



COMM 201: Media Theory & Criticism Fall 2015

Instructor: Elizabeth Coffman

Class Corboy Law Center, Room 211; Tu/Th., 2:30-3:45

Office: WTC, School of Communication, 219

Office Hours: Tues, 12:00-2:00, SOC, 219, WTC

Thurs, 1:00-2:00, and by appointment

Objectives:

- ✚ How do images, sounds, texts, games and websites communicate meanings to audiences?
- ✚ Are there patterns in how audiences interpret and act on these signs?
- ✚ What are the ethical implications for media producers when shaping stories about body, identity, politics, and society?
- ✚ Why do we need to understand design when discussing technology?

This course examines schools of thought surrounding the systematic operation and impact of media, particularly moving image media and sounds. Students will be introduced to the history of media theory, from the Frankfurt school to the public sphere, as well as to critical methods for designing, producing, and writing about media. Topics include truth and representation, design and impact, story and argument. Students will express their ideas about media with critical insights, conversations, hypertextual essays, creative designs and by thinking through ethical contexts for media production, consumption and distribution.

Learning Outcomes:

- Acquisition of the critical, historical and technical vocabulary to describe, analyze and produce media.
- Appreciation of the interdependency between media representations, narratives, information, and relationships to power.
- Improved critical thinking, writing and media skills.

Texts & Screenings:

Media Articles on Sakai

Film Screenings--online or reserve. Any costs for online films you will pay, but they will be under \$10.00. See <http://libguides.luc.edu/video>

Grade Scale:

Participation and conversations (4)	25%
Midterm Exam	25%
Multimedia Research/Video Essay Project	30%
Reading Presentations (Group)	20%

Course Expectations:

- **Participation** includes the value that the student adds to the discussions in class, and how prepared they are with readings outside of class. **Conversations** are intentional discussions that may develop in class, culminating in a post on the class Forum site and also uploaded under Assignments (250-300 words). Each conversation should raise questions about readings, and include media examples (with links, images, etc.). Conversations may each earn up to 5 points. You must complete four (two by spring break), but may finish more for extra credit. You will receive Participation points (up to 5) for thoughtful comments on other posts that occur throughout semester (not all at the end of the course...)
- The **Midterm** exam will be completed online. You will have access to your notes, book and the web.
- You will participate in one group **Presentation** (10 mins) of the class readings (groups of 3) during the semester. Please post presentations on Sakai for review. The presentations will help with the Midterm.
- You are required to complete a **Multimedia Research Project**, 1500-1750 total words (about 6-7 double-spaced pgs of text) with additional images, links and sources. Topic (with research list and bibliography) must be turned in after fall break. Your project will either be web-based, interactive or a video essay. If a video essay, you should submit your voiceover with references in addition to your video link. It may include narrative, experimental, or documentary interview materials to support your critical inquiry. (Use your cell phones, 'borrow' footage from the web; record your desktop, etc.) You must have standard written endnotes and bibliography of your sources. Use [MLA](#) citation format.
- You are required to give an in-class, speed **Presentation** (2 mins.) of your project in class before the end of the semester.
- You will view additional media outside of class time. Any online media charges (Netflix Google, etc.), you will assume.
- If you are sick, we must have a note from the infirmary or a doctor. An appropriate confirmation of personal issues is also needed (obituaries, note from family member, etc.) If you have any kind of disability that requires accommodation, review these guidelines or speak with me privately. <http://www.luc.edu/sswd/index.shtml>
- All work must be original and done for this class. Review these guidelines. http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml. If you need help completing assignments, please see me or go to the Writing Center for outside help.

Course Schedule:

Readings and writings are due on day they are listed unless indicated.

Part One: Theory, Video Essays and Interactive Docs

Week 1: August 25th /27th Defining theory. Building systems. Transforming media.

Tues: Watch in class: History/Theory Timeline; Desktop documentaries, Kevin B. Lee's *Transformers: The Premake*

Thurs: Read/Watch: ““What is theory?””(Sakai); Lee & Fandor's *Turning Point: the Year in Video Essays*; The [Spielberg](#) Face and [Paul Thomas Anderson](#) videos
Bring in examples of video essays or reading/writing/imaging/cool film experiments.

Week 2: September 1st/3rd Cinephilia, Clues and Transitional Objects

Tues: Watch: Jean Luc Godard's “Vivre sa Vie.”

Thurs: Read/Watch: Chris Keathley, Catherine Grant's “[The Use of an Illusion](#)”
Optional read; Carlo Ginzburg's essay, “Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes.”

Sign up for presentations

Conversation 1: How does the video essay contribute to media criticism? Is video criticism similar to child's play?

Week 3: September 8th/10th Reading Machines and Interactive Docs

Tues: Read Jennifer Schuessler's *NYTimes* article on [Bob Brown](#) ;Optional read, Jessica Pressman's “Machine Poetics and Reading Machines; “ Play with [The Readies](#). and [Project for Tachistoscope \[Bottomless Pit\]](#); Skype with Craig Saper

Thurs: Presentation1—Digital hostage taking

Read: Sandra Gaudenzi's “[The Interactive Documentary as a Living Documentary](#)” pp. 10-21; Chuck Tryon's “[Digital Distribution, participatory culture and the transmedia documentary.](#)” **Watch:** [Last Hostage](#), [High Rise](#)
Bring in examples of I-docs

Conversation 2: Do you ever experience reading as a creative, poetic experience? Describe it. Or make it up....

Part Two: Looking Closer—Museums, Ideology, Media that Kills

Week 4: September 15th/17th Who gets to curate museum walls?

Tues: Presentation 2—Tools of Power

Read: John Berger's "Ways of Seeing," Ch. 1 (Sakai); TBA

Bring in museum-like web sites, Tumblr, etc..

Thurs: No Class. Go to a museum or gallery.

Conversation 3: Select one Berger quote to reference with your museum experience.

Week 5: September 22nd /24th Charlie Hebdo, Copblock and Satire

Tues: Presentations 3 & 4— Meaning Machines, the Culture Industry

Read: Walter Benjamin, "Work of Art in Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; Adorno, Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"

Look at/read about Joe Sacco [cartoons](#) on Charlie Hebdo murders.

Conversation 4: Invent an idea for a theory or process for how media works. Maybe a machine?

Thurs: Presentation 5—Sign Here Please

Read: Marcel Danesi, "Messages, Signs, Meanings" What do you make of the interactive site [Copblock](#)?

Conversation 5: Try to imagine an image and a context that would drive you to respond with extreme anger. Is there one? Why or why not, do you think?

Week 6: September 29th /Oct.1st Narratives, Zombies and Reenactments

Tues: Presentation 6--Media Zombies

Read: Allan Cameron's "Zombie media: transmission, reproduction and the digital dead"

Thurs: Presentation 7—Fact or Fiction?

Read: Bill Nichols, Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject"

Conversation 6: What are your favorite kinds of narratives? What's involved structurally in bringing 'dead' material to life?

Due: **At least 2 conversations should be completed by October 2nd, midnight.**

Week 7: October 6th/8th Killing for the camera

Tues: Fall Break; No class

Watch before next class: *The Act of Killing of The Missing Picture*

Thurs: Presentation 8—Torture on TV

Read: Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others”; Deidre Boyle’s [“Finding the Missing Picture: the Films of Rithy Panh”](#)

Conversation 7: How do you feel about the ethics of the killers’ performances in *Act of Killing*? How does the use of Claymation affect the documentary story in *The Missing Picture*?

Part Three: Making Lives Visible—Digital Selves; Digital Audiences

Week 8: October 13th/ 15th

Tues: **MIDTERM EXAM** Online—

Thurs: Watch in class: *CitizenFour* excerpts

Week 9: October 20th/22nd Digital Politics, Public Space and Edward Snowden

Tues: Presentation 9—The Revolution will be Online

Read: Jurgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere”

Thurs: Bring a selfie to class. Ever been to a street protest?

Conversation 8: What’s the problem with recording everything?

Week 10: October 27th /29th Animating everything for audience

Tues: Presentation 10-- Who needs actors?

Read: Margaret Talbot, “Pixel Perfect: the Scientist behind the digital cloning of actors”; I.Ang, “Audience as Market and Audience as Public”

Thurs: Watch in class: TBA

Part Five: Constructing Realities—Gender, Postmodernism, Networks

Week 11: November 3rd / November 5th

Tues: Presentation 11—Smile for the Camera

Read: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”; Jen Proctor et al. [“Woman with the movie camera redux:”](#) Nina Martin [“Porn: it’s not just about sex anymore.”](#)

Thurs: *Born Into Brothels*

Conversations 9: How do you feel about the camera framing ‘attractive’ parts of bodies on screen? What about porn in the digital age?

Week 12: November 10th /12th

Tues: Due- Final Project Topic, 1 page with research list

Thurs: TBA

Week 13: November 17th /19th Collaborative meaning-making?

Tues: Presentation 12—Where has meaning gone?

Read: Jean Baudrillard, “Postmodernism”; Optional: William Uricchio, “The algorithmic turn: photosynth, augmented reality and the changing implications of the image.”

Conversations 10: Are you skeptical about truth in the media? Why? In what context is fiction OK? Give examples.

Week 14: November 24th/26th Thanksgiving

Tues: Last 2 conversations due

Thurs: No class.

Part Six: Picturing Argument—Privacy and the Public Sphere

Week 14 December 1st/ 3rd

Tues: Due: 2 min, in-class, presentations of final project

Thurs: : Due: 2 min, in-class, presentations of final project

Final Research Projects Due on Sakai by Dec. 4th, midnight

*Syllabus and Calendar are open to change by professor. All changes will be posted to Sakai.