

## **Theory of Media**

Francesco Casetti

FILM 312 01 / HUMS 216 01 / LITR 354 01 (F11)

Tu and Th 10.30-11.20 -- YK212 106

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In this course we read some of the “classical” and “foundational” contribution to media studies. Topics involve modernity, reproduction, knowledge as commodity, spectatorship, public sphere, representation and simulacra. The viability of the concept “communication” itself will be questioned – with an emphasis on the necessity to take in account the idea of “circulation” more than the concept of “exchange.” A special attention is put on discourses on film, as the first “mass media” to be conceived as such – but the analysis also include the passage from the “mass” media to the “personal” ones. The course also hosts some scholars from different disciplines, who discuss the relevance of media in their field, and present some of the most recent topics in media studies.

### **Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>: Modernity**

*Readings:* John B. Thompson, “Social Theory and the Media,” in D. Crowley, D. Mitchell, *Communication Theory Today* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 27-49;

### **Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> , 8<sup>th</sup> : Transmission**

*Readings:* Harold Lasswell, “The structure and Function of Communication in Society” (1948), in Wilbur Schramm, *Mass Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), pp. 84-99; Melvin L. DeFleur, “Media as Social System” (1970), in Schramm, pp. 63-83

### **Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> , 15<sup>th</sup> : Prosthesis**

*Readings:* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media: the extensions of man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), chapters 4, 6 and 7  
Guest: Jack Balkin (Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>)

### **Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> , 22<sup>th</sup>: Cultural Forms**

*Readings:* Raymond Williams, “The Technology and the Society,” in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York : Schocken Books, 1974, then New Yourk: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-25  
Guest: Rudiger Campe

### **Sept. 27<sup>th</sup> , 29<sup>th</sup> : Public Sphere**

*Readings:* Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article” in Meenaskshi Gigi Durham, Douglas M. Keller, eds, *Media and Cultural Studies* (Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2006); Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14(1): 49–90  
Guest: Michael Warner

### **Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> , 6<sup>th</sup> : Apparatus**

*Readings:* Dziga Vertov, “Kinoks: a Revolution,” in *Kino.Eye: the Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984; Jean Luis Baudry, “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema”, in P. Rosen, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 299-318.  
Guest: John MacKay (Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>)

### **Midterm paper due**

**Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> , 13<sup>th</sup> : Decoding**

*Readings:* Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 128–138; Janet Staiger, "Modes of Reception", "The Perversity of Spectators", "Writing the History of American Film Reception", in *Perverse Spectators. The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 9-57

Guest: Charles Musser: Decoding films, today

**Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> , 20<sup>th</sup> : Narratives**

*Readings:* Henry Lefebvre, "Myths in Everyday Life," in *Key Writings*, New York, London, Continuum, 2003, pp. 100-106; Daniel Dayan, Elihu Katz, "Electronic Ceremonies: Television Performs a Royal Wedding," in Marshall Blonsky, *On Signs*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 16-32

Guest: Kirk Freudenburg: 'The Visual Mechanisms (Cinematography) of Ancient Epic Narrative'

**Oct. 25<sup>th</sup> , 27<sup>th</sup> : Spectacle/Simulacra**

*Readings :* Guy Debord, "The Commodity as Spectacle", in Durham, Keller, eds, *Media and Cultural Studies*; Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in Durham, Keller, eds, *Media and Cultural Studies*

**Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> , 10<sup>th</sup> : Global/Local**

*Readings:* Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", in *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 27-47

Guest: Bryan Garsten: Media and Political Sciences

**Nov. 15<sup>th</sup> , 17<sup>th</sup> : Convergence**

*Readings:* Henry Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars? Digital cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture," in Durham, Keller, eds, *Media and Cultural Studies*

Guest: Howard Bloch, The Medioeval Sign Theory (Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>)

**Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> , Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> : Mediation/Remediation**

*Readings:* Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, "Immediacy, Hypermediacy and Remediation", in *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mit Press, 1999)

Guest: Maria Menocal

**Final paper**

First paper due by October 17th; length 3-4 pages; a commentary on some quotations from the mandatory readings

Final Paper: length 10 pages; a commentary on some quotations from mandatory readings, reflecting contrasting positions or orientations.

Final exam (through electronic resources): a commentary on one or more topics discussed in class.

Regular attendance and participation (including discussion groups): 20%

First paper: 30%

Second paper: 30%

Final Exam: 20%