New Media Cultures – SOCY931 – Queen’s University – Winter 2021
Remote via MS-Teams - Thursdays 12:30pm-2:30pm EST
Instructor: Dr. Michael Siciliano
Email: m.siciliano@queensu.ca
Office Hours: Wednesdays 4pm-6pm by appointment through MS-Teams

Technology Requirements:
High-speed internet connection
Computer with webcam and microphone
MS-Teams (available for free to Queen’s University students and faculty)

Remote Learning Etiquette:
Participation, discussion, and community are crucial to graduate coursework, especially during our rather unique circumstances. For this reason, I ask that you please turn your camera on when in class unless you cannot due to technical issues. This is not mandatory, but it is polite. In the absence of physical co-presence, it is crucial that we see each other’s faces when we speak to each other about fairly complex ideas.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes:
This course provides graduate-level students with a grounding in media research traditions within sociology and an overview of current issues in the sociological study of media. Though the course emphasizes “new” media technologies and contexts of technological mediation, readings will deal with a variety of cultural and technological forms in order to provide conceptual richness in approaching forms of mediated social life.

The first four weeks of the course consist of classic readings from and discussion of structural (critical political economy, production of culture) and agential (British and North American cultural studies) perspectives in media sociology. By no means exhaustive, this portion is intended to provide a foundation for Weeks 5 & 6 in which we discuss more contemporary theoretical emphases on materiality, performativity, enchantment, and the embeddedness of social life within media infrastructures. The remaining weeks will focus on particular, empirical topics to be chosen by members of the course. Options include (but are by no means limited to) the labor of media production and mediated labor, industrial processes of media production, the politics of algorithmic visibility, the politics of digital interfaces, social movements and radicalization online, media as tool of colonial/political/class domination/resistance, and the mediated body.

As a sociology course, readings and discussion focus on the social aspects of media and media technologies rather than focusing on the specific content or messages of any particular media object. (New) media sociology tends to be interdisciplinary and so goes this course. Readings comes from cultural sociology, anthropology, communication, cultural studies, and media studies.

Course Aims: Students will 1) learn about theoretical perspectives and research traditions in the sociology of media in order to develop knowledge to begin research in the subfield and 2) develop an ability to discuss and evaluate contemporary research. Students will be evaluated on their ability to critically engage with readings and ideas presented in the course and to develop a viable research project within media sociology.
Assignments:

Active Participation and Discussion in Class and Attendance (33.33%)

Discuss readings prior to class with your assigned group. Groups will be assigned during week 1.

Lead discussion at least once with your group.

When leading discussion, you should attempt to draw together comments and questions from your peers’ responses while raising provocative questions. Questions should be aimed at helping us to further our understanding of core concepts from the readings and helping us understand how the week’s readings fit within our understanding of media sociology or media studies.

Aim for positive contributions to discussion and avoid distracting or interrupting the class.

Weekly Reflection Papers (33.33%)

800-1000 words in prose form posted to discussion forums in OnQ by 5pm the day before class starting in Week 2. These will be evaluated for full or partial credit. Your two lowest score will be dropped.

You do not need to cover each and every reading in these reflections as you might in an undergraduate response paper. Instead, you should use them to organize your thoughts on the readings. Remember, the core focus of a graduate education in sociology is usually to develop expertise in some particular subfield and to develop a research question in that subfield. Generally, it’s best to orient your studies around that goal: developing a research questions vis-à-vis extent bodies of sociological knowledge.

With that in mind, you may want to consider these questions when reflecting upon the readings:

• What does media seem to “do” or how is media understood in this theory/study/model?
• What sorts of research questions does the author’s core argument or theory allow you to ask?
• How do you understand the author’s arguments as related to theoretical traditions in the social sciences and/or how do they extend/innovate/build upon/challenge those traditions?
• What seems to be the authors’ positive or negative polemic? Whom are they in a dialogue with and what is their intervention in that dialogue?
• How might adopting a particular author’s perspective change/shape/modify your research project? the questions you ask?

Final Paper (33.33%)

5000-6000 words (15-20 pages double-spaced), turned in through OnQ during Finals Week. Final due date and further guidelines will be discussed in Week 6.

a) Original argument about media sociology based on literature review of material presented in the course

or

b) proposal for research project related to media which draws upon course material along with outside readings
Readings, Course Materials, and Copyright: Most readings will be available through OnQ or through the library, however, we might collectively decide to read a full book which, of course, will require a purchase. All materials made available through OnQ are intended for use as part of SOCY931: New Media Cultures at Queen’s University and are the property of the instructor unless otherwise stated. Third party copyrighted materials (such as book chapters and articles) have either been licensed for use in this course or fall under an exception or limitation in Canadian Copyright law.

Copying this material for distribution (e.g. uploading material to a commercial third-party website) can lead to a violation of Copyright law. Find out more about copyright here: http://library.queensu.ca/copyright.

Email Policy: Please include a subject heading that includes SOCY931 and a few words related to the email’s body. I will respond within 24 hours, so please, do not send follow up message until 24 hours have passed. I most likely will not respond to emails on Saturdays and Sundays.

Late Assignments: Weekly assignments will not be accepted late as they are required for the functioning of the course, however, your two lowest scoring weekly responses will be dropped. All remaining written assignments have a 3 day (72 hour) grace period. After the grace period, there will be a 10% deduction for each day that the assignment is late. As this is a graduate level course, I will neither be reaching out to you if you miss any assignments, nor will I remind you of deadlines.

If you think you may have issues turning an assignment in on time, please contact me ahead of time. If an emergency or illness prevents you from completing an assignment within the grace period, please let me know as soon as you are able to do (but by all means, take care of yourself first). The goal of the deadlines is not to be punitive, but to properly pace your work and to keep you on task.

Grading: Components of this course will receive percentage points or letter grades. For purposes of calculating your course average, letter grades will be translated into numerical equivalents using the Faculty of Arts and Science approved scale (see Appendix A). Your course average will then be converted to a final letter grade according to Queen’s Official Grade Conversion Scale (see Appendix A).

Grade Reappraisal: You must wait 7 days before requesting a reappraisal of any assignment. You may then submit, in writing, a clear and cogent argument as to why your assignment requires reassessment. This argument must point out exactly what you think has been improperly assessed. If you simply want an explanation of a grade, schedule an office appointment during my specified weekly office hours.

Statement on Academic Integrity: Academic Integrity is constituted by the six core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage (see www.academicintegrity.org). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the "freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University (see the Senate Report on Principles and Priorities http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senate/report-principles-and-priorities).

(continued on next page)
Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1 http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academic-calendars/regulations/academic-regulations/regulation-1), on the Arts and Science website (see http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academics/undergraduate/academic-integrity), and from the instructor of this course. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

OUTLINE OF COURSE

Week 1 – Introductions
What shall we talk about in this course?

Is there even such a thing as “media sociology?” Yes, but then again, maybe not?


Part 1: What the Olds Talked About (and what we can learn from what they were talking about)

Week 2 – Early Critical Theory’s Political Economy of Media/Culture and Embodied Relation to Media
How does ownership and thus power shape media?

Early Critical Theory

(Week 2 readings continued on next page)
Political Economy of Media/Communication


Week 3 – Political Economy’s Apolitical Cousin: the “Production of Culture” Perspective
How do social forces shape the production and consumption of media?


Week 4 – Resistance and Participation: The Agential Approach of Early Cultural Studies
How do consumers/audiences appropriate and make use of media?

The “Birmingham School” of Cultural Studies


Later Developments


Optional

Part 2 – What We’re Still Talking About

Week 5 – Living in It, Pt. 1: Performativity, Materialities; Enchantment, Mediation
How does media construct us and our world? How do we become invested in media?

Performativity Power of Infrastructures


Enchantments of Technology & Media


Week 6 – Living in It, Pt. 2: Phenomenology of Shifted Embeddedness + Let’s talk about Weeks 7-12


Review the list of potential topics on the following pages. Identify 6 topics you would want to focus on and/or come up with potential articles you might want to read and discuss with the group. I welcome additional suggestions for any of these key topics.

Part 3 – Topical Discussions

Potential Options for Weeks 7 – 12
These are meant to be a starting point for discussion of what we might read in this class. If you would like to suggest specific books that you would like us to read together as a group, please bring them up to me prior to this class meeting so that I can assess their suitability for the course and then arrange for us to discuss the possibility of their inclusion in this week’s meeting. We can proceed in two ways: either we pick from this list of curated readings or we deign to read a book per week for the remainder of the course. The latter would require that we all be able to purchase the books. Some ideas for full book readings follow the curated lists below.
Affect, Ontology, and the Mediated Body

The Performance/Fabrication of “Authenticity”

Further Readings

The Politics of Media Interfaces and Design

The Politics of Algorithmic (In)visibility
Gillespie, Tarleton. 2016. “Algorithms” in Digital Keywords.
Noble, Safiya. 2017. Selections from Algorithms of Oppression

Further readings
Media and the State


The Selling of Audiences / Data Use


Mediated Social Movements


Media Labor


(New) Media Production Processes


Some Recent Books that Could Make for Good Readings

Here are some recent books in the social scientific study of media. By no means exhaustive, these simply seem interesting. Again, this is a starting point. Look them up. See if anything grabs your attention.

In this course, some components will be graded using numerical percentage marks. Other components will receive letter grades, which for purposes of calculating your course average will be translated into numerical equivalents using the Faculty of Arts and Science approved scale (see below). Your course average will then be converted to a final letter grade according to Queen’s Official Grade Conversion Scale (see below).

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