CULTURE, COGNITION AND THE MEDIA—920: 572: 01

Professor Karen A. Cerulo
Department of Sociology
Class Time: Tuesday 1:00 to 3:40PM
Location: Davison Hall, Room 127

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OBJECTIVES
This course examines the interrelations between culture, cognition and mass media. We will explore a variety of issues, with an eye to mastering the following topics … (what the graduate school calls learning goals):

- Understanding the ever changing role of media in society and the historical development of theory designed to understand media impact
- Understanding message makers and the cultural and cognitive dimensions of their persuasiveness
- Understanding messages and meaning including issues of content, structural design, frames and narratives
- Understanding technology and its role in the conception of place, actorhood and interaction
- Understanding audience impact on meaning making
- Understanding the literature on media effects, including cognitive, emotional, behavioral and socialization issues.

We will discuss both classical and contemporary excursions on these very complex subjects.

BOOKS
All readings for this course will be posted on Sakai. To access them:

- Go to https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal and log in. Our course site, identified by our course number, should immediately pop up as one of your Sakai locations.
- Look at the bar on the left side of the screen and click on “Resources.”
- Look for the reading using the author’s last name. If I use an author more than once, I’ll have name and topic listed.
REQUIREMENTS

This course presents a variety of requirements designed to tap the full array of your intellectual strengths and skills:

1) “Deep Thoughts”: Good discussion is critical to successful class meetings. I’ll do some lecturing, but I also want to hear from you. So to help us make the most of each period, every student is expected to come to class with two “reactive” discussion questions that grow from the readings assigned for the day. Writing these questions down will, I hope, focus your thinking and facilitate good classroom exchanges.

Your assignments will be collected and graded on a weekly basis. This work will constitute 15% of your final grade. No late papers will be accepted.

2) Oral Presentations: Many of our meetings will devote some portion of class time to student led discussions. Each student will be expected to lead one such discussion during the semester. If class size is large, two or more students will share the week’s discussion task. Presentations will be scheduled during the first week of classes. Students will be graded on their performance. These grades will count for 10% of the final grade.

3) Toward a Research Paper: Three short, focused written assignments are part of the course requirements:

   A) Paper Topic and Bibliography: Each student must propose a research topic addressing any of the substantive areas covered in this course. Students must provide a 1-3 page description of their project, and generate a list of 10 bibliographic citations representing their research area. This assignment will count for 20% of your final grade.

   B) Summary and Critique of the Literature: Using the Social Science Citation Index, students will identify the three most cited items in their bibliography. Students also will select two additional items from their list – selections driven solely by the student’s intellectual tastes. (Obviously, if you have a list of books, we will negotiate the number of things that you read.)

   With these five items in hand, students should a) read the materials, b) summarize the writings’ collective contribution to the literature, c) forward two weaknesses of this literature, and d) explain why these works are relevant to your research question. In doing your reading, consider e.g. what the writings say about the current state of sociological knowledge on your topic … the issues and controversies introduced by these materials … the questions and puzzles these articles/books pose for the topic you are planning to research … the questions/issues that are currently missing from discourse in your field.

   This paper should be 8-10 pages in length. It will count for 30% of your final grade.
**Requirements, con’t.**

**C) Research Proposal:** Students have proposed a research topic and explored some relevant literature. In this assignment students must revise and expand the 1-3 page description of their research topic, expanding it to something akin to an article introduction – say 3-5 pp. Students also are required to discuss one possible method for studying the problem at hand. Extra credit will go to students who identify a viable funding source for their project.

This paper should be 5-8 pages in length (as it should contain your methods and references as well). It will constitute **20% of your final grade**.

**Alternatives to Research Paper requirement:** Some students are currently working on qualifying papers that address culture, cognition and the media. I am willing to discuss ways of incorporating this writing into the class, making your work on the qualifier count toward the grades for this class. If you think you would like to go this route, please see me during the first week of class.

**4) Attendance:** I will view student input as vital to this course. Faithful attendance is a must, and students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to enter discussion. Attendance and participation will constitute **5% of your final grade**.

**5) Use Media!!!!!!** During this semester, I expect you to become an avid media user, including television, film, radio, and the Internet. If you are a media addict, Great!!!!!! You now have a legitimate excuse to “feed your habit.” If you hate media, please make this 14 week sacrifice. I think it is important that you experience – first hand – exactly what we are studying.

In this regard, please note: as part of your “deep thoughts” assignments, I will also ask that you tell me the most thought provoking media experience of your week.

**CLASS ENVIRONMENT:** The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

Knowing this, our classroom should be considered a “safe place” for everyone. Students are encouraged to engage in discussion and debate related to the readings and topics scheduled for the class provided that one’s views are not intended to provoke, insult, or damage another member of the class or the instructor. To facilitate such an environment, all of us (students and instructor) must act with mutual respect and common courtesy.
CLASS SCHEDULE

MTG. 1 (1/21):  Introduction to the Class
✓ Overview of the Course
✓ Discussion of Class Requirements
✓ Lab: Doing a Literature Review

Assignment: Saturday is my birthday. Make sure to tell me how young I look!

MTG. 2 (1/28):  Let’s start at the very beginning: a brief history of early media theories. This review gives us a sense of the intellectual frames that drive social science studies of communication.
✓ When Media Met Cognition – The Hypodermic Needle Theory
✓ Enter Sociocultural Concerns – The Two Step Flow and One Step Flow Theories

Readings for Today’s Class

Note: We will listen to portions of the Hindenburg disaster radio coverage and the “War of the Worlds” broadcast.

Selected Bibliography: The Original Studies


Schedule of classes continued on next page

Today, we’ll examine research on professional sources, noting the factors that are thought to enhance the communicator’s effectiveness with an audience. This will include issues of credibility and trustworthiness. We will do some hands on analysis in class.

Readings for Today’s Class


Student Led Discussion Items (Non-presenters should read these as well.)


Selected Bibliography:

The Original Studies


Some Newer Ideas:


Newer ideas, continued on the next page:


We will spend today’s class examining message content and its manipulation. Topics include:

- Agenda Setting
- Knowledge Construction and Cultivation Analysis
- Frames and Schemata

**Readings for Today’s class**


3) Saguy, Abigail. 2013. “Fashioning Frames” **Pp. 107-130** in *What's Wrong with Fat?*. Oxford University Press. **Note: Abby Saguy will Skype into class for a brief Q&A.**


**Selected Bibliography:**

*The Original Studies: Agenda Setting*


*Classics in Social Construction and Media Knowledge:*


*Selected Bibliography continued on the next page*


*Classic Media Framing Articles:*


*Cultivation Analysis*


*NeoMarxist and Hegemonic Approaches to Content Selection: The Power of the Elite:*


**MTG. 5 (2/18):** Says What – Media Messages, Part II.

We continue our examination of messages, turning this week to narration in the media.

**Readings for Today’s Class**


*Student Led Discussion Items on the next page*
Student Led Discussion Items: (Non Presenters should read article 1 and one of articles 2 and 3


Selected Bibliography: Classics and Selected Empirical Applications of Media Narration


We continue our examination of messages, turning this week to an exploration of message structure or design and its role in meaning making. Today’s topics include:

✓ A crash course in semiotics
✓ Spatial and temporal design

Readings for Today’s Class


Selected Bibliography:

Theoretical Works


Peirce, Charles Sanders. Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics.


Review Articles and Books


Selected Bibliography continued on next page.


*Interesting Empirical Applications*


**MTG. 7 (3/4):** Class Presentations of Research Abstracts

Students will prepare a short presentation of their proposed research topics. Class members should be prepared to offer constructive feedback on each proposal, helping presenters to limit, focus, or strengthen their topics.

**Assignment 1 due today – 3/4**  **No late papers accepted!**
MTG. 8 (3/11): How Part I: Technology and Theories of Thought

This week, we will discuss two of the most influential theories in the field of communication technologies and cognition. First up is Marshall McLuhan who initiates the premise that specific technologies alter messages in ways that confer specific meaning. Second, we focus on Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory and the re-assembling of the social. Both of these theorists will give us a basis for exploring contemporary communication phenomena in the coming two weeks.

Readings for Today’s Class

   Note: We may also watch part of a Latour lecture in class.

Selected Bibliography

Other Important Theories and Ideas on Technology and Communication:


Cut Loose – Spring Break!
MTG. 9 (3/25) How: The Medium is the Message, Part II

We continue our examination of communication technologies and their impact on our perceptions. Today, we ask: Who is a Social Actor and What is a Social Connection?

Reading for Today’s Class

Part 1:


Part II:

NOTE: Mary Chayko will visit our class today


Selected Bibliography


Selected Bibliography continued on next page


**MTG. 10 (4/1): How: The Medium is the Message, Part III**

Today we conclude our discussions of new communication technologies by considering two topics of central importance in the contemporary literature: multitasking and surveillance.

**Reading for Today’s Class**

**Part I:**


**Part II:**


**Note:** William Staples will Skype into our class for a brief Q&A on his work.

Student led discussion items on next page
Student Led Discussion Items  (Non-presenters should skim this as well.)


1) Bajc, Vita: Sociological Reflections on Security through Surveillance

2) Sáenz, Rogelio: Reflections on the Sociology of Security and Surveillance in the Study of Immigration

3) Berda, Yael: Managing Dangerous Populations: Colonial Legacies of Security and Surveillance

4) Stampnitzky, Lisa: Towards a Sociology of "Security"

2) Note: A Multitasking reading to be announced.

Selected Bibliography

On Multitasking


On Surveillance


Selected Bibliography continued on next page


**MTG. 11 (4/8):** To Whom: The Active Audience

In today’s class, we will look at a variety of works that bring the power of meaning to the hands of the audience. This literature was initiated with the concept “the active audience.” With the growth of the web, the idea has taken on new meanings

**Readings for Today’s Class**


**For Student Presentation**


**Selected Bibliography**

**Classics in the Area:**


*Selected Bibliography continued on next page*


*Assignment 2 due at the end of class.*

*No late papers accepted!*

Media influences us … but how? For decades, researchers looked for a direct link between media exposure, media content and behavior. Thankfully, recent works have taken a more nuanced approach. We’ll examine some of these ideas in today’s class.

Readings for today’s class: We cannot begin to tackle this massive literature. So today’s readings are samples of the field; lecture will fill in some of the blanks.

Cognitive effects:

Emotion:

Identification and Socialization:

Student Presentation:

Selected Bibliography

Literature Review Sources:

Selected Bibliography continued on next page
Classics Effects Studies


Some interesting applications:


Fear


Selected Bibliography continued on next page


**MTG. 13 (4/22): Individual Meetings:**

This week, I will meet with students individually to “check in” on progress toward the final assignment. We will not meet as a class.

**MTG. 14 (4/29) Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a valuable methodology in studies of media, culture, and cognition. They are underused, often misunderstood, and rarely taught in traditional methods courses. To compensate for that gap, today’s class will be a focus group. In part one, we will execute the task; in part two we will discuss the pros and cons of the methodology.

**Readings for Today’s Class**


**Selected Bibliography**


**Assignment 3 due IN CLASS on 4/29. No late papers accepted!**