lana and Lilly Wachowski (Excerpt)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRMSGsbExwg>

*Plato's Allegory of the Cave* by Alex Gender (TED-Ed) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RWOpQXTltA>

Required Screening:

*The Matrix* (1999) Lana and Lilly Wachowski

*Barbie* (2024) by Greta Gerwig (Go out and see the film as soon as possible. We will be referring to this text over the course of the semester.)

Recommended Screenings:

*The Conformist* (1970) by Bernardo Bertolucci

*Dark City* (1998) Alex Proyas

**9/6**

**Week 2**

**Ideology**

**Materialist Analysis – The Political Economy of Media**

Readings:

*Media Theory For A Level: The Essential Revision Guide*, chapter 12

*Critical Media Studies*, Chapters 2

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam, *The Frankfurt School*

Viewing:

*The Matrix* (1999) by Lana and Lilly Wachowski (DVD CL Reserve and Amazon)

**9/13**

**Week 3**

**Organizational Analysis**

Readings:

Media Theory For A Level, chapter 14

Critical Media Studies, Chapter 3

Required Screening:

*Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and Media* by

Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick (Kanopy)

*The Myth of Liberal Media: The Propaganda Model of News* by Katherine Sender, Sanjay Talreja, and Sut Jhally (Kanopy)

**Start First Paper Assignment. Due: 9/27**

**Week 4**

**9/20**

**Rhetorical Analysis**

**Semiotics**

Readings:

*Media Theory For A Level*, Chapter 1

*Mythologies, The World of Wrestling*, pp. 15-25 by Roland Barthes

Required Screening:

*Roland Barthes – How to Read the Sign in the News*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeF6O6E9RQ8>

**9/27**

**Week 5**

**Cultural Theory**

**Structuralism, Myth, and Ideology**

**Post Structuralism**

Readings:

*Media Theory For A Level*, Chapter 2

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam, *The Advent of Structuralism*

*Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Right of Passage*, Introduction and Chapter 1 by Sue Short

Required Screening:

*The Company of Wolves* (1984) by Neil Jordan (Kanopy)

**Paper Assignment: Due**



**10/4**

**Week 6**

**Narrative Studies and Genre Theory**

*Media Theory For A Level*, Chapters 3 and 4

**10/11**

**Week 7**

**Cultural Theory**

**Media, Ideology, and Representations of Race and Ethnicity**

Reading:

*Media Theory for A Level*, Chapter 6 and 7

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam, *Multiculturalism, Race, and Representation*

Viewing:

*Stuart Hall: Race-The Floating Signifier* by Hughes, Spencer, and Jhally (Kanopy)

*Color Adjustment: A History of African American Portrayal on Television (1991)* by

Marlon Riggs (Library Online Alexander Street)\

Required Screening: *Nosferatu* (1922) F.W. Murnau (Kanopy)

**EXAM**

**10/18**

**Week 8**

**Feminist and Gender Studies Analysis**

Readings:

*Media Theory for A Level*, Chapters 8 and 9

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam, *The Feminist Intervention*

*Feminist Film Theory* by Linda Steiner (Sakai Resources)

*Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, Chapter 5, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* by Laura Mulvey (online)

Required Screenings:

*Vertigo* (1958) by Alfred Hitchcock (CLR and Amazon)

*Cleo From 5 to 7* (1961) by Agnes Varda (Kanopy)

Recommended Screening:

*Witches of Hollywood* by Sophie Peyrard (Kanopy)

**10/25**

**Week 9**

**Gender as Performance**

Readings:

*Media Theory for A Level*, Chapter 10

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam, *The Coming Out of Queer Theory*

*New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* by Michele Aaron, Chapters 1 and 2 (online)

Required Screenings:

*Orlando (1992)* by Sally Potter (CL- Online)

Queer Theory in 80's and 90's Action Movies (YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wsHjT8sPi4>

Recommended Screening:

*Paris is Burning* by Jennie Livingston (CLR-DVD)

*A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, directed by: Sophie Fiennes (Kanopy)

**11/1**

**Week 10**

**Postmodern Theory**

Readings:

*Media Theory for A Level*, Chapter 5

\*Postmodernism: WTF? An Introduction to Postmodernist Theory by Tom Nichols

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6s\\_sW6FZ2g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6s_sW6FZ2g)

The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 (online)

A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader, Jean-Francois Lyotard, pp. 203-217 (CLR)

\*Film Theory: An Introduction by Robert Stam, The Poetics and Politics of Postmodernism (online)

Film Theory: An Introduction by Robert Stam, Post Cinema: Digital Theory and the New Media

Screening: *Cabin in the Woods* (2012) by Drew Goddard (CLR-DVD or Amazon)

\*START PAPER ASSIGNMENT

**11/8**

**Class 11**  
**Reception Analysis**

**EXAM**

Readings:

*Media Theory for A Level*, Chapter 17

*Film Theory: An Introduction* by Robert Stam, *The Rise of Cultural Studies* and *The Birth of the Spectator*

**11/15**

**Week 12**

**Media Effects**

Readings: *Media Theory for A Level*, Chapters 15 and 16

PAPER DUE

**11/29**

**Week 13**

**Audience/Fandom**

Readings: *Media Theory for A Level*, Chapter 17

**12/6**

**Sociological Analysis**

**Media Frames**

*Readings:*

*Seeing is Believing* by Peter Biskind, Chapter 3 (Pods and Blobs) (Library Reserve)

*Horror Movies Reflect Cultural Fears* by Aja Romano (Sakai)

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2016/12/21/13737476/horror-movies-2016-invasion>

*Viewings:*

*Todd Gitlin, Media's Countdown to War in Iraq (YouTube)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzDd8dAuL88>

**12/13**

**Final Exam @ 4:15**

