

COMS 616
Proseminar in Communication Studies
Fall 2007

Professor Jonathan Sterne

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Prospectus:

This course is designed to introduce entering MA and PhD students to the graduate program in Communication Studies at McGill. The course will offer a mix of academic acculturation to the field of communication studies – especially as it is practiced at McGill – and relevant professional concerns for students, such as grant writing, the thesis and what it means to be an academic and an intellectual.

Class time will feature weekly lectures and discussions, and throughout the term we will have visits from members of the Communication Studies faculty. Students will write a series of short seminar papers and participate in class with verve and regularity.

Required Texts (for sale at *Paragraphe* and on reserve at the library):

Armand and Michèle Mattelart, *Theories of Communication, A Short Introduction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage 1998.

There is a packet of required and recommended course readings available at *Copie Nova*, 1015 Sherbrooke St. West.

Additional recommended readings will be listed in a bibliography at the end of this syllabus, and where possible, they will be placed on reserve at the McClennan Reserve Desk.

Course requirements:

Seminar participation	-	40%
Short papers (x4)	-	60%

Seminar participation will consist of vigorous engagement in weekly discussions of assigned texts. Consistent failure to attend or participate will be penalized. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom is also required. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstance. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

Short papers will consist of brief (2 pages max.) critical responses to one or more of the assigned readings. Papers should avoid excessive summary and description, and focus instead on points of critical interrogation of the text and its implications. Papers may illustrate points of critique and argument with reference to empirical evidence, actual cases, social phenomena, etc., or draw comparisons with other texts, but the primary focus of analysis should remain the assigned text in question. Students must complete four short papers over the course of the term, on readings selected from the schedule below. Short papers must be submitted in the body of an e-mail message to the course listserv no later than 3 pm the Saturday before the reading is to be discussed in class. Papers submitted after this deadline will not be eligible for credit. Students are expected to read their colleagues' short papers in preparation for class discussion.

McGill University statement on academic integrity:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequence of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept. 10): Course introduction and Intro to the Field

Apologia for the course; on the history of communication studies.

Armand and Michèle Mattelart (1998), *Theories of Communication: A Short History*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Week 2 (Sept. 17): Interestingness

C. Wright Mills (1959) "The Promise," in *The Sociological Imagination*, 3-24, New York: Oxford University Press.

Thomas S. Kuhn (1970) "The Route to Normal Science," "Normal Science as Puzzle-Solving," "The Priority of Paradigms," and "The Response to Crisis" in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd Edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 10-22, 35-51, 77-91.

Pierre Bourdieu (1992). Part III: The Practice of Reflexive Sociology (The Paris Workshop) of *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (published with Loic Wacquant), 217-260.

Darin Barney, "'Taking a Shit in Peace': Players and Workers in the New Academy." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, 129-134.

Week 3 (Sept. 24): Grant-writing workshop

Profs. Jonathan Sterne and Marc Raboy

Students not applying for SSHRC or FQRSC funding in this year's competition are excused (this seminar will be open to all students in the program who are applying).

Week 4 (Oct 1): The Thesis

Using the ProQuest dissertations and theses database (available via McGill University library website), or by visiting the departmental library of dissertations and theses (now housed in the hallway), obtain an MA or PhD thesis (corresponding to your own level of study). Prepare a brief 5-10 minute presentation of the thesis. Presentations should highlight: the research problem or question addressed by the thesis or dissertation; its breadth, coverage and organization; its methodology and theoretical content. Presentations should also reflect on the distinctiveness of the thesis or dissertation as a genre: how is it distinguished from other genres of academic writing (articles, monographs, etc.)?

Week 5 (Oct. 9 TUESDAY): Competing Accounts of Communication Studies

For this class session, we will each pick a book or set of articles characterizing some aspect of the history of the field of communication studies and discuss its depiction of the field. Options will be presented after I learn a bit more about student interests.

Week 6 (Oct. 15): Theory – Prof. Darin Barney

Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (1977), “Intellectuals and Power.” In *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 205-217.

Ronald Beiner (1992), “Prologue: The Theorist as Storyteller” and “Epilogue.” In *What’s the Matter with Liberalism?*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-14 and 171-192.

Craig Calhoun (1995), “Rethinking Critical Theory,” in *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History and the Challenge of Difference*. Malden: Blackwell, pp. 1-42.

Ronald Beiner (1997), “Preface: The Theorist as Critic.” In *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. ix-xiv.

Week 7 (Oct. 22): The Problem of Defining Method - Prof. Carrie Rentschler

Sandra Harding (1987). "Introduction: Is there a Feminist Method?" In Sandra Harding (ed.). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1-14.

John Ngyuet Erni (2001), “Media Studies and Cultural Studies: A Symbiotic Convergence.” In *A Companion to Cultural Studies*, ed. Toby Miller. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 187-213

Paul Smith (2001), “Looking Backwards and Forwards at Cultural Studies.” In *A Companion to Cultural Studies*, ed. Toby Miller. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 331-340.

Richard Johnson, Deborah Chambers, Parvati Raghuram and Estella Tincknell (2004), *The Practice of Cultural Studies*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 9-84.

Week 8 (Oct. 29): Why Study Media and Communication Policy? – Prof. Marc Raboy

Marc Raboy (2002). “Communication and Globalization: A Challenge for Public Policy”. *Street Protests and Fantasy Parks: Globalization, Culture, and the State*, edited by D. Cameron and J. Stein. UBC Press, 109-140. (.pdf).

Week 9 (Nov 5): Urban Space and Social Difference – Prof. Jenny Burman

Blanchot, Maurice. “Everyday Speech”. *Yale French Studies* (1987)

Burman, Jenny. “Absence, ‘Removal’ and Everyday Life in the Diasporic City”. *Space & Culture* 9:3, 2006.

Walcott, Rinaldo. “Black men in frocks: Sexing race in a gay ghetto (Toronto)”. In *Claiming Space: Racialization in Canadian Cities*. Ed. Cheryl Teelucksingh. WLU Press, 2006.

Week 10 (Nov. 12): Topic TBA – Prof. Kevin Robins

Readings TBA

Week 11 (Nov. 19): Media and Cultural Memory -- Prof. Will Straw (note: Prof Straw has a conflict at this time so we will need to reschedule this meeting)

Will Straw, “Embedded Memories,” in *Residual Media*. Edited by Charles Acland, 3-15. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

--. “Exhausted Commodities,” <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=571&layout=html>

Week 12 (Nov. 26): Sound, Technology and Historiography – Prof. Jonathan Sterne

Michel Foucault (1991), “Questions of Method: An Interview,” in *The Foucault Effect*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 73-86.

Bruno Latour (1988, as “Jim Johnson”), “Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer.” *Social Problems* 35:3, pp. 298-310.

Jonathan Sterne (2003), “Hello!” in *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp 1-30.

_____. (2006), “The MP3 as Cultural Artifact,” *New Media and Society* 8:5, pp. 825-842.

Week 13: (Dec 3): Professionalization

Profs Carrie Rentschler, Jenny Burman, Jonathan Sterne