

New York University  
Media, Culture, and Communication  
MC-GE 2145  
January Intersession 2022  
Mon/Tues/Wed/Thurs 9:30-12:15  
Class is remote on zoom.

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Office hours: after class or by appt on  
zoom.

## INTRODUCTION TO METHODS IN MEDIA STUDIES

### **Course description:**

This course is an introduction to methods of analysis for media studies and cultural analysis. It provides an introduction to the fundamental qualitative methods (and related theories) for understanding the construction of meaning in media forms, media/technology history, media infrastructure, film, television, popular music, digital media, and branding. This course surveys methods of analysis such as semiotics, genre analysis, socio-historical analysis, ideological analysis, discourse analysis, media archaeology, historical/archival research, political economy, and ethnography as tools through which to understanding in depth.

The aim of the course is to establish a vocabulary for methodological approaches to research, to examine the nature of research questions served by different methods, to analyze the usefulness and limits of certain methods, and to prepare students to design a research project. Readings include explanations of method as well as examples of particular theoretical/methodological approaches.

The course's approach is both practical and meta-theoretical. We will unpack the assumptions, techniques, and aims of different methods, and do short exercises in using them. We will look at the methodological aims and approaches of a range of texts, examining the ways in which various scholars construct their arguments, define their materials, data, and objects of study, and justify their examples as representative of broader cultural and media contexts. With each approach, we will examine what kinds of questions a method will help us to ask (and not ask) and the limits and strategies of each approach.

In looking at readings we will consider the following questions: What questions is the author asking? What is the object of study? What is the data? What is the argument? What methods is the author using to make this argument? How do you know, i.e. how does the author reveal his/her method and what consequence does this have? How persuasive is the argument? How does the author argue that his/her object(s) of study is representative of a larger field? What is gained by this choice of method? What is not available to the author through this choice?

**Course Requirements:**

Students are required to attend all seminars, to undertake the reading assignments prepared to discuss the readings. There will be 10 short assignments (~1 pages) throughout the semester in which you use a different methodological approach, of which you need to complete 8 in total. It is crucial to the experience of the class that you do these assignments on time each week—within 2 days. These assignments will be shared on the class blog. Two students will be assigned to bring questions to the class discussion each class.

Grades will consider short assignments 80%, participation 20%.

**Required Texts:**

The readings will be posted in pdf on Course site .

**Recommended Texts:**

Bonnie S. Brennan, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4891115>

Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies, Fourth Edition* (Sage, 2016)

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking Third Edition* (Oxford, 2018)

**Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams, making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours. You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

When taking this class, you enter into a contract that states that all the work you are turning in has been your own and no one else's, and that you have not turned in any work for which you have received credit in another class, and that you have properly cited other people's work and ideas. Do not take this policy lightly! Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade in the course. If you have questions about these policies, or proper citation of scholarship, please come speak with me in person. (see [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic\\_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity))

**Student Resources**

- Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu)) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
- Writing Center (Washington Square): 411 Lafayette, 4th Floor. Schedule an appointment online at <https://nyu.mywconline.com> or just walk-in.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1:

#### **Class 1, Monday, January 3: Introduction—Media/Cultural Analysis, Evidence, and Empiricism**

Reading:

Kim Sawchuck, "Thinking About Methods"

Paul Edwards, "How to Read a Book"

#### **Class 2, Tuesday, January 4: Semiotics/Textual Analysis**

Reading:

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, Chapter 1 (pp.22-48) and Chapter 2 (pp.74-86)

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Introduction and Chapter 1

Recommended:

Bonnie Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*, Textual Analysis

Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, Chapter 6

*Assignment 1:*

*Do a semiotic/ideological analysis of an image, object, or print advertisement.*

#### **Class 3, Wednesday, January 5: Ideology/Narrative/Genre/Feminist Method**

Reading:

Marita Sturken, *Thelma & Louise* excerpts

Jason Mittell, "Television Genres as Cultural Categories"

Recommended:

Jason Mittell, "Making Fun of Genres"

*Assignment 2:*

*Do an ideological/feminist analysis of a film or television show or video game.*

**Class 4, Thursday, January 6: Discourse Analysis/Visual Analysis**

Reading:

Marita Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial"

Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*: "Branding Consumer Citizens: Gender and the Emergence of Brand Culture"

Adele Clarke, *Situational Analysis*: Introduction and Chapter 4, Turning to Discourse(s),

Recommended:

Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, Chapters 8 and 9

*Assignment 3:*

*Analyze the discourses that are shaping the meaning of a particular event, site, or media artifact.*

**WEEK 2:****Class 5, Monday, January 10: Historical Research/Archival Research**

Reading:

Lynn Spigel, "Introduction to *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*" excerpt and "Outer Space and Inner Cities"

Laine Nooney, "A Pedestal, A Table, A Love Letter: Archaeologies of Gender in Videogame History"

Susan Douglas, "Writing From the Archive: Creating Your Own"

Jonathan Sterne, "Rearranging the Files: On Interpretation in Media History"

Recommended:

Lisa Gitelman, "Media as Historical Subjects"

Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, Chap 2

Bonnie Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*, History

*Assignment 4: Create a conceptual archive, what would be the materials you would ideally have in your archive to analyze an historical object/artifact or image.*

### **Class 6, Tuesday, January 11: Media Archaeology/Infrastructure/STS**

Reading:

Shannon Mattern, "Purity and Security: Towards a Cultural History of Plexiglas"

<https://placesjournal.org/article/purity-and-security-a-cultural-history-of-plexiglass/>

Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, Introduction to *Media Archaeology*

Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, Introduction to *Signal Traffic*

Jonathan Sterne, "What do we Want? Materiality!"

Finn Brunton, *Digital Cash: The Unknown History of the Anarchists, Utopians, and Technologists Who Created Cryptocurrency* (2019), Intro and Chapter 1

Recommended:

Nicole Starosielski, "Fixed Flows: Undersea Cables as Media Infrastructure"

Jennifer Holt and Patrick Vonderau, "Where the Internet Lives: Data Centers as Cloud Infrastructure"

*Assignment 5:*

*Analyze an historical technological artifact/device/object.*

### **Class 7, Wednesday, January 12: Political Economy of Culture/Production Studies**

Reading:

Shawn Shimpach, "Realty Reality: HGTV and the Subprime Crisis"

Vicky Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John Caldwell, "Introduction to *Production Studies*"

Susan Murray, "Reviving the Technical in Television History"

Dana Polan, "Cable Watching: HBO, The Sopranos and Discourses of Distinction"

*Assignment 6:*

*Conduct a political economic analysis of a particular film, TV series, videogame, or software/app.*

### **Class 8, Thursday, January 13: Methods for Unpacking Race**

Reading:

Paula Chakravartty, et al, "CommunicationSoWhite"

Safiya Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*, excerpt

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, excerpt

Nicole Fleetwood, Introduction to *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*

*Assignment 7:*

*Analyze the racial aspects of a platform, image, or TV/film.*

**WEEK 3:****Monday January 17, Martin Luther King Day, NO CLASS****Class 9, Tuesday January 18: Ethnography**

Reading:

Daniel Miller, "Why We Shop"

Helga Tawil-Souri, "Checkpoint Time"

Dawn Pankonien, "Research Methods: The Ethnographic Interview"

<https://pankonien.medium.com/research-methods-the-ethnographic-interview-course-content-909da6d74cf>

Radha Hegde, "Fragments and Interruptions: Sensory Regimes of Violence and the Limits of Feminist Ethnography"

Recommended:

Bonnie Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*, Interviewing and Focus Groups*Assignment 8:**Observe a place for an hour and describe the patterns of behavior that you see.***Class 10, Wednesday January 19: Media Ethnography**

Reading:

Natasha Schull, "Gambled Away: Video Poker and Self-Suspension"

Natasha Schull, "Data for life: Wearable technology and the design of self-care"

dana boyd, "Making Sense of Teen Life"

Gabriella Coleman, *Coding Freedom*, excerpt*Assignment 9:**Choose a media form and analyze how you would conduct an ethnography of it for both designers and users/audience.*

**Class 11, Thursday January 20: Digital Media Research/Ethnography**

## Reading:

Alice Marwick, "Ethnographic and Qualitative Research on Twitter"

Angela Xiao Wu, Harsh Taneja, and James Webster, (2020). "Going with the flow: Nudging audiences online." *New Media & Society*.

Ben Light and Jean Burgess, "The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps"

Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, #Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States"

<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/amet.12112>

## Recommended:

Christian Sandvig and Eszter Hargittai, "How to Think about Digital Research"

*Assignment 10:*

*Choose an online site (social media platform, online game, etc.) and analyze the potential benefits and pitfalls methodologically of doing an ethnographic study of it.*