Media Criticism, Spring 2025

Course Description

This course will survey some fundamental theories about mass media and culture. We will methodically summarize, evaluate, and compare these writings and critical approaches. The writings we will cover criticize media as popular culture, a commercial industry, and a territory for cultural citizenship.

Because this is a three (3) unit course, you're expected to spend an average of nine (9) hours per week working on this course.

Goals

This Media Criticism course is best regarded as a criticism of media criticism, or "media criticism *criticism*," if you prefer. This course will require you to read one or two essays per week before class that criticizes some aspect of mass media and culture. At each class session, we will cover the historical and scholarly context in which the essays were written and extract some key terms and concepts. In subsequent classes, we will revisit some of the essays compare them the other essays we have already read. By the end of the course you will be familiar with the literature of media studies and will be able to understand any other essays you encounter in media studies and several other fields. Your success in this course depends less on memorizing class material and more on developing the ability to be a critical media scholar through intensive reading and argumentative writing.

Writing Intensive Course at Queens College

This course is a Writing Intensive (W) course and fulfills one Writing Intensive requirement. W classes include a significant portion of time devoted to writing instruction. This may include things such as revision workshops, discussions of rhetorical strategies, or reflective writing about writing assignments

You will learn about writing in this course through practice and through reading about writing.

No one can teach you to write. It is something that you will have to learn for yourself. Every writer approaches the craft differently so it would be a waste of time to teach you The One Right Way to write because that would be dishonest. It doesn't exist. However, I can relate my own experiences in hopes that you discover what works for you. In this course, you will write two comparative essays using a four–part process:

1. *researching*: reading and learning about your subject
2. *outlining*: organizing what you've learned into a coherent, linear narrative
3. *drafting*: composing prose corresponding to your outline
4. *revising*: proofreading, copyediting, and simplifying your prose

You will also read about writing that emphasizes some important features for every writer:

- *clarity*: write what you mean and how it makes sense to you
- *simplicity*: keep it simple
- *persistence*: writing is a task and it involves a lot of repetition; writing is rewriting
- *empathy*: think about the human who is reading your words

We will consider this when working on your comparative essays.

You should also review Goals for Student Writing published by Writing at Queens College.

Instructor

Juan Monroy

- Web: https://juanmonroy.com/mediacriticism
- Email: juan.monroy@qc.cuny.edu
    - To maintain professional standards, please use your CUNY email account to contact me
    - Email Hours: 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM
    - I usually respond within a day

Office Hours

Office hours are held remotely. Sign up for an appointment at https://juanmonroy.com/officehours.

- Remote via Microsoft Teams: I will email you a meeting link for you to join the meeting

Loaner Devices for Remote Instruction

Queens College offers loaner devices to students who need them for remote instruction. Contact Queens College ITS for how to request a device.

The G Building News

The Media Studies department has a newsletter. The newsletter aims to offer students an accessible platform to be informed about campus and departmental events, and hiring opportunities within the field. With all that happens throughout the semester, The G Building News overs the projects of students and faculty to inspire creativity and potential collaborations.

"The G Building News. Stay Informed. Stay Creative."

Subscribe today at https://qcmediastudies.substack.com.

Writing Center

Would you like *free* in-person assistance with writing your papers?

The Writing Center at Queens College offers individual tutoring for your writing assignments. Make an appointment with a Writing Consultant to get help with any writing assignments.

Many students in the past have attested that visiting the Writing Center to get help with writing assignments was the most effective thing they did at Queens College.

Counseling Services at Queens College

Counseling Services are available to any Queens College student. They assist students with personal concerns that can affect their enjoyment of and success in college. *Services are free and confidential*. All sessions take place on Zoom or by telephone, depending on student preference.

To make an appointment, students should call 718–997–5420 and leave a message with their phone number and CUNY ID. You can also e-mail counselingservices@qc.cuny.edu to set up an appointment.

https://www.qc.cuny.edu/studentlife/services/counseling/counseling/Pages/default.aspx

Brightspace

We will be using Brightspace for all graded assignments, including quizzes and exams.

https://brightspace.cuny.edu

Sign in using your CUNY Login, not your college-specific address (the one you use for email).

Brightspace Pulse App

I recommend downloading and signing into the Brightspace Pulse app. Among the many benefits, you get notifications about announcements and content. You also get reminders about upcoming assignments.

It is available at https://apps.brightspace.com/pulse/launch

Modules

This course is broken up into twelve modules. Each module consists of:

- *recorded video lecture* that introduces the reading(s) assigned in this module.
- *assigned readings* about media criticism
- occasional screenings posted on Brightspace and linked in this course website
- *Reading Media Criticism assignment* about the assigned readings on Brightspace
- a *weekly discussion session* on Zoom

The material from each module will be posted in the course schedule below.

You must complete the material for each module before our weekly class meeting. A subsequent module will be available the following day.

Module Introduction Videos

Each week, I will post a recorded video lecture that introduces you to the reading(s) assigned in this module. The video includes a brief biography of the author(s), a summary of the reading, and a discussion of terms and concepts that might help you understand the reading.

Watch the video before beginning the assigned readings and in advance of our weekly discussion session.

The recorded video lectures are available on Brightspace.

Readings

Assigned readings are listed in the course schedule below.

Our class uses zero-cost textbook readings available only for authorized CUNY users. There are two ways

- **Readings from QC Library:** Use your CUNY Login to authenticate.
- **Readings from CUNY OneDrive:** Use your CUNY Login to authenticate to CUNY OneDrive.

Screenings

There are a few screenings I would like you to do before our weekly discussion session. These are linked in the course schedule below and available on Brightspace.

Weekly Discussion Sessions

All students must participate in the weekly discussion session.

During this discussion session, we will form into breakout rooms and closely analyze the readings for the week.

- Section 3
  - Remote Online Synchronous
  - Thursday, 6:30 PM
  - Join on Zoom

Zoom Meeting Information

- Video policy: you're welcome to have your video turned off during class, but you must participate in class and in breakout rooms
- *You must sign in to your CUNY Zoom account to participate in our weekly discussion sessions.* Do not create an account or sign in with your qmail.cuny.edu address. Skip to the bottom and sign in with SSO and enter cuny.zoom.us as the company domain. Then sign in using your CUNY Login.
- *If you are a transfer student from another CUNY campus*, you might be asked to confirm changing your Zoom account. The confirmation email for that change is usually sent to the *email address of your previous campus*. Be sure to check that account as well as your Queens College qmail account.
- If you're having trouble signing in, read this guide from Queens College Helpdesk
- Each session will have live transcription and will be recorded for only students in our class
  - Recordings are available on Brightspace under the respective module.
- Attendance is mandatory
  - If you miss four or more sessions this semester, you will not be eligible to take the final exam.
- Weight: 10%

Reading and Writing Media Criticism

Reading Media Criticism: Low-Stake Exercises

Throughout the semester, you will complete a series of low-stake writing exercises, where you interpret the assigned essays for each module.

These exercises will help you understand how media criticism is written and how a conversation develops between various writers.

Each exercise will be available on Brightspace.

- ten of the twelve assignments are required
- due one hour before each discussion session
- Weight: 20% of your final grade

Writing Media Criticism: *Media and Culture Industries*

In the second half of the course, you will take what you've learned about reading media criticism essays to write your own.

You will write a comparative essay that compares Herbert Schiller's "The Corporation and the Production of Culture" essay with an essay we've studied in the second half of the class.

- Assignment Guidelines
- Essay Questionnaire on Brightspace
- Mandatory individual office hours
  - Schedule an appointment at https://juanmonroy.com/201officehours

- Draft Essay due on Brightspace
- Review my Paper Writing Tips before you prepare your final essay
- Final Essay
  - submit on Brightspace
  - *No late papers accepted after the assignment closes on Brightspace*
  - Length: 1,200 words
- Weight: 40% of your final grade.

Exams

You are required to complete two exams. Each exam will consist of subjective questions, requiring answers in the form of explanations. Your answers to the exam questions should synthesize what you learned in the readings, discussions, and screenings for each module.

Open-book exam: you may use the materials from the modules to help you with the materials, but no other material is permitted, necessary or even very helpful.

Exams are available on Brightspace, based on the following course material:

1. Exam 1: modules 1–6
2. Exam 2: modules 7–12. *If you miss four or more weekly discussion sessions this semester, you will not be eligible to take this second exam.*

Both exams are required and constitute 30% of your final grade.

- higher exam score: 20%
- lower exam score: 10%

All exams must be submitted by the final deadline, otherwise they will receive no credit.

Course Schedule

Complete all activities no later than the date posted on Brightspace.

Getting Started

1. Read the policies governing this course
2. Review the Goals for Student Writing published by Writing at Queens College
3. Listen to a conversation between Preet Bhara and Benjamin Dreyer about the "The Laws of Language" and the "morality of writing." It is available at Cafe: scrub to 0:10:24 where the conversation begins
4. Join the Weekly Discussion Session
   - Sec 4 Thu: January 30, 6:30 PM on Zoom

Module 1: Mass Culture and the Culture Industry

- Watch the module introduction video: *The Culture Industry and Mass Culture* (26 min.)
  - Available on Brightspace
  - Slides (PDF)
- Read Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944)
- Read the Wikipedia page on The Culture Industry
- Watch "Critical Theory, The Frankfurt School, Adorno and Horkheimer and the Culture Industry" on YouTube
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Adorno and Horkheimer* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
  - Sec 4 Thu: February 6, 6:30 PM on Zoom
  - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 2: Lipsitz and Popular Culture

- Watch the module introduction video: *Popular Culture* (25 min.)
  - Available on Brightspace
  - Slides (PDF)
- Here are links to songs and videos referenced in the recorded lecture:
  - Alan Jackson, "Old Rugged Cross" on YouTube and on Apple Music
  - Rashaan Roland Kirk, "Old Rugged Cross" on YouTube and on Apple Music
  - Rashaan Roland Kirk, "Blacknuss" on YouTube and on Apple Music
  - Rashaan Roland Kirk on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, January 24, 1971, on YouTube
  - The Silhouettes, "Get a Job" on YouTube and on Apple Music

    - Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 181
- Read George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Is Ain't No Sideshow," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3–20
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Study the Review Questions for this week's reading: on Lipsitz
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: George Lipsitz* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: February 13, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 3: Benjamin and Mechanical Reproduction

- Watch the module introduction video: *Freedom from Aura in the Age of Mechanical Production* (23 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935)
    - Available on Brightspace
- Read the Wikipedia page on The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
- Study the Review Questions for this week's reading: on Benjamin
- Watch John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, Episode 1 (1972) on YouTube
    - complete series is available on Internet Archive
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Walter Benjamin* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: February 20, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 4: Media, Technology, and Power

- Watch the module introduction video: *New Media and Power: Manovich* (13 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Watch the module introduction video: *New Media and Power: Spigel* (12 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?," *Critical Inquiry 35*, no. 2 (January 2009): 319–31
    - Available from QC Library
- Read Lynn Spigel, "The Domestic Economy of Television Viewing in Postwar America," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 4 (1989): 337–54
    - Available from QC Library
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings: on Manovich and on Spigel
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Lev Manovich and Lynn Spigel* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: February 27, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 5: Television and Authority

- Watch the module introduction video: *Television and Authority* (11 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Susan J. Douglas, "The Turn Within: The Irony of Technology in a Globalized World," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2006): 619–38
    - Available from QC Library
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings: on Douglas
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Susan Douglas* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: March 13, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 6: Media, Industry, and Political Economy

- Watch the module introduction video: *Political Economy of Media* (16 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace

    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Herbert I. Schiller, "The Corporation and the Production of Culture," in *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 30–45
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings by Schiller
- Watch *Herbert Schiller Read the Sunday New York Times* (1981), available on Vimeo
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Herbert Schiller* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: March 20, 6:30 PMon Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Exam 1

- The exam covers the material from Modules 1–6
- Complete Exam 1 on Brightspace
- There is no weekly discussion session today

Module 7: Media and Niche Marketing

- Watch the module introduction video: *Media Industries and Niche Marketing: Curtin* (14 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Watch the module introduction video: *Media Industries and Niche Marketing: Amaya* (9 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Michael Curtin, "On Edge: Culture Industries in the Neo-Network Era," in *Making & Selling Culture*, ed. Richard Malin Ohmann et al. (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996)
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Read Hector Amaya, "Citizenship, Diversity, Law and *Ugly Betty*," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 5 (September 1, 2010): 801–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443710373954.
    - Available from QC Library
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings by Curtin and by Amaya
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Curtin and Amaya* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: April 3, 6:30 PM EDT on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 8: Media, Technology and Control

- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, Technology, and Control: Mark Andrejevic* (14 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, Technology, and Control: Tom McCourt and Patrick Burkart* (14 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Mark Andrejevic, "The Work of Being Watched: Interactive Media and the Exploitation of Self-Disclosure," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 2 (June 2002): 230–48
    - Available from QC Library
- Read Tom McCourt and Patrick Burkart, "When Creators, Corporations and Consumers Collide: Napster and the Development of On-Line Music Distribution," *Media, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 (May 2003): 333–50
    - Available from QC Library
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings by Andrejevic and by McCourt and Burkart
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: McCourt and Burkart; and Andrejevic* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: April 10, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 9: Media, Audiences, and Fan Culture

- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, Audiences, and Fan Culture: Lawrence Grossberg* (12 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, Audiences, and Fan Culture: Mizuko Ito* (10 min.)

    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lewis, Lisa A. (London: Routledge, 1992), 50–65
    - Available from QC Library
- Read Mizuko Ito, "Japanese Media Mixes and Amateur Cultural Exchange," in *Digital Generations: Children, Young People, and New Media*, ed. David Buckingham and Rebekah Willett (Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006), 49–66
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings by Grossberg and by Ito
- Watch *Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Fans of My Little Pony* (Laurent Malaquais, 2012)
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive (85 min.)
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Grossberg and Ito* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: April 24, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 10: Media, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere

- Read Stuart Cunningham, "Popular Media as Public 'Sphericules' for Diasporic Communities," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (June 2001): 131–47
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Watch *In Jackson Heights* (Frederick Wiseman, USA, 2015, 190 min.)
    - Available on DVD at Rosenthal Library
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings by Cunningham
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Cunningham* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: May 1, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 11: Media, the Nation, and Cultural Citizenship

- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, the Nation, and Cultural Citizenship* (15 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Lauren Berlant, "The Theory of Infantile Citizenship," *Public Culture* 5 (1993): 395–410
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive
- Study the Review Questions for this week's reading by Berlant
- Watch *The Simpsons*, "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington," September 26, 1991.
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive (22 min.)
- Watch *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra, USA, 1939).
    - Available on CUNY OneDrive (130 min.)
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Berlant* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: May 8, 6:30 PM on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Module 12: Media and Governmentality

- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, Governmentality, and the Good Citizen: Laurie Ouellette and James Hay* (10 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Watch the module introduction video: *Media, Governmentality, and the Good Citizen: Sasha Torres* (12 min.)
    - Available on Brightspace
    - Slides (PDF)
- Read Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, "Makeover Television, Governmentality and the Good Citizen," *Continuum* 22, no. 4 (August 2008): 471–84
    - Available from QC Library
- Read Sasha Torres, "Television and Race," in *A Companion to Television*, ed. Janet Wasko (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 395–408
    - Available from QC Library
- Study the Review Questions for this week's readings by Ouellette and Hay and by Torres
- Watch *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, "The Harris Family," April 11, 2004.

    - Available on OneDrive (43 min.)
- Complete the *Reading Media Criticism: Ouellette and Hay; and Torres* assignment on Brightspace before class
- Join the Weekly Discussion Session
    - Sec 4 Thu: May 15, 6:30 PM EDT on Zoom
    - These are the quotations for the breakout rooms for today's session

Exam 2

- Complete Exam 2 on Brightspace
- The exam covers the material from Modules 7–12
- There is no weekly discussion session today
- **No late exams will be accepted**