

MEJO 843.001 – Theory and Research in Media Processes and Production

Fall 2023

Instructor: Lee McGuigan, PhD

Assistant Professor

Hussman School of Journalism and Media

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Carroll Hall – Room 355

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Meeting Time: Tuesday 9:30am-12:15pm

Meeting Place: Carroll Hall – Room 143

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-4:00pm, and by appointment

Course Overview: This course examines media industries and cultural production, focusing on some of the factors and forces that structure the creation and distribution of media content. It starts from the presumption that before media content can have effects on individuals and society, it is itself an effect of dynamic social processes. Those processes are shaped by social institutions, modes of industrial organization, technologies and information infrastructures, and relationships of economic and cultural power. We will read theory and research from a range of fields and disciplines, including the political economy of media/communication, cultural studies, sociology, organizational theory, media law and policy, and science and technology studies. Both readings and topics will range across historical and contemporary material. Topics include: digital and creative labor, social media and influencers, platform governance, and data and algorithms.

Readings: All readings will be posted to Sakai, unless otherwise noted.

*Please complete the readings **before** class.*

Coursework: The evaluated coursework will consist of a term paper, a written book review, leadership of in-class discussions, and general participation in the class.

Assignment Weights:

Final term paper	50%
Seminar leadership	20%
Participation	20%
Book review	10%

Class Schedule:

PLEASE check Sakai throughout the semester, as the schedule may change.

Week 1

August 22

Hitting the ground picketing – Some current events and some overarching themes

Brooks Barnes, John Koblin, and Nicole Sperling, “[Actors Join Writers on Strike, Bringing Hollywood to a Standstill](#),” *New York Times*, July 13, 2023.

Brian Merchant, “[Hollywood is on Strike Because CEOs Fell for Silicon Valley’s Magical Thinking](#),” *Los Angeles Time*, July 21, 2023.

David Dayen, “[Barbenheimer Reveals the Drastic Choices of Hollywood Executives](#),” *The American Prospect*, July 28, 2023.

Julia Rock, “[The Magical Math Behind Disney’s Content Purge](#),” *The Lever*, July 25, 2023.

Sarah Whitten and Lillian Rizzo, “[Why Are Streaming Services Removing Some of Their Own Movies and Shows?](#)” *CNBC*, May 29, 2023.

Ko Bragg, “[The Writers’ Strike Over AI is Bigger Than Hollywood](#),” *The Markup*, July 29, 2023.

Andrew deWaard, “[Financialized Hollywood: Institutional Investment, Venture Capital, and Private Equity in the Film and Television Industry](#),” *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 59, no. 4 (2020): 54-84.

Nicole Cohen, “A Site of Struggle: Theorizing Freelance Media Work,” in [Writers’ Rights: Freelance Journalism in a Digital Age](#) (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), pp. 24-54.

OPTIONAL:

Listen to “The Changing Hollywood Landscape,” *Fresh Air*, NPR, July 20, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/19/1188650553/the-changing-hollywood-landscape>.

Amba Kak and Sarah Myers West, [AI Now 2023 Landscape: Executive Summary](#), AI Now Institute.

Week 2

August 29

Situating media and communication in society

James Carey, “[A Cultural Approach to Communication](#),” in *Communication as Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 11-28.

Stuart Hall et al., "[The Social Production of News](#)," in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 53-82.

Raymond Williams, [Television: Technology and Cultural Form](#), Routledge Classics edition (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-38.

Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: The New Press, 2010), pp. 1-28, 243-260.

Devon Powers, "[The Problem of Popular Culture](#)," *Communication Theory* 32, no. 4 (2022): 461-470.

Kylie Jarrett, "[The Relevance of 'Women's Work': Social Reproduction and Immaterial Labor in Digital Media](#)," *Television & New Media* 15, no. 1 (2014): 14-29.

Week 3

September 5 (No class – Well-being Day**)**

Week 4

September 12

Media industries and cultural production – Some critical frameworks and approaches

David Hesmondhalgh, [Chapters](#) 1 and 2, in *The Cultural Industries*, 4th edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019).

Bernard Miège, "[Theorizing the Cultural Industries: Persistent Specificities and Reconsiderations](#)," in *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, eds. Janet Wasko, Graham Murdock, and Helena Sousa (Blackwell Publishing, 2011), pp. 83-108.

Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic, "Critical Media Industries Studies: A Research Approach," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 2 (2009): 234-253.

Vincent Mosco, "[Overview of the Political Economy of Communication](#)," in *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2nd edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), pp. 1-20.

OPTIONAL:

David Hesmondhalgh, "[Bourdieu, the Media, and Cultural Production](#)," *Media, Culture, & Society* 28, no. 2 (2006): 211-231.

Eileen R. Meehan and Janet Wasko, "In Defense of a Political Economy of the Media," *Javnost - The Public* 20, no. 1 (2013): 39-53.

Week 5

September 19

Media industries and cultural production – Some critical frameworks and approaches (cont.)

David Hesmondhalgh, [Chapters 4](#) and 5 in *The Cultural Industries*, 4th edition. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019).

Leah A. Lievrouw, “Materiality and Media in Communication and Technology Studies: An Unfinished Project,” in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, eds. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 21-51.

Sarah Sharma, “Introduction: A Feminist Medium Is the Message,” in *Re-Understanding Media: Feminist Extensions of Marshall McLuhan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), pp. 1-18 (read pp. 1-10, skim the rest).

Blake Hallinan and Ted Striphas, “Recommended for You: The Netflix Prize and the Production of Algorithmic Culture,” *New Media & Society* 18, no. 1 (2014): 117-137.

OPTIONAL:

James Carey, “[Space, Time, and Communications](#),” in *Communication as Culture*, pp. 109-132.

Week 6

September 26

A contemporary study of news production

Caitlin Petre, [All the News That's Fit to Click: How Metrics are Transforming the Work of Journalists](#) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021). *

OPTIONAL:

Gaye Tuchman, “[Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity](#),” *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no. 4 (1972): 660-679. (a classic study of news production)

Week 7

October 3

Structures of media systems – Audience construction, personal data, and economic pressures

Marcel Rosa-Salas, “[Making the Mass White: How Racial Segregation Shaped Consumer Segmentation](#),” in *Race in the Marketplace*, eds. Guillaume D. Johnson, Kevin D. Thomas, Anthony Kwame Harrison, and Sonya A. Grier (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 21-38.

Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 15-68, 263-284.

Matthew Crain and Nicole Cohen, “[Social Media and Audience Commodification: Toward an Applied Theory](#),” in *The Routledge Companion to Advertising and Promotional Culture*, 2nd edition, eds. Emily West and Matthew McAllister (New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 115-125.

Sarah Myers West, “Data Capitalism: Redefining the Logics of Surveillance and Privacy,” *Business & Society* 58, no. 1 (2019): 20-41.

Week 8

October 10

Structures of media systems – Advertising, commercial surveillance, and public policy

Matthew Crain, [Profit Over Privacy: How Surveillance Advertising Conquered the Internet](#) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).*

Week 9

October 17

Platforms, politics, and cultural production

David B. Nieborg and Thomas Poell, “[The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity](#),” *New Media & Society* 20, no. 11 (2018): 4275-4292.

Robyn Caplan and danah boyd, “[Isomorphism Through Algorithms: Institutional Dependencies in the Case of Facebook](#),” *Big Data & Society*, (Jan-June 2018): 1-12.

Ramon Lobato, “[The Cultural Logic of Digital Intermediaries: YouTube Multichannel Networks](#),” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media* 22, no. 4 (2016): 348-360.

Fernando N. van der Vlist and Anne Helmond, “[How Partners Mediate Platform Power: Mapping Business and Data Partnerships in the Social Media Ecosystem](#),” *Big Data & Society* (Jan-June 2021): 1-16.

Francesca Tripodi, “[Ms. Categorized: Gender, Notability, and Inequality on Wikipedia](#),” *New Media & Society* 25, no. 7 (2023): 1687-1707.

Week 10

October 24

Social media and platform governance

Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).*

Week 11

October 31

Influencers, content creators, and self-branding

Alison Hearn, "['Meat, Mask, Burden': Probing the Contours of the Branded 'Self'](#)," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 2 (2008): 197-217.

Brook Erin Duffy, [\(*Not*\) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work](#) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. ix-xii, 1-11.*

Emily Hund, *The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media* (Princeton University Press, 2023), pp. 1-61.*

Sophie Bishop, "[Influencer Management Tools: Algorithmic Cultures, Brand Safety, and Bias](#)," *Social Media + Society* January-March (2021): 1-13.

Sophie Bishop, "[Anxiety, Panic and Self-Optimization: Inequalities and the YouTube Algorithm](#)," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media* 24, no. 1 (2018): 69-84.

Week 12

November 7

Media, feminism, and popular culture

Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).*

Week 13

November 14

Media, race, and surveillance

Simone Browne, [*Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*](#) (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). *

Week 14

November 21

Media systems and democracy – U.S. journalism and television

Victor Pickard, [*Democracy Without Journalism? Confronting the Misinformation Society*](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). * (selections TBA)

Reese Peck, *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). * (selections TBA)

Week 15

November 28

The internet as social and political struggle

Jessa Lingel, *The Gentrification of the Internet: How to Reclaim Our Digital Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).*

University and Class Policies

Attendance:

University Policy:

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

Class Policy:

If unavoidable circumstances prevent you from attending, please notify me as soon as possible. Please do not come to class if you feel sick or if you think you have come into contact with someone who has COVID-19.

HONOR CODE:

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Associate Dean Julie Dixon-Green, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Syllabus Changes

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

ARS

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

(source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

TITLE IX

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvscc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harassment and discrimination](#). In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies.

MASK USE

All enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community -- your classmates and me -- as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](#). At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For additional information, see <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/university-guidelines-for-facemasks/>.