

Methods of Media Criticism

Spring 2013

Online

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Cell:

Teaching Assistant: Rachel Morrissey --

Office Hours Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday by appointment; any day by phone appt.

Course Description

Methods of Media Criticism is a writing-intensive course that considers a wide range of approaches to the analysis and evaluation of media artifacts, including objects of study from film, theater, music, literature, games, public address, art and architecture. One feature that often distinguishes media criticism from art and literary criticism is that literary and art criticism typically focus on the work itself, whereas media criticism most often focuses on relationships—relationships among context, creator, artifact, and audience. The course will consider several models for analysis including neo-Aristotelian, narrative, ideological, metaphorical, organic, framing, and a media perspective on social change.

Required Text:

Arthur Berger. *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage: 2010. (We will post required chapters but purchasing book recommended.)

Recommended:

Karen Gocsik, et al. *Writing About Movies*. New York: Norton: 2013. (Great little book.)

Sonja K. Foss. (2009). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, 4th ed. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press. (Good broad resource.)

Additional readings as assigned. Readings posted in "Resources" on Blackboard

Assignments

Short Paper #1 - "Most or Least Favorite Medium" (15%)

Short Paper #2 - Topic TBD (15%)

Short Paper #3 - Topic TBD (15%)

Final Paper. Open Topic. 20 pp. Due May 6. (Proposal Due March 18) (30%)

Attendance and Participation in Discussion. (25%)

Lectures, Readings and Discussion: Each Sunday I will post a lecture and a series of discussion questions. Readings are posted in Resources. *Each discussion will be open for posting from Sunday until the following Sunday, when the thread will be closed.* You are expected to make at least two contributions each week to the discussion. Posts of 1-3 paragraphs are usually most effective in keeping the conversation going. I will join in the discussions as appropriate, but will not respond to every post.

Participation in weekly discussions is required. Several short posts are more effective than one long post because they encourage a more conversational flow. Ideally, post one item yourself in response to the discussion topic and one or more items in response to someone else's contribution. Think of it as an actual discussion rather than a series of unrelated comments.

This is a *large* class for an online course with a writing emphasis. It is usually more congenial to do this sort of thing at least in part face-to-face, but we must work within the parameters of this Blackboard medium. (There's a ripe topic for criticism!) I will try various devices to keep things moving and lively, but we all need to pitch in to make it interesting. In the past I have tried moving segments of the class to other online platforms, etc, but - honestly - at the end of the day it is usually more trouble than it is worth.

One approach we will employ is to do a series of short critiques and one long (20+ pp) critique for a final paper. We will work on the final paper in sections as the semester moves along. Be prepared to select a topic about a third of the way through. For the short critiques I will divide you into 3 small groups and ask you to comment on each other's thoughts. The logistics of all this are rather daunting, but I will try to spell it out as clearly as possible within the next few weeks.

In the short run, I want to get to know you a bit before laying down the final syllabus, because it should be responsive to your individual interests as well as to the larger group sentiment. If we have a class full of film buffs, for instance, the emphasis might be different than if you are gamers or social media fans. My guess is that it will be a little of everything - which makes things both more challenging and more interesting.

Schedule

1. 28 January Students begin posting 1/30
 Introductions and Overview: Tell us about yourself. What is your background in general and in media specifically? Where do you live? What media are you especially interested in? Film? TV? Music? Internet? Literature? Games? Social Media of various types? Celebrity culture? Sports? Political media? Youth media culture? Etc etc etc. Also - do you lean toward production or theory or both? Do you have any burning desires at this point about what we should be covering in this class? Even some ideas about a final paper? Why are you taking this class online (just curious!)
 Visit the "Introductions" thread in Blackboard discussions and say "Hello."

2. 4 February **The Critics Role**
 Read:
 Roland Greene, "The Social Role of the Critic"
 David Mendelsohn, "A Critic's Manifesto"

3. 11 February **"My Most or Least Favorite Medium and Why"**
 2-3 page paper due
 POST IN "MEDIUM" DISCUSSION ITEM
 Read:
 Carol Wilder "Why I Love Pencils"
 Edward Tufte "The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint"

 This assignment is a writing exercise to stretch your muscles and get you thinking about mediums of all sorts. I used this assignment in my "Ideas" class and it was very successful, so let's hope it is here, too. . . Think in or out of the box of conventional media.
 READ AND COMMENT (100 +/- WORDS) ON ANY FIVE PAPERS BY FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY

4. 18 February **Beginning at the Beginning: Aristotle and the Art of Persuasion**
 Read: Berger, "Methods of Textual Analysis," pp. 45-132
 Neo-Aristotelian Criticism (posted)
 Watch: Obama, "State of the Union" - Tuesday 12 February
 Post: Obama Neo-Aristotelian Critique before Friday 22 February

5. 25 February **Criticism for Everyone: The Oscars**
 Watch: The Oscars - 24 February

 Take a look at previous Oscar criticism:

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/oscars-2012-reviews-critics-295399>

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/02/the-oscars-one-long-orgy-of-praise-praise-praise.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/27/movies/awardsseason/the-artist-wins-best-picture-at-the-academy-awards.html?pagewanted=all>

<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/entertainment/02/27/12/early-reviews-oscar-show-mostly-negative>

<http://watching-tv.ew.com/2012/02/27/academy-awards-2012-oscars-billy-crystal/>

<http://www.metacritic.com/feature/84th-academy-award-winners-and-reviews>

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/ask/2012/02/david-denby-richard-brody-oscars-academy-awards.html>

Post: Oscar Critique Discussion ALL WEEK

6. 4 March - **Some Methods of Media Criticism**
Read: Foss Chapters 1 & 2 (posted)
Post: Discussion Questions as Posted
7. 11 March - **SHORT PAPER #2 DUE - 2-3 pp. OPEN TOPIC**
8. 18 March - **FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE**

26 March -- Spring Break
9. 1 April -- **Media Criticism and U.S. Political Culture**
Read/Watch/Listen: Various Political Analysts/Pundits/Satirists
10. 8 April -- **Media and Social Change**
Read: "Occupy" readings and others as posted
11. 15 April - **SHORT PAPER #3 DUE** - Critique of Social Change/Campaign/Movement Organization
12. 22 April - **Social Media Platforms: New Criticism for New Medi?**
Read: Sharkey, *Here Comes Everybody*, as posted
Other readings TBD
13. 29 April - **Fandom and Its Discontents**
Read: Jenkins as assigned and posted
14. 6 May - FINAL PAPER DUE

15. 13 May - Feedback and Discussion of Final Papers