

"It is quite evident that a great gathering of political and commercial forces is driving the United States from her former isolation into the cockpit of world politics. Her manufacturing trusts want foreign markets and the defence of a powerful fleet; the tariff interests favor a military and naval expenditure which makes against economy and requires high duties; the financial and investing classes wish to secure at the public expense protected areas of profitable exploitation outside the present national limits; a more definite official class, military and civil, is forming itself by accretion from the wealthier and more educated groups in her Eastern States, and will be a growing force for a pushful foreign policy. Moreover, as the protected and concentrated business interests find their supremacy in politics and industry menaced by the boisterous clamor of 'a rabble multitude' armed with an equal franchise, they will be more and more impelled to divert the popular interest and passion into external activity. The Americans are a self-confident, restless, and patriotic people, and have been rightly designated as 'eighty millions of the most warlike people in the world.' To such a people the sensationalism of war and empire is a terrible temptation. To this must be added an extraordinary conviction, sedulously fostered by a fanatical clergy and an hysterically sentimental Press, that it is the duty of America 'to carry canned civilization to the heathen' (as one of their own statesmen put it), and that they are fully competent to perform this duty."

"Physician — Heal Thyself" Booklovers Magazine (p. 862) June 1904

Overview

Once upon a time, what we studied was called "the mass media". Its shiny products were simultaneously experienced by millions and widely derided as trashy "mass culture." Now, as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, it may seem as if that was such a very long time ago. The movie theatre and the television set are dinosaurs, everyone's earbuds play a different tune, and old keywords like "vulgarity" or "vice", "dumbed down" or "standardized," have lost their power to chastise. If platforms, content, and tastes have changed, media's centralizing, controlling and conservative power nonetheless continues to make headlines and stir debate. As it turns out, recent attacks on "fake news" and widespread distrust of "the Media" (including, now, the micro-targetting of "social" media!) aren't new. This seminar historicizes such criticisms by revisiting the notorious midcentury critique of mass culture, its ancestors and descendants. While Adorno, Greenberg, MacDonald and others helped make it central to the new discipline of communication/media studies in the 1950s and 60s, the critique drew on older, popular polemics against "yellow journalism," "canned music," or "movie-made children," alongside even older, "highbrow" critiques of "the vulgar masses." Revisiting so-called "legacy" media, and the ideas of those who first confronted its power and prominence, we will seek to trace out one genealogy of mass media critique from the 1890s into the 1960s and beyond. Because this Honours Seminar is intended to serve as a capstone course for the MIT degree, a related concern will be the discipline of Media Studies itself: how it emerged and evolved, what cultural baggage it travels with, and how an understanding of its history might enhance contemporary research.

Course Objectives

- 1) To familiarize students with a selection of the critical literature on mass media as mass culture.
- 2) To provide an outline of a key moment in the formation of media studies as a discipline.
- 3) To practice applying historical lessons to contemporary media and society.
- 4) To develop critical and analytical abilities and improve research, writing and argumentation skills.

Required Texts:

Apart from Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel, Brave New World, which you ought to buy in paperback (i.e., I strongly discourage reading it on a screen) and then start reading a.s.a.p., all "Required" course readings are listed alphabetically by author last name in the "Resources" folder in our OWL site. Some of the "Suggested" readings, however, might require you to track them down yourself.

Evaluation

- 1) Citizen Kane Response Paper: 10% of final grade due in class Jan. 26

Instead of viewing the film in class, we will stream Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941) on January 19th via UWO Libraries (that week you are also required to set up a one-on-one zoom meeting with me to discuss possible Seminar topics; see #2 below). Pay particular attention to any references to crowds, masses, audiences, media, or culture. Then write your 2-page (double-spaced) "Response" to the film). Any aspect of the film or of your thoughts/feelings about it are fair game here. The point is to view the film and engage with it in writing, however you wish, via a very brief paper. If there is something you especially liked or disliked about the film, make sure you back up your opinion with an explanation of why you feel that way. **Submit your paper to OWL as Word .docx BEFORE the start of our class and also bring a hard copy to class. Spelling, grammar and English usage will factor into your mark, as with all written assignments in this class.**

To stream:

<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=https://stream.mcintyre.ca/westernu2020/title/21502>

(takes you to the UWO Library system, where you log in with your UWO username/password)

CRANKY CINEPHILE NOTE: Because Welles and the Mercury Theatre come out of radio, sound is extremely important to their art; so make sure the "Closed Caption" function is turned off (move your cursor to the bottom of the film frame and a menu with "CC" should pop up if it's on). And because Gregg Toland's stunningly complex, deep-focus cinematography is often considered to be among the all-time greatest achievements of screen art, please try to watch the film on as big a screen as you can manage--**never ever ever** on a phone!

- 2) Proposal for research paper: 10% of final grade due in class Feb. 9

The proposal involves identifying and outlining a subject for the research paper, conducting initial research, and beginning to think about your argument/analysis. The proposal will include a brief description of the proposed topic, an outline of a preliminary perspective, analysis or argument, a bibliography clearly demonstrating preliminary research, and a discussion of the research and work that remains to be done. **It is mandatory that you have had at least one Zoom meeting to talk to me about your potential ideas for your paper, and to have done so well in advance of the proposal due date** (ideally our first Zoom meeting will be during the week of Jan. 16-23). ~500 words plus biblio

- 3) Brave New World Response Paper: 15% of final grade due in class Feb. 16

Read Aldous Huxley's 1932 sci-fi satire, Brave New World. Pay particular attention to the role of mass consumption and mass media in the story. Write an approximately 4-

page, double-spaced paper describing and considering your own, first-person reactions/response to this novel, 89 years after it was published. Contemplate the ideas and/or images that most affected you as a reader and as a student of media culture. Bibliography/footnotes are unnecessary (if you need to quote from the text, simply put a page number in brackets). **Submit to OWL as Word .docx with subject heading by the start of class and also bring a hard copy** (Since we will be discussing responses in class, submitting after our seminar is, obviously, not an ideal option.)

4) Seminar Presentation: 20% of final grade **dates assigned by lottery**

In the last month of the semester (March-April), students will be expected to make a brief presentation to the seminar of their preliminary research. The point is to help you develop your ideas/analysis and work toward writing your final paper. Each student seminar should be approximately 10 minutes (including any examples or powerpoint, should you decide to include those), followed by class discussion (see "Participation" below). Seminar dates will be assigned. One *possible* structure for your seminar (there can be variations) would be: 1) establish the issue/debate/object you are focussing on; 2) contextualize it, including telling us what other scholars/thinkers have said about it; 3) offer a preliminary analysis/argument about it.

5) Research Paper: 35% of final grade. **due "April 6"***
(but see note at bottom of this paragraph)

Our primary focus in the course will be historical. However, you are most welcome to research a current aspect of mass/media culture for your Seminar Presentation and Final Paper, as long as you bring relevant concepts/debates/readings from the course to bear upon it. The final Research Paper will be the culmination of several steps in the course: before the Paper, you will have discussed your topic one-on-one with me via Zoom; conducted research; submitted a Proposal; and presented a version in your Seminar (and hopefully received and incorporated useful feedback from everyone in the Seminar). The Final Paper may be on virtually any topic related to masses/mass media/mass culture, but it must integrate relevant theoretical and/or historical material from lectures and readings along with your own research. The quality of the student's writing will affect the final grade for this assignment. ~2000 words, plus bibliography, images, appendix, etc.
* Final Papers are technically due April 6th, but everyone is hereby granted an extension until April 21st. Submit to OWL.

6) Participation: 10% of final grade.

Although there will be some lectures, this is a Seminar, which means your engagement in respectful debate and considered contributions to informed discussion will constitute the bulk of the course. You do not need to speak in every single meeting of the seminar; what matters is the quality of your questions, comments and discussion, whether on course materials in lecture discussions or following the other students' Seminar Presentations. All of these will be the basis of your Participation mark.

Jan. 26

Citizen Kane's Mass Appeal

Citizen Kane Response Paper:
due

Suggested Reading:

Michael Denning (1996) "The Politics of Magic: Orson Welles's Allegories of Anti-Fascism" The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century pp. 362-402.

Marshall McLuhan (1951) "Preface," "Front Page," "Nose for News," "The Ballet Luce" and "The Revolution is Intact" Mechanical Bride: The Folklore of Industrial Man, pp. v-vi and 1-13.

Tim Wu (2013) "Netflix's War on Mass Culture: Binge-viewing was just the beginning. Netflix has a plan to rewire our entire culture" New Republic 4 December.
<https://newrepublic.com/article/115687/netflixs-war-mass-culture> s

Further suggested Easy Online Reading:

"How fascist is President Trump? There's still a formula for that." The Washington Post August 21st, 2020

Anis Shivani (2020) "A decade closer to apocalypse: Looking back at the mayhem of the 2010s: Yes, the planet is dying — but so are liberal democracy and human consciousness. Which is worse? Take your pick" Salon 4 January.
<https://www.salon.com/2020/01/04/a-decade-closer-to-apocalypse-looking-back-at-the-mayhem-of-the-2010s/>

Martin Kettle (2019) "The political landscapes of Brexit Britain and Weimar Germany are scarily similar: A new exhibition in Berlin highlights how quickly a loss of respect for democracy can end in catastrophe" The Guardian 16 May.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/16/brexit-britain-weimar-germany-far-right-democracy-contempt-politicians>

Paddy Ashdown (2018) Introduction to Nein! Standing up to Hitler, 1935-1944
<http://paddyashdown.co.uk/articles/index.php/2018/10/04/nein-introduction/>

Tim Lister (2018) "Are we sliding back to the chaos of the 1930s?" CNN 22 July.
<https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/21/europe/world-returns-to-1930s-intl/index.html>

Géraldine Schwarz (2018) "My family has a Nazi past. I see that ideology returning across Europe: In Germany and elsewhere, younger generations are becoming indifferent to the history of fascism. This is how the far right thrives" The Guardian 18 April. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/18/family-nazi-past-ideology-europe-germany-fascism-far-right>

Feb. 2

Taste and Social Division

Required Reading:

John Storey (2003) Inventing Popular Culture chaps. 1-3, pp. 1-47.

Pierre Bourdieu (1979) "Distinction and the Aristocracy of Culture"
from Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste

Monica Kjellman-Chapin (2010) "The Politics of Kitsch" Rethinking Marxism pp. 27-41

Suggested Reading:

Richard Butsch The Citizen Audience Chapters 1 & 2: "Theater Audiences, Crowds and Publics" and "From Crowds to Masses", pp. 21-58.

Clement Greenberg (1939) "Avant Garde and Kitsch" Partisan Review

Feb. 9 Midcentury Mass Proposals Due
 Hannah Arendt (1960) "Society and Culture"
Daedalus Vol. 89, No. 2 (issue on "Mass Culture and Mass Media")

Herta Herzog (1941) "On Borrowed Experience: An Analysis of Listening to Daytime Sketches"
Studies in Philosophy and Social Science

Betty Friedan (1963) "The Problem That Has No Name" (Chap. 1 excerpt, pp. 1-21) plus all of
 chapter 9 "The Sexual Sell" The Feminine Mystique

Dwight MacDonalD (1953) "A Theory of Mass Culture" Diogenes Vol. 1, No. 3

Susan Sontag (1964) "Notes on Camp" Partisan Review (Fall)

Feb. 16 Brave New World, Revisited
"Brave New World Response Papers" due

Suggested Reading:
 Aldous Huxley Brave New World Revisited
 E.M. Forster (1909) "The Machine Stops"
 Yevgeny Zamyatin (1921) We
 Suzanne Collins (2008) The Hunger Games

Feb. 23 No Class—Reading Week

March 2 Canned Music, Canned Culture
 Required Reading:
 John Philip Sousa (1906) "The Menace of Mechanical Music"
 Theodor Adorno (1941) "On Popular Music"
 Bernard Gendron (1986) "Theodor Adorno Meets the Cadillacs"

Suggested Reading:
 Patrick Feaster (2015) "Phonography and the Recording in Popular Music"; and
 Keir Keightley (2015) "Grinding Out Hits at the Song Factory", both in The Sage Handbook of
 Popular Music (UWO Libraries e-book)

Seminar Presentations (~10 min. presentation/~20 min. class discussion)

March 9	Student Seminars x 3:
March 16	Student Seminars x 3:
March 23	Student Seminars x 3:
March 30	Student Seminars x 4:
April 6	Student Seminars x 3:

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