The Media and Discursive Practice  
Anth. 607, Spring 2010

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W 1:30-4:00  
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Saunders 345

COURSE TOPIC AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

This course will explore the contributions that anthropology can make to a critical understanding of the mass media in cultural context. In the course, the mass media will not be viewed primarily as technologies but rather as specific conjunctions of technology, audience, and meaning in which each of these three factors interacts with the others, creating unique limitations and potentials for meaningful exchanges. The central questions posed by the course will include the specific ways that participants create meaning in mass mediated communication, the roles of the mass media in the formation and interactive use of personal and group identity, and the relationship of the media to ritual and conflict processes in society.

COURSE GOALS

The goal of the course is to provide students with an anthropological perspective on the mass media. Specifically, critical discourse analysis as well as ethnography will be explored in approaching the problems of meaning production in mass communication and the political/social implications of the media. Theoretical and methodological discussions will be framed in the context of specific case studies. A general goal of the course will be the advancement of each student’s particular research interests in relation to the media.

COURSE PROCEDURES AND EVALUATION

The course will be run in lecture/seminar fashion, and students will be expected to be prepared each week to discuss the assigned readings. Given the variety of disciplinary backgrounds among the class members and the multidisciplinary character of the topic, basic concepts will be reviewed in each topic area, such as language theory, ethnographic method, and social theory relevant to the media. Several short essays targeted to key concepts will be assigned. A course project, in the form of a research paper, will be required, and students will be given time for class presentations of their work. The student’s grade will be based on participation in weekly class discussions, the short essays, a class presentation, and a final paper.
**READINGS**

Textbook: *The Anthropology of Media*, a reader edited by Kelly Askew and Richard Wilk. Also recommended: *The Power of Identity*, Second Edition, by Manuel Castells. Copies of assigned readings will be made available on reserve in the Anthropology office, and the readings will be available online on electronic reserve at Sinclair Library. I am assuming each student has a particular interest (e.g. the elderly, food advertising and commentary, religion, and so on), and I would like each member of the class to select material—reading, video, etc.—that he or she would like the class to discuss.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>I. Introduction</strong></td>
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<td>1. Introduction to discursive practice theory:</td>
<td>Anth Dept. web page:</td>
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<td>2. A Case Study in Media Anthropology</td>
<td>Mankekar (12)</td>
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<td><strong>II. Media, Technology, Modernity</strong></td>
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<td>3. Media History and Impact</td>
<td>Thompson (17), McLuhan (13)</td>
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<td>4. Media and Identity</td>
<td>Gouldner (10), Castells (4)</td>
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<td><strong>III. Discourse Theory</strong></td>
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<td>5. Dialogic language theory</td>
<td>Rommetveit (15), &amp; Wertsch (18)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Post-structuralist Discourse Theory</td>
<td>Foucault (7, 8, 9)</td>
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<td><strong>IV. Postmodernity and Ethnography</strong></td>
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<td>7. The French Connection</td>
<td>Baudrillard (2), Lyotard (11)</td>
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<td>8. Ethnography of the Audience</td>
<td>Morley (14)</td>
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<td>9. Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>Fiske (6), Bignell (3)</td>
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<td>10. Identity, Social Movements</td>
<td>Castells (5)</td>
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V. Case Studies & Student Projects (actual topics to be determined)

11. Overviews
   Spitulnik (16), Wilson & Peterson (19)

12. Intangible Property

13. Advertising

14. News Media

15. Soaps, Melodrama

Assigned Readings:


2. Baudrillard “Simulacra and Simulations: Disneyland”

3. Bignell “Media Semiotics: An Introduction” Chpt. 1


5. Castells “Social Movements against the New Global Order”

6. Fiske “Media Matters” Chpt. 3

7. Foucault “The Order of Discourse”

8. Foucault “Power as Knowledge”

9. Foucault “Genealogy and Social Criticism”

10. Gouldner “The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology” Chpts. 1 & 4

11. Lyotard “The Post Modern Condition”

12. Mankekar “National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City”

13. McLuhan “Understanding Media” Intros, Chpts. 1, 2, & 31


15. Rommetveit “The Dialogical Alternative”
16. Spitulnik “Anthropology and Mass Media”

17. Thompson “The Media and Modernity” Chpts. 2 & 3
