



**MF 220-01: INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA STUDIES**  
**MONDAY/WEDNESDAY 2:30-3:50 PM, BOLTON 382**  
**MONDAY 6:00-9:00 PM, DAVIS AUDITORIUM**  
**PROFESSOR PAUL BENZON**  
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**OFFICE: TISCH 327**  
**OFFICE HOURS: MONDAY 4:15-5:45, FRIDAY 9:30-**  
**10:30, AND BY APPOINTMENT**  
**COURSE BLOG: [HTTPS://MF220.WORDPRESS.COM/](https://mf220.wordpress.com/)**

## Course Description

We live in a culture saturated by media. From the television shows and films that stream to us on our laptops and tablets to the images and updates we consume on our phones, media texts and technologies are so omnipresent within contemporary life that they seem almost invisible. Yet this seeming invisibility makes it all the more important that we look closely at the workings of media technology, and that we ask critical questions of the media that surround us. How do different media forms work to produce artistic and social meanings? What powers do media hold over us, and what powers might they give us as consumers and producers? How have media changed from the beginning of the modern period to our contemporary moment of digital convergence?

In this course, we will ask these and other questions as we explore the broad and eclectic terrain of media and film studies. We will hone our skills in the critical analysis of a range of media forms, including film, television, radio and sound, and the internet and new media. Studying key texts in these forms alongside a selection of critical writings, we will consider how media technologies create aesthetic effects and how they play crucial roles in shaping social questions of identity, power, community, and artistry. Our ultimate goal will be to become more critically aware as students, consumers, producers, artists, and citizens within contemporary media culture.

## Course Goals

In this course, you will

- Become conversant with foundational concepts, questions, and concerns in the field of media studies
- Learn to analyze media texts closely and critically, making use of formal analysis and theoretical frameworks in class discussion as well as in your scholarly writing
- Engage texts across a range of media with an eye towards larger social, cultural, and historical questions, aided by theoretical and critical concepts and writings
- Analyze media historically, considering the questions and issues of contemporary media culture alongside those of earlier periods
- Participate in class discussions and workshops focused on the formal and cultural analysis of media
- Write thoughtfully and critically about media texts in a range of formats and contexts

## Required Texts

All print readings are available in the Course Packet. Short texts in other formats (marked with an asterisk in the course schedule) will be accessible either from a class YouTube playlist at <http://bit.ly/mf220benzon> or otherwise as noted. Full-length films will be watched during our screening block and will also be available on reserve at the library for further study and use in papers and other assignments.

## Grading

You must complete all of the following course assignments in order to pass the course:

Class Participation	20%
Class Blog	20%
Short Shot Analysis	5%
Music Video Analysis	15%
How to Watch (More) Television	20%
Audio/New Media Project	20%

Late work will be marked down one grade level for each class period after the due date (for example, from a B+ to a B for one late day). Extensions will only be granted in the case of an emergency documented by a college dean.

### **Preparation, Participation, and Class Structure**

We will spend our class time each day on a variety of different activities, including but not limited to full-class discussions, small-group discussions, close study of short clips (video, sound, etc.), and in-class writing. While I may occasionally give short lectures, the bulk of our time will be spent talking and engaging together with the course material and with each other's ideas. In order to do this, it is essential that you come to class prepared to address the day's material. This means printing out (if necessary) and completing all reading before class, bringing the reading to class, and being prepared to discuss the reading thoughtfully. You should have interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these and to be called on in our conversation during each class. The more each of you brings your own thinking to the discussion, the more all of us will get out of class—I encourage you to offer perspectives, ideas, examples, oppositions, questions, and other contributions as much as possible. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in class, please let me know or come see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work together to make things easier for you.

Although I will rarely lecture, that does not mean that you should not take notes on what the class has to say about the material we are discussing, just as you would in a lecture course. Having a record of the class' comments, concerns, debates, etc., will be extremely valuable to you in preparing to develop topics and arguments for further writing and thinking in the course. More broadly, consistently remaining actively engaged in our discussions, even if only as a listener and note-taker at certain moments, will help you to develop as a critical thinker and writer.

**Laptops and tablets may be used in class only for class-related work such as note-taking, class writing, and research. If inappropriate computer or electronic use becomes a problem for some members of the class, I will revoke permission to use them for the class as a whole. If you have questions about whether a certain use of technology is appropriate or not, please don't hesitate to ask me.**

### **Course Blog**

Over the course of the semester, you will post regularly to a course blog focused on the texts and issues we will be discussing in class. This work will serve several purposes: firstly (and most immediately), it will give us a chance to think and talk critically about some of the course material before we discuss it in class and to gear our discussion towards issues and questions that are important to you or that you are curious about. In giving you the opportunity to bring new material and new areas of concern into our conversation, it will also help you to generate topics, ideas, and arguments for papers.

*Blog Posting.* Note that the blog is located on our independent course website at <https://mf220.wordpress.com/>, **not on Blackboard** (although we will use Blackboard for email, papers, and other elements of the course). You are not required to register with WordPress in order to post on the blog, but you must subscribe to the blog so that you receive notifications of new material that I post, and you should include your name or other identifying information in your posts so that we can all follow the conversation online and I can give you credit for your work. The current post will

appear at the top of the page—click on the comments link for that post to read what others have written and post your writing.

*Blog Content.* Each week on the blog, you should submit **one main post of your own and one response to a classmate's post.** Your main post should be at least 250 words (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page—you might write and edit your post in Microsoft Word or a similar program so that you know the length of your post and so that you have a backup of it on your computer).

The topics and focuses for your main posts are largely open-ended: while I may sometimes suggest issues or questions for you to write about or approaches you might take to our material, what you focus on will largely be up to you. The blog is a space for us as a group to be reflective about the material we are discussing, and to begin to air initial responses, interpretations, and reactions before we pursue them more fully in class discussion. In this spirit, your posting to the blog should be thoughtful and analytical—you should always ground your writing in quotation and close analysis of our material for the day, and you should offer interpretations and critical questions rather than summaries or solely personal responses. There are a number of ways you might do this: you might write about a particular element or issue in the day's material that strikes you as especially important in some way, you might respond to the material using critical approaches you're already familiar with (whether from earlier in our course or from other courses), you might raise a few questions about the material and work to think through answers to them, or any number of other approaches. The more engaged an approach you take, the stronger your posts will be and the more you will be able to bring to our discussions.

Your response can be shorter than your main post, but should address your classmate's post thoughtfully and substantively—rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing, you should build upon, expand, complicate, or otherwise analytically engage their ideas just as you would in a live classroom discussion. I encourage you to draw on other elements of our work in these responses—you might discuss how an issue your classmate discusses in a post for Monday relates to the reading for Wednesday, or how our Monday evening screening illustrates some of the issues from Monday's reading and discussion. Depending on what is already on the blog when you go to post your main post of the week, you may choose to make that main post a response to a classmate's writing; however, that post should still be at least 250 words, and you should still make a second shorter response post later on.

*Blog Scheduling.* Unless I specify otherwise, each week's main blog post will be due before Monday's class (consult the course schedule below for specific details). In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to read comments and absorb the online discussion before we meet on Wednesday, **main posts are due by midnight on Sunday night. Response posts are due by class time on Wednesday. Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts and responses will not receive credit.**

*Blog Grading.* I will grade your main blog posts on a scale of 1-4 each week. Criteria for each grade are as follows:

### **Grade Characteristics**

- 1 The post is missing, late, or severely underdeveloped, showing minimal engagement with the text and the issues it raises.
- 2 The post is underdeveloped: it meets at least some of the technical requirements of the assignment, but consists mostly of summary or personal response rather than close analysis of or critical thinking about the text.
- 3 The post is successful: it uses textual or other material to make analytical claims, and begins to develop them, but those claims or connections are not fully developed or analyzed.
- 4 The post is exceptional: it uses textual or other material to make thoughtful, original analytical claims and/or connections, and engages and analyzes the issues it raises in independent, in-depth ways.

I will grade response posts on a credit/no credit basis based on your completing them substantively and on time.

### **Short Shot Analysis**

As part of our work with film early in the course, you will choose one film from our class viewings and analyze a sequence of 8-10 shots from that film that you find particularly significant. Working with the terms and concepts we develop in class, you will document and analyze each shot in your chosen sequence and write a short (1-2) page analysis of the formal effects of your sequence overall.

### **Music Video Analysis**

Following from our work in class and in the short shot analysis assignment, you will select a music video from a list of choices provided and write a 4-5 page analysis of that video in terms of formal composition, narrative form, and cultural representation.

### **How to Watch (More) Television**

As part of the section of our course on television, you will write a 5-6 page expansion of the scholarly collection *How to Watch Television* (available on electronic reserve through the library). You will have the option of either extending one chapter in the text, applying it to a new program that you select and analyze, or writing a new chapter focused on a concept not discussed in the existing collection. I will provide more in-depth instructions for this assignment in advance of the due date, and a short topic proposal will be due as part of the working process for this assignment.

### **Audio/New Media Project**

For your final assignment in the course, you will produce a project in which you engage in one of the media practices we will explore in the latter part of the course (audio culture, social media and identity, digital surveillance, digital convergence, or meme culture) and reflect critically on that engagement in dialogue with critical material from our course. As part of this project, you will submit the relevant digital artifacts for your topic and a 7-9 page paper. I will provide more in-depth instructions for this assignment in advance of the due date.

### **Attendance**

You are permitted a total of **three absences** throughout the semester without penalty. Keep in mind that this includes not only our regular Monday/Wednesday class meetings but also our Monday evening screenings. We will not have screenings every week of the semester, and they will not always run the full three hours, but the ones we do have are mandatory and you should plan for them as noted

on the course schedule below. In addition to watching/listening to media content during this time, we will also frequently engage in short discussions, in-class writing, and consideration of course assignments.

For each subsequent absence, your final course grade will drop one-third of a letter (e.g., from an A- to a B+), and after four absences, you risk failing the course. Repeated or excessive lateness will also count as an absence.

If you miss all or part of a class or screening, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work for the course—make sure to follow the syllabus, stay on track with the reading, turn in any written work that was due for the day, and consult a classmate, check the course website on Blackboard, or come see me during my office hours to talk about what you might have missed in class.

### **Office Hours**

I want each of you to be successful in this class. Helping each of you develop as readers, writers, thinkers, and students of media and culture is important to me, and I want to do what I can to help you achieve those goals and succeed in my class. More importantly, I have a great deal of interest in the material we will be working on this semester, and I would love for you to get the same enjoyment and excitement from it that I do. If you have any questions, problems, or things you want to discuss—about the course, the readings, writing assignments or paper ideas, the Media and Film Studies minor, life at Skidmore, future academic or career plans, or anything else at all—or if you simply want to talk more about what we're doing in class, please come see me. I encourage you to think of meeting with me not just as a last resort or something to do when you need help, but as a central part of making your learning more productive, meaningful, and enjoyable. My office hours are Monday 4:15-5:45pm (right between class and our screening) and Friday 9:30-10:30am in Tisch Hall 327—this time is set aside for us to talk and for me to help you and work with you. If you aren't free during that time, get in touch with me before or after class or by email and we can set up a time that is more convenient. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are having trouble or feel you need help, or for any other reason at all.

### **Accessibility**

If you anticipate needing accommodations regarding any element of this course, please come talk with me early in the semester so that we can work together to address these issues. You should also visit the Office of Student Academic Services at <http://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/index.php> for more information.

### **Academic Integrity**

Independent thinking and writing are crucial elements of both your work in this course and the intellectual culture of Skidmore more broadly. Violating these principles through plagiarism or other academic dishonesty is a serious offense. Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade for the assignment and may result in more serious consequences as well. If you have any questions about citation, attribution, or plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me before you hand in your work. For more information about Skidmore's academic integrity policy, visit <http://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.php>.

### **Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct**

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a

student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by *contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.*

## Course Schedule

The schedule below may change over the course of the semester. I will announce any changes in class and/or via email. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes by attending class, checking your email and the class blog regularly, and contacting me or coming to my office if you have any questions.

### Film

#### Week 1: Seeing, Spectacle, and Spectatorship in Early Film

- Mon. Jan. 23      Course Introduction: What are Media? What is Media Studies?  
**Screening: Short Silent Films**
- Wed. Jan 25      Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Cinema and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight TUESDAY**

#### Week 2: Film Form, Film Politics

- Mon. Jan 30      Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, “The Elements of Cinematography,” “The Elements of Editing”  
Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage is Conflict”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**  
**Screening: Dziga Vertov, *Man With a Movie Camera***
- Wed. Feb. 1      Dziga Vertov, “We: Variant of a Manifesto,” “From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye,” “Kino-Eye: Lecture II”  
Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (sections 7-end)  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

#### Week 3: Film Form, Film Narrative

- Mon. Feb. 6      William H. Phillips, “Composition: The Uses of Space” and “Angles and Point-of-View”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**  
**Screening: Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner***
- Wed. Feb. 8      David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, “Narrative Form”  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**  
**Short Shot Analysis Due Friday, Feb. 10**

#### Week 4: Gender, The Body, and the Gaze

- Mon. Feb. 13      Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**  
**Screening: Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom***

Wed. Feb. 15 E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?"  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

## Television

### Week 5: TV as Social System

Mon. Feb. 20 Raymond Williams, "The Technology and the Society," "Programming: Distribution and Flow"

\*Gil Scott-Heron, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"

**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

**Screening: Prime-Time TV**

Wed. Feb. 22 Jane Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology"  
Philip Auslander, "Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective"

\*Watch at least one half-hour each of late-night and morning television

**Response Post Due by Class Time**

**Music Video Analysis Due Friday, February 24**

### Week 6: TV as Narrative and Culture

Mon. Feb 27 Jason Mittell, "Complexity in Context"

**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

**Screening: *Breaking Bad***

**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

**How to Watch (More) Television Topic Proposals Due**

Wed. March 1 Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding"

Garret Castleberry, "Understanding Stuart Hall's 'Encoding/Decoding' Model through TV's *Breaking Bad*"

**Response Post Due by Class Time**

### Week 7: TV Futures / Sonic Histories

Mon. March 6 James Poniewozik, "Streaming TV Isn't Just a New Way to Watch. It's a New Genre"

Farhad Manjoo, "How Netflix Is Deepening Our Cultural Echo Chambers"

Nicholas Mirello, "My Friend, Frasier Crane"

**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

**Audio Screening: *War of the Worlds***

## Radio and Sound

Wed. March 8 Michel Chion, "The Three Listening Modes"

Neil Verma, "What Is the 'Theater of the Mind?'"

Michele Hilmes, "The Imagined Community"

Hadley Cantril, "It Didn't Sound Like a Play"

**Response Post Due by Class Time**

**How to Watch (More) Television Chapters Due Friday, March 10**

## Week 8: We Now Interrupt This Broadcast...

Mon. March 13    **No Class: Spring Break**

Wed. March 15    **No Class: Spring Break**

## Week 9: Sonic Technology and Remix Aesthetics

Mon. March 20    Ulf Poschardt, *DJ Culture* (selections)  
\*Eric B. and Rakim, “Paid in Full” (all versions)  
\*Grandmaster Flash, “The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

Wed. March 22    Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, *Rhythm Science* (selections)  
Jace Clayton aka DJ /rupture, “Confessions of a DJ”  
\*DJ /rupture, “Gold Teeth Thief”  
\*Girl Talk, *All Day* (with visualizer)  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

## Week 10: Sonic Production and Consumption in the Digital Moment

Mon. March 27    \*Kembrew McCloud, *Copyright Criminals*  
Damon Krukowski, “Plagiarize This: A Reasonable Solution to Musical Copyright After ‘Blurred Lines’”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

Wed. March 29    Eric Harvey, “Station to Station: The Past, Present, and Future of Streaming Music”  
Jayson Greene, “Kanye West Is Still Changing *The Life of Pablo*. Does It Matter?”  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

## New Media

### Week 11: Social Media and Digital Identity

Mon. April 3    danah boyd, “Introduction” and “Identity”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

Wed. April 5    danah boyd, Texts TBA  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

## Week 12: Digital Surveillance and the Politics of Data

Mon. April 10    Alexis Madrigal, “I’m Being Followed: How Google—and 104 Other Companies—Are Tracking Me on the Web”  
Nicole Cohen, “The Valorization of Surveillance: Towards a Political Economy of Facebook”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

Wed. April 12      Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes.”  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

### **Week 13: Digital Convergence**

Mon. April 17      Henry Jenkins, “Worship at the Altar of Convergence”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

Wed. April 19      Henry Jenkins, Texts TBA  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

### **Week 14: Internet Aesthetics, Internet Politics**

Mon. April 24      Ryan Milner, “Logics: The Fundamentals of Memetic Participation” and “Grammar: Structures for Making Statements and Making Do”  
**Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday**

Wed. April 26      Ryan Milner, “Voice: Pop and Populism in Public Commentary”  
\*Reply All, “The Grand Tapestry of Pepe”  
**Response Post Due by Class Time**

### **Week 15: Endings and Beginnings—The Future of Media Studies**

Mon. May 1      **Final Class: Conclusions, Reflections, Celebrations**