

CHAPMAN UNIVERISTY
University Honors Program
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COURSE SYLLABUS

HON 206
Media, Self and Society

Spring 2010

Catalog Description: *Prerequisites: Acceptance to the University Honors Program, or consent of instructor.* An analysis of mass media as a social institution. This course is an interdisciplinary approach to the origins, history, evolution and social functions of the mass media. It addresses the impact of the media on the social self. Though it addresses the transitions from oral to print to electronic media the emphasis is on the electronic media and its impact on the social construction of reality. (Offered as needed.) 3 credits.

Restrictions: Acceptance to the University Honors Program, or consent of instructor.

Essential Equipment and Facilities:
Seminar-style classroom; video and computer facilities

Course Goals, Objectives, and Learning Outcomes:

This course will be a critical exploration – on both the “objective” and the “personal” level – of the phenomenon conventionally labeled “mass media;” an examination of the origin, history and functions of “mass media” and its pervasive effects on our social life. What social conditions brought about the phenomena of “mass media”? How do the media, in turn, shape the texture of our experience of social reality and social history? How much of our version of reality has been shaped, molded and tailored by the media? It would seem that it is not until an event, principle, movement, institution, etc. crosses the media threshold or media membrane that it takes on a solid, legitimate and confirmed reality for us today. Is the function of mass media to inform, educate, and enlighten or rather to deform and endarken, to train us to become more and more unaware of how we actually live our lives, more and more actively ignorant? How does the mass media mix with and permeate the texture of our intimate experience of who we are, of how we experience our personal and social identities? We hope to develop a keen media awareness that will help us live *with* the media in this world, instead of living *in* the world of the media.

In reference to the great historical transformation from the print age to the electronic age we will inquire into how the medium of Gutenberg’s typographic print influenced our frames of reference towards “knowledge” “truth” and “reality”? We will ask, is TV a neutral technology – like the electric light bulb – or is it more of a hypnotic force and technique of social control, a la Orwell’s 1984? Etc., etc.

What does the practice called “watching television” (or “reading the newspaper”, or “listening to the radio” “surfing the net”) actually, phenomenologically consist of? Do newspapers simply “report” how things are, or do they perhaps function more to promote an ontology of the social world and a disguised form of further entertainment, further distraction? Can we justifiably say that the primary role of the media is to serve as a delivery system for advertisers? How has advertising effected, infected and infested our view of ourselves? How has the media impacted our experience of political democracy? (Consider the somewhat extreme/somewhat humorous recent statement by John Perry Barlow about the last Presidential Election, “TV in America created the most coherent distortion field that I’ve ever seen. Therein is the problem: People who vote watch TV, and they are hallucinating like a sonofabitch. Basically, what we have in this country is government by hallucinating mob.”) Etc., etc.

Current Required Texts:

1. E. M. Forster – “The Machine Stops” Short Story on Lib. Res. Only
2. Bernard McGrane - **The Un-TV and the 10 MPH Car**. 1994, Small Press. (Amazon.com prices: \$6.00-17.50. *Many copies on Lib Res.*)
3. Inge Bell and Team Bell - **This Book Is Not Required**. Revised or Third Ed. 1998/ 2004, Pine Forge.(Amazon.com prices: \$11.45-34.95. *Many copies on Lib Res.*)
4. Marie Winn - **The Plug-In Drug, Television, Computers and Family Life**. 25th Anniversary Ed. 1977/2002, Penguin Books
5. Jerry Mander - **Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television**. 1978, Quill William Morrow & Co.
6. Michael Parenti – **Make Believe Media, The Politics of Entertainment**. 1992, St. Martin’s Press.
7. Ben Bagdikian – **The New Media Monopoly**. Latest Edition. 1983/2004 Beacon Press.
8. Bill McKibben - **The Age of Missing Information**. 1992, Random House.
9. Vance Packard – **The Hidden Persuaders**. 1957/1980. (Lib. Res. only).
10. **Watch Out for Children: A Mother’s Statement to Advertisers** (Pamphlet, Lib Res only)
11. Thomas de Zengotita – **Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World And The Way You Live In It**, 2005, Bloomsbury.

Instructional Strategies:

Lecture, seminar discussions, power point presentations. Student oral presentations.

Methods of Evaluation:

1. **Exam #1: Take Home Essay:** Formulate and integrate the central arguments of Mander and Winn (including references to Forster and Wallace).
2. **Exam #2: Take Home Essay:** Formulate and integrate the central arguments of Parenti and Bagdikian.
3. **Final Exam: Take Home Essay:** Formulate and integrate the central arguments of McKibben and Zengotita (including references to McLuhan and Packard).
4. **Course Projects:**

- a) Saturday Morning Ghetto : A field work project involving watching children’s television, interviewing a preschooler about his/her experience of television watching and visiting a toy store.
- b) Television Project: Short paper comparing your experience seeing a show “live” vs. as it appears on TV.

- c) Various other projects (analyzing ads, news, television watching, malls, etc.) will be assigned as we move along.
- d) Oral reports will be regularly assigned.
- e) Various “exploriments” will be assigned from time to time.
- f) Any “extra-credit” papers, projects, experiments, film responses, etc., happily accepted.

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy:

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor and referral to the university's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including dismissal. (See the Undergraduate Catalog for the full policy.)

Students with Disabilities Policy:

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University, through the Center for Academic Success, will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student in determining what accommodations are suitable based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Prepared by:

Bernard McGrane, Spring 2009

Last revised by:

Bernard McGrane, Spring 2010