

New York University
Culture and Communication
E38.2075-001
Spring 2007
Silver 709
Wed. 7:15-9:25

Prof. Marita Sturken
Department of Culture and Communication
239 Greene Street 7th Floor
email: marita.sturken@nyu.edu
tel: 212-992-9424
Office hours: Tues. 2-4 and by appt

Methods in Interpreting Popular Culture

Course description:

This course is an introduction to methods of cultural analysis for interpreting popular culture as site of cultural meaning. It provides an introduction to the fundamental qualitative methods (and related theories) for understanding the construction of meaning in film, television, popular music, and advertising, tracing the study of popular culture through film theory and mass media analysis to cultural studies. This course surveys methods of analysis such as structuralism, semiotics, genre analysis, psychoanalysis, socio-historical analysis, ideological analysis, discourse analysis, political economy, reception theory, feminist method, and ethnography as tools through which to understanding popular culture in depth. It will include screenings of excerpts of film and television in class.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to attend all seminars, to undertake the reading assignments seriously, and to participate fully in seminar discussions. You should come to class prepared to discuss the readings. There will be 13 short assignments throughout the semester in which you use a different methodological approach. Each assignment will be 2-3 pages. Grades will consider short assignments 90%, participation 10%.

Required Texts:

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture* (Routledge, 1981)
Toby Miller, et al, *Global Hollywood 2* (British Film Institute, 2005)
Ernest Larsen, *The Usual Suspects* (British Film Institute, 2002)
Marita Sturken, *Thelma & Louise* (British Film Institute, 2000)
The rest of the readings will be posted in pdf on Blackboard.

Recommended:

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking* (Oxford, 2001)
Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (Sage, 2002)

**Week 1, January 17:
Introduction--Models for Thinking about Popular Culture**

Recommended reading:

Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, "Defining Popular Culture"
James Schwoch and Mimi White, "The Questions of Method in Cultural Studies"

Week 2, January 24: Structuralism and Film Form

Reading:

Umberto Eco, "Narrative Structures in Fleming"
Dennis Porter, *The Perilous Quest: Baseball as Folk Drama*
Ernie Larsen, *The Usual Suspects*

Recommended:

Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, "Introduction: Rethinking Popular Culture"

Assignment 1 due

Week 3, January 31: Semiotics

Reading:

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Introduction and Chapter 1
Kaja Silverman, "From Sign to Subject: A Short History"
Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, excerpts
Paula Treichler, "How to Use a Condom"
Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other"

Recommended:

Practices of Looking, Chapter 1

Assignment 2 due

Week 4, February 7: Genre Theory

Reading:

Marita Sturken, *Thelma & Louise*
John Frow, "Approaching Genre"
Jason Mittell, "Television Genres as Cultural Categories" and "Making Fun of Genres"
Derek Kompare, "Extraordinarily Ordinary"
Charlotte Brunson, "Women's Genres and Female Agency"

Recommended:

Larry Grossberg, Ellen Wartella, Charles Whitney, "The Interpretation of Meaning"

Assignment 3 due

Week 5, February 14: Ideological Analysis

Reading:

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Part 2

Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"

Larry Grossberg, Ellen Wartella, Charles Whitney, "Ideology"

Robin Wood, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur"

Recommended:

Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Practices of Looking, Chapters 2, 6

Assignment 4 due**Week 6, February 21: Socio-Historical Analysis**

Lynn Spigel, "Introduction to Welcome to the Dreamhouse"

"The Suburban Home Companion"

"Outer Space and Inner Cities"

Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, excerptsSusan Douglas, *Listening In* (excerpt)

Henry Jenkins, "No Matter How Small: The Democratic Imagination of Dr. Seuss"

Assignment 5 due**Week 7, February 28: Discourse Analysis**

Reading:

Foucault, Preface to *The Birth of the Clinic**The History of Sexuality*, excerptsEdward Said, *Orientalism*, excerpt

David Morley, "Cultural Studies and Media Studies"

Marita Sturken, "The Aesthetics of Absence"

Carol Cohn, "War Wimps and Women"

Recommended:

Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski, "Language, Identity and Cultural Politics"

Assignment 6 due

Week 8, March 7: Political Economy of Culture

Reading:

Toby Miller et al, *Global Hollywood 2* (excerpts)

Dana Polan, "Cable Watching: The Sopranos and Discourses of Distinction"

Recommended:

Practices of Looking, Chapter 5**Assignment 7 due****Spring Break March 12-16****Week 9, March 21: Spectatorship and Psychoanalysis**

Reading:

Judith Mayne, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship"

Tania Modleski, "Hitchcock, Feminism, and Patriarchal Consciousness" and "Rear Window"

Anne McClintock, "The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism"

Josefina Saldana-Portillo, "In the Shadow of NAFTA"

Recommended:

Practices of Looking, Chapter 3

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Assignment 8 due**Week 10, March 28: Postmodernism and Poststructuralism**

Reading:

Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"

David Harvey, "The Condition of Postmodernity"

Umberto Eco, "The City of Robots"

George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc"

Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Is Nick for Kids?"

Recommended:

Lawrence Cahoon. "Postmodernism: An Introduction "

Practices of Looking, Chapter 7**Assignment 9 due**

Week 11, April 4: Positivism, Empiricism, and Questions of Evidence

Reading:

George Steinmetz, "Positivism and its Others in the Social Sciences"

Sarah Igo, Introduction to *The Averaged American*

Clifford Gertz, "Thick Description"

John Caldwell, "Cultural Studies of Media Production"

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction and the Aristocracy of Culture*, excerpt

Eva Ilouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, excerpt

Assignment 10 due**Week 12, April 11: Reception Theories and Everyday Practices**

Reading:

David Morley, "Methodological Problems and Research Practices"

John Corner, "Reception"

Janice Radway, "Reading Reading the Romance"

Michel de Certeau, "Reading as Poaching" and "Walking in the City"

Laura Marcus, "The Project of Mass Observation"

Mass Observation Project, "Two Letters"

Recommended:

Janet Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, excerpt

Assignment 11 due**Week 13, April 18: Ethnographic Audiences**

Reading:

David Morley, excerpts from *Television, Audiences & Cultural Studies*

Ellen Seiter, "Qualitative Audience Research"

Elizabeth Bird, *The Audience in Everyday Life* excerpt

Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*, excerpt

Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, excerpt

Assignment 12 due**Week 14, April 25: Media Ethnographies and Conclusion**

Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, excerpt

Mizuko Ito et al, *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian* excerpt

Terry Rantanen, *The Media and Globalization*, excerpt

Annette Kuhn, *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger*, excerpt

Assignment 13 due

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Write a personal narrative that makes a larger point from your personal story.

Assignment 2: Do a structural analysis of a television series, sports activity, or cultural product.

Assignment 3: Do a semiotic analysis of an image, object, or print advertisement.

Assignment 4: Define the formulas and characteristics of a film or television genre.

Assignment 5: Do an ideological analysis of a film or television show.

Assignment 6: Go to the Fales Library Archive, describe one document or object you find there and what kind of evidence it is.

Assignment 7: Choose a particular event or situation and discuss the discourses that are competing to define it.

Assignment 8: Choose a particular media or cultural product and map out the elements of its political economic context.

Assignment 9: Apply one concept from psychoanalysis to a cultural product.

Assignment 10: Analyze a film, television show or other cultural product as postmodern.

Assignment 11: Observe a place for an hour and describe the patterns of behavior that you see.

Assignment 12: Intervene in a public context in some way that changes it and reveals something to you about how it is structured.

Assignment 13: Interview one person who you know well and one person you don't know about their iPod, TV viewing habits, or consumer habits. Compare the two interviews in terms of strategy, information you got, general conclusions you could make about the topic.