MEDIA ETHNOGRAPHIES

Course Director:
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ANTH 398G/ SOCI 398G
03 credits
05 September—06 April 2011
Room: SGW, H-435
Meeting days and times:
Wednesdays, 10:15am—1:00pm

Overview

When it comes to media, you are the natives. This course will teach you nothing at all about any one specific medium, and it is not a "history of television" (or radio, or print) course. It is a course about understanding, and explaining, and asks you to reflect on your extensive personal experience with the media in dialogue with several influential theories and research approaches. Our focal interest deals with the influence of media, media effects, agenda setting, media and political conflict, and media production, and how we might learn different things by adopting certain methodologies of investigation. Why are some persons very critical media consumers, while others appear to be passive and easily influenced? How are our thought patterns changed by media, that is, not just *what we think about*, but *how we think*? Who sets the agenda for media productions, and why? Can we discern the intentions of media producers, from their productions? Can whole societies be changed by transmitting one country's television programs to others? How do we know what people actually think about what they see and hear? When indigenous peoples engage in media production, using Western technology, have they betrayed their own cultures and made a pact with the devil? Are we content with assertions such as "images are powerful," and "information is power"?

Under all of these questions, one key question is at the centre of this course is: What can ethnographic approaches to the study of media production and consumption offer to our understandings of how media influence us? Another is: Which previously established theories rise, fall, remain unchallenged, or can be revised as a result of in-depth immersion, in face-to-face contact with media producers and consumers?

The media discussed in this course are radio, television, cinema, and to a lesser extent print media, that is, almost everything that excludes the Web and social media. We are dealing here with modern **mass media**, with unidirectional communication from the producers of messages to a mass of consumers – this is quite distinct from what happens on the Web, where communication is many-to-many, and where one can almost simultaneously be both a media consumer and producer. Mass media, despite the Web (and now often thanks to the Web), continue to have an overwhelming presence in socialization, enculturation and representation. The challenge is trying to figure out the nature and degree to which that presence becomes influence, and how we

understand and explain any influence of the media on persons' cognition, cultural values, identity, and political orientations.

Ethnography, and qualitative research more broadly, are research approaches common to both sociology and anthropology. For the purposes of this course, "the ethnographic approach" involves direct immersion by the researcher in a given social setting, learning the "cultural norms" directly, and then producing first hand accounts based on personal observation and participation. The basic question of this course is whether ethnographic approaches to studying people's engagements with modern mass media can help us to understand more about the social and cultural effects of mass media at the ground level, as well as how media consumers and producers shape their own understanding of mass media. We can thus amplify what we learn about media beyond what we might learn from surveys and from deconstructions of media messages. We therefore study the actual media effects in the lives of real persons, as producers, consumers or brokers for modern media.

An ethnographic approach to media sees the media as grounded in broader social contexts and wider fields of practice than media production alone. Studying media productions as texts that can be deconstructed by the solitary expert critic may not suffice (depending on the questions that are being asked, and the theoretical constructs employed by the researcher), nor will ratings and statistical surveys of media consumption provide us with a complete and uncontested picture from which we can derive unambiguous conclusions. What we are interested in is how actual people receive, use, and respond to media productions, and how they may create their own mediated representations. Our interest lies in collective representations, individual understandings, the social relations between people and media, and the cultural meanings inscribed or derived from mediated images and texts.

Students will benefit from an expansion of their knowledge of social and cultural theory as a result of this course, while also gaining an appreciation for different applications of ethnographic fieldwork. We will become familiar with some of the main concepts and methods that ethnographers use in studying mass media. The hope is that in the process students will distil some key questions, issues, and methods that they may then apply in any media ethnography that they may undertake in the future, and, at the very least look at and listen to media in an even more attentive, questioning, and critical manner than may presently be the case.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should have acquired familiarity with the basic premises underlying the ethnographic study of mass media. In addition, knowledge of basic course concepts, and how they are applied in the case studies presented in the course, is an anticipated result.

Course Policies

Students are responsible for acquiring course content. Therefore, if a class is missed, no independent tutorial will be provided by the professor to brief the student on what transpired in the class the student missed, nor will a summary or any notes be provided. Students may audio record lectures if they wish. Students should make arrangements with one another to get a photocopy of the notes for a missed class, and be willing to return the favour.

Students are responsible for getting their assignments in on time. No exceptions are allowed, except in extreme cases, such as a death in one's immediate family or a serious illness.

If you enter the course with a pre-existing medical condition that will impede you from completing the course, then please drop the course by the relevant drop deadline. *No "incompletes" will be awarded to any student, for any reason, for this course in 2011.* As you are being informed of this policy from the very start, there will be no negotiation.

There is one major exception to these policies: in the event of a major public health crisis, or events beyond the University's control, alternative course requirements and grading policies will be developed and used.

Students whose behaviour in class is disruptive and abusive can expect a steep penalty in the final grade, at the professor's discretion, in addition to any further penalties imposed by the University.

Grading Policies

A+	90-100	**EXCELLENT**	C+	67- 69	**SATISFACTORY**	D+	57- 59	**POOR**
A	85- 89		C	63- 66		D	53- 56	
A-	80- 84		C-	60- 62		D-	50- 52	
B+	77- 79	**VERY GOOD**						
B	73- 76							
B-	70- 72							

VERY POOR: F or FNS — 40 (30-49); R — 20 (0-29)

The grading scale above is that which has been officially established by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and is followed by all faculty.

It is important that you note the qualitative terms associated with numerical grades. Your work is first assessed qualitatively, and secondly the appropriate numerical equivalent is generated (usually to mark differences between papers received – see below). **Please note** that work that meets the basic requirements, that is fair, without major flaws, that is *satisfactory*, can only achieve a grade in the **C** range. Not getting a grade higher than that does *not* mean that you "lost points," but rather that the points were never gained. Grades in the **A** range are not liberally awarded and thus tend to be more rare.

In general, student work is assessed in the following manner: Student assignments are evaluated in comparison with each other, normally done by the instructor assembling a random sample and

highlighting the best elements of each paper, which then forms the template by which papers are judged. The paper(s) that set(s) the highest standards for student work will receive the highest grades. Students will tend to judge their paper in isolation, which is understandable; however, please keep in mind that the instructor's determination is a comparative one.

Students should also understand that **grades are not open to negotiation**. If a student feels that factual errors were made in an assessment, or that the evaluation was manifestly unfair, then of course the student should speak to the professor. Asking for a paper to be reassessed, however, does not mean that a higher grade will be the guaranteed outcome: in fact, the grade could go lower, or stay the same. Students' performance in other courses is most assuredly not a valid basis for anticipating particular grade outcomes in this course.

Academic Regulations and Plagiarism Issues

Section 16 (Academic Information: Definitions and Regulations) of the Undergraduate Calendar will be strictly administered – particularly on deadlines, Failing Grades, Administrative Notations, Late Completions='INCompletes' (Grade/INC), 'Failed No Supplementals' (FNS), 'Did Not Writes' (Grade/DNW).

For this course, no bibliography is required when referring to assigned readings. When quoting one of your readings, or drawing attention to a supporting fact in a reading, simply end the sentence with a bracketed reference that contains the author's surname, and the original page number (not the PDF page number) – for example: (Smith, 22). Note that, like in all sentences, **the final period comes after the closing parenthesis of the reference**.

No references are required for lecture notes. You may encounter different policies on this elsewhere. However, the professor in this course believes that once a lecture is delivered, it becomes common knowledge for the course.

No references are required for class discussions. Thus you can also eliminate starting a sentence with "As we discussed in class."

Note: You should generally *not* be writing *for your professor* but for an assumed general, educated audience, that may not know what you are talking about and thus needs you to explain it.

When referring to a film for the first time in a paper, write out its full name in italics, i.e., *Chronicle of a Summer*. Subsequent references can be shortened, i.e., *Chronicle*.

Do not waste any space by writing out the full title of an article or chapter within the body of an essay, unless it is an especially important piece.

Announcements, E-mail Use

In the event of an unscheduled cancellation of a class, the appropriate notice is posted by the University on its website. See the "Class Cancellations" link on www.concordia.ca. In addition, digital billboards on campus will announce the cancellation. You will also be notified by email.

For the duration of this course, please check your email at least once each week, and look for any messages that begin with the course number.

Having said that, please ensure that you have the right email address entered in your MyConcordia student profile. That is the same email address to which course messages are sent.

Disclaimer

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change".

ESSAY EXAMS

The final course grade is based entirely on four (4) take-home essay exams, each one carrying the same weight as a portion of the final grade. Each exam consists of a single question. You are permitted no more than 750 words for any one essay—"space" is at a premium, and the wandering recitation of notes and extensive quotes from readings is thus not possible, nor desirable, within such constraints. You will need to synthesize material, at a minimum.

While each exam is worth at most 25% of the final grade for the course (and each one is marked out of 25 points)—your lowest exam score will be dropped, but only on this condition: that you submit each of the four exams, and on time. The submission of a blank page, or an outright non-submission of an exam, means that you earn a grade of zero for that exam, and it will count as part of the final grade.

Each exam (apart from the final one) will be graded and returned no sooner than two weeks after the submission date.

There is no grade for participation in class, but it is strongly encouraged: ask questions (unless you understand everything perfectly, you must have a question); offer your opinions. It has been noted by teachers everywhere that once students make an active investment in class, their learning improves considerably, as does their overall course performance.

Exam Schedule

Exam Number	Assigned on:	Due:
1	Wednesday, 26 January, 2011	Wednesday, 09 February, 2011
2	Wednesday, 16 February, 2011	Wednesday, 09 March, 2011
3	Wednesday, 16 March, 2011	Wednesday, 30 March, 2011
4	Wednesday, 06 April, 2011	Wednesday, 20 April, 2011

There are two exams in Part 1 of the course, one in Part 2, and one in Part 3. Apart from the final exam, each essay is due **in class, at the start of class**. Late exams will not be accepted.

When an exam is assigned, it is posted as PDF to the course website: where the above table appears, each date will become a clickable link. Also, the link to the exam will be circulated via e-mail and on the News page of the course website.

The final exam is due on **Wednesday, April 20**, delivered in person to the course coordinator's office in **H-1125-11**, any time between **12:00pm and 1:00pm**. If you cannot make it for that time, there is only one option: you must hand it in earlier, by depositing the exam in my mailbox *before 12:00pm*. Make sure that you are depositing your exam in the correct mailbox. *Do not deposit your exam in the mailbox* during the hour in which the coordinator is in his office. The final exam will not be returned, but you may see it (by arrangement) any time up to mid-May 2011.

More about the Essay Exams

Note: You should generally *not* be writing *for your professor* but for an assumed general, educated audience, that may not know what you are talking about and thus needs you to explain it.

The language of instruction is English, and all of the assigned readings are in English. Proficiency in English is necessary to master course content. Students who wish to submit work in French, should first speak with the professor. The professor can read French, only much more slowly than English. It may be necessary to reach a compromise where half the time a given student may submit work in French, and the other times (especially final work) will need to be in English.

Description of the Essay Exams:

The exam essays are structured around materials provided in this course (lectures, films, readings, and if applicable, class discussions). Essays should have an introduction, main body (divided into separate paragraphs), and conclusion (please see the notes that follow). Sources need to be documented. In the main body, each paragraph should begin with a meaningful statement that indicates both the subject of the paragraph, while fitting in with the larger "map" of your essay as outlined in your introduction. *Don't read the assigned readings passively: for helpful hints on how to write, closely examine the writings of our authors in this course.*

In each of these four essay exercises, only one question will be assigned, and you will normally have two weeks to work on your exam (except in the case of the mid-term break, when you will have a total of three weeks). Each exam performs a specific function, such as: compare and contrast; take one side in a debate; evaluate the merits of an argument; or, articulating your own particular perspective.

Students are evaluated on the extent and depth to which they have utilized assigned readings, lectures, films, and class discussions when applicable. Students are also evaluated on their ability to successfully apply key course concepts to their own writing. Analytical and conceptual clarity (the argument does not contradict itself repeatedly, the writer stays focused, any concepts used are defined, concepts are related to one another when applicable, pros and cons are considered, assertions are supported with evidence or logic), are vital elements of a paper deemed to be "very good" or better. Structure, logical organization, and effective writing are of substantial importance.

In general, a very good paper should aim for the following:

- an effective introduction that shows an understanding of the problem at hand, without modifying the original question to such an extent that the student is effectively addressing a problem that was not assigned;
- a conclusion that does not just repeat or summarize, but that draws together the main themes and ideas of the paper;
- significant ideas forming the first sentence of each new paragraph;
- ideas and paragraphs that flow from one to the other, so that there is no abrupt break; and,
- logical presentation: statements that logically follow from one another.

- an effective paper is not one that contradicts its own main premises and statements, without a discussion of the reasons for the apparent contradiction;
- better papers tend to have a clear picture of the problem as a whole and its constituent parts;
- a demonstrated understanding of the key ideas, concepts, or theories is required – being able to apply and scrutinize those ideas, concepts, or theories makes for a better paper.

- a well reasoned, logical, and analytical paper is further strengthened by being able to refer to supporting ideas or details from the assigned readings and other course materials; and,
- it is expected that students will try to cover, as much as is reasonable and applicable given the specific question, the assigned readings, films and lectures, without any unjustifiable exclusions.

Improving Students' Academic Experience

The University offers many services that can help students. To improve students' ability to succeed in their courses, get the most out of the university experience, and ensure their success in

completing their degree, it is **strongly recommended** that you make a note of the following list of services:

- **Concordia Counseling and Development** offers career services, psychological services, student learning services, etc. http://cdev.concordia.ca/
- **The Concordia Library Citation and Style Guides:** http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/citations.html
- **Advocacy and Support Services:** http://supportservices.concordia.ca/
- **Student Transition Centre:** http://stc.concordia.ca/
- **New Student Program:** http://newstudent.concordia.ca/
- **Access Centre for Students with Disabilities:** http://supportservices.concordia.ca/disabilities/
- **Student Success Centre:** http://studentsuccess.concordia.ca/
- **The Academic Integrity Website:** http://provost.concordia.ca/academicintegrity/
- **Financial Aid & Awards:** http://web2.concordia.ca/financialaid/
- **Health Services:** http://www-health.concordia.ca/

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Readings

Readings for this course are derived primarily from two required texts, which are available for purchase in the Campus Bookstore, and are on the Course Reserve (see below). They are:

> ***The Anthropology of Media: A Reader***. Edited by Kelly Askew and Richard R. Wilk. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
>
> ***The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World***. By S. Elizabeth Bird. New York: Routledge, 2003.

See the Bookstore list at:
http://bkstore.concordia.ca/services/coursebook.asp?DEP=ANTH&CRS=398G&SEC=&submit=List+Books&IMG=Y

COURSE RESERVE (no login required if accessed from a campus computer):
http://clues.concordia.ca/search/r?SEARCH=anth+398G

Lecture outlines used in class will be added as links below: click on the title of a lecture to download a PDF copy of the lecture outline.

1. Wednesday, 05 January, 2011

Course Overview;
(Re)Introducing Ethnography to Media Studies

[Lecture]

Optional Reading:
[Online—go to the course website] Ethnography — Maximilian Forte.

PART ONE: MEDIA THEORIES THAT MATTER(ED)

2. Wednesday, 12 January, 2011

Introducing Media Theories

[Lecture, Review of Readings]

Readings:

[Askew & Wilk] Introduction – Kelly Askew, 1-13.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 10, Hollywood and the USA – Hortense Powdermaker, 161-171.

Sunday, 16 January, 2011

- *Last day to add winter term courses.*
- *Deadline for withdrawal with tuition refund from winter term courses.*

3. Wednesday, 19 January, 2011

Media Effects I: The Medium is the Message and Technological Determinism, Part 1

[Lecture & Film]

Readings:

[Askew & Wilk] chapter 1, The Medium is the Message – Marshall McLuhan, 18-26.
[Online–go to the course website] Edmund Carpenter: explorations in media & anthropology (pp 110-140) – Harald E.L. Prins

Film #1: *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!*

4. Wednesday, 26 January, 2011

Media Effects I: The Medium is the Message and Technological Determinism, Part 2

[Review & Discussion]

[Askew & Wilk] chapter 2, The Technology and the Society – Raymond Williams. 27-40.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 11, Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves – Stephen F. Sprague, 172-186.

First exam is assigned on this date.

5. Wednesday, 02 February, 2011

Media Effects II: Cultural Imperialism, Part 1

Readings:

[Askew & Wilk] chapter 8, The Imperial Imaginary – Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 117-147.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 20, The Global and the Local in International Communications – Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, 337-356.

6. Wednesday, 09 February, 2011

Media Effects II: (Questioning) Cultural Imperialism, Part 2

[Review, Discussion, Film]

Readings:

[Askew & Wilk] chapter 16, Rambo's Wife Saves the Day: Subjugating the Gaze and Subverting the Narrative in a Papua New Guinean Swamp – Don Kulick and Margaret Wilson, 270-285.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 17, "It's Destroying a Whole Generation": Television and Moral Discourse in Belize – Richard R. Wilk, 286-298.

Film #2: *Militainment, Inc.*

First exam is due on this date (to be returned in class on 02 March).

7. Wednesday, 16 February, 2011

Media Effects III: Gazing at Images of the Other

[Film, Discussion, Review of Readings]

Readings:

[Askew & Wilk] chapter 6, The Gaze of Western Humanism – James C. Faris, 77-91.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 7, The Color of Sex: Postwar Photographic Histories of Race and Gender – Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, 92-116.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 19, Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture – Sut Jhally, 327-336.

Film #3: *Dream Worlds 3*

Second exam is assigned on this date.

Wednesday, 23 February, 2011 – NO CLASSES, READING WEEK

PART TWO: APPROACHES TO PRODUCTION

8. Wednesday, 02 March, 2011

Agenda Setting: News Production, Part 1

[Film, Discussion, Review of Readings]

Readings:

[Bird] chapter 6, CJ's Revenge: A Case Study of News as Cultural Narrative, 145-163.

Film #4: *Al Jazeera: Voice of Arabia*

Saturday, 05 March, 2011

- *Last day for academic withdrawal from two-term and winter term courses.*

9. Wednesday, 09 March, 2011

Agenda Setting: News Production, Part 2

[Film, Discussion]

Film #5: *OutFoxed!*

Second exam is due on this date.

10. Wednesday, 16 March, 2011

Indigenous Peoples' Media Productions

[Lecture, Film]

Readings:

[Bird] chapter 4, Imagining Indians: Negotiating Identity in a Media World, 86-117.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 13, Mediating Culture: Indigenous Media, Ethnographic Film, and the Production of Identity – Faye Ginsburg, 210-235.

Film #6: *Magic in the Sky*
Third exam is assigned on this date.

PART THREE: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC TURN TO THE AUDIENCE

11. Wednesday, 23 March, 2011

The Turn to the Audience

[Lecture/Review of Readings]

Readings:

[Bird] chapter 1, Beyond the Audience: Living in a Media World, 1-20.
[Bird] chapter 7, Media Ethnography: An Interdisciplinary Future, 164- 191.

12. Wednesday, 30 March, 2011

Media Ethnography: Exploring Audience Research

[Lecture]

Readings:

[Bird] chapter 2, Media Scandal Meets Everyday Life, 21-50.
[Bird] chapter 5, A Popular Aesthetic? Exploring Taste through Viewer Ethnography, 118-144.

Third exam is due on this date.

13. Wednesday, 06 April, 2011

National Television

[Lecture, Discussion, Review]

Readings:

[Askew & Wilk] chapter 18, National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City – Purnima Mankekar, 299-322.
[Askew & Wilk] chapter 22, The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity – Lila Abu-Lughod, 376-393.

Final exam is assigned on this date, and is due on 20 April—see the assignments section for details about where, when, and how to submit the final exam.