Anthropology of Media

**Anthropology of Media – ANTH UA 123**

Fall 2011/MW 11:00-12:15 PM/TISCH Hall LC-9

Professor: Tejaswini Ganti  
Office Location: 25 Waverly Place, # 506  
Hours: Thursdays, 3-4:30 PM  
Phone: 998-2108  
Email: tganti@nyu.edu

T.A.: Lee Douglas, lee.douglas@nyu.edu  
Office – 25 Waverly Place, 714  
Hours: Mondays, 12:30-1:30

**OFFICE HOURS**

- Thursdays, 3-4:30 PM
- Mondays, 12:30-1:30

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines the social and political life of media and how it makes a difference in the daily lives of people as a practice – in production, reception, or circulation. It provides an overview of the increasing theoretical attention paid to the mass media by anthropologists, and focuses on concrete ethnographic examples. It examines cross-culturally how the mass media have become the primary means for the circulation of symbolic forms across time and space and crucial to the constitution of subjectivities, collectivities, and histories in the contemporary world. Topics include the role of media in constituting and contesting national identities, in forging alternative political visions, in transforming religious practice, and in creating subcultures. The types of media forms we will examine range from commercially driven movie-making to small-scale video production, from cell phones to Facebook, and from news reporting to advertising. We will read about media practices in diverse parts of the world, from Australia to Trinidad, from Egypt to India.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- To reduce our ethnocentrism about the mass media: that the media are produced differently according to specific social, cultural, political, economic, and historical conditions. Media technologies are not outside of culture, society, and history. Media forms are also interpreted according to local contexts. Social categories such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, etc. shape media reception.
- To develop a more complex, critical, and nuanced understanding of this monolithic category, “The Media” and be able to interrogate and recognize the assumptions about media production and consumption, which dominate contemporary discussions, found in the popular press and broadcast media.
- To learn about a growing subfield within contemporary anthropology which provides insights into the discipline as well as familiarizes you with the issues, questions, and debates that concern contemporary cultural anthropologists.
- To develop the skills and experience in writing clear, cogent, analytical academic papers and proposals.

**PRE-REQUISITES:** Human Society and Culture (ANTH-UA 1). If you have not taken this course, you need my permission to enroll in this course. Please inform me of other relevant coursework that makes you eligible to take this course.

**REQUIREMENTS**

- All assignments must be completed for a passing grade in the course.
- Deadlines: **EXTENSIONS WILL NOT BE GIVEN** [except for authorized medical reasons/emergencies] **LATE WORK WILL BE NOT BE ACCEPTED**, i.e., **YOU WILL RECEIVE A ZERO INSTEAD.**
• Attendance and doing the readings prior to class are mandatory. Your general demeanor in class – punctuality, level of alertness, paying attention, being respectful – and overall contribution – responding to questions, participating in discussion – significantly shape my perception and assessment of you as a student.
• I do not allow the use of laptops or smart phones in class.
• With the exception of the Current Media Event, all other assignments will have more details posted on Blackboard.

A. **Exams** – 50%
   a. **Midterm Exam** – 25%; **OCT. 14.** This is a take-home essay exam. The questions will be posted on Blackboard by Oct. 7 and you must upload your answers by 10 PM on Blackboard.
   b. **Final Exam** – 25%; **DEC. 19, 10-11:50 AM**

B. **Assignments** – 50%
   a. **The Everyday Life of Media at NYU [3-4 pages] – 5%: SEPT. 23 (by 5pm on Blackboard):** The task is to describe your particular media world at NYU – whether it’s your dorm, your social group, student organization, or job. The idea is to look at your particular surroundings anthropologically and assess the role of media within them. This paper will form the basis of another paper for the class – the project proposal.
   b. **Project Proposal – Studying the Social Life of Media at NYU [5-7pages] – 15%: NOV. 4 (by 5pm on Blackboard):** Using one of your classmate’s Everyday Life of Media paper [we will be redistributing them], you are to design an ethnographic project that examines some dimension of media usage or media practice at NYU. This will be written in a proposal format [I will have samples up on Blackboard] that should include a statement of research question, brief literature survey, methodology, and explanation of anthropological significance.
   c. **Media in Social Movements [10-12 pages] – 20%: DEC. 9 (by 10pm on Blackboard):** This paper requires you to research and analyze the role of media [broadcast, digital, social, small, mass] in a particular social movement. You are to pick from one of the following social movements:
      i. The “Arab Spring” – the pro-democracy uprisings that occurred in North Africa and the Middle-East (Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Qatar, Yemen, etc.) in Spring and Summer of 2011 [social media]
      ii. The anti-corruption crusade and hunger strikes by Anna Hazare that has galvanized a huge cross-section of the populace in India in Spring and Summer of 2011 [broadcast media, social media]
      iii. The “Green Movement” in Iran protesting the outcome of the 2009 presidential election [social media]
      iv. The People Power II Revolution (EDSA Revolution) in the Philippines in 2001 [cell phones-texting]
      v. The Anti-Globalization protests against the WTO conference in Seattle in 1999 [Internet]
      vi. The Zapatista Movement in Mexico in 1994 [Internet, video]
      vii. The 1979 Iranian Revolution that deposed the Shah [audiocassettes]
If you would like to write about something different than the above examples, you must clear it with me first. You will hand in some components of this paper prior to the due date so that I can guide you and gauge your progress. Failure to submit the
following components on time will affect your final grade. The following components are due in class on the following dates:

- Choice of topic: Oct. 19
- Preliminary bibliography, minimum of 5 scholarly sources: Nov. 14
- Draft thesis paragraph: Nov. 28

**d. Current Media Event [1-2 pages] – 10%: variable due dates**

- Each student is required to hand in or post on the course’s Blackboard Site an example – it can be a newspaper article, cartoon, photograph, magazine article, TV broadcast, radio broadcast, blog-post, YouTube clip -- of a news-item or feature that pertains to the issues being raised by the reading for a particular week.
- Students will sign up beforehand for a particular week. You only have to do this once in the semester.
- Students must supply a 1-2 page commentary [typed] about the example’s relevance to the week’s theme. This will be handed into me in class.
- Not only is it important to find an event/phenomenon that relates to the readings for that day, it is important that you explain why you think what you chose is relevant to the topic at hand – which means it is important to connect it to the readings in a substantive manner – to demonstrate that you understand the gist of what is being argued by the particular author. What you bring in doesn't have to illustrate the same points, but should be in conversation with those points.
- This assignment is basically a more creative sort of reading response in that I am asking you to respond to the readings by finding and discussing an example of contemporary media that speaks to the issues raised by the reading. Therefore in your analysis, you really need to engage with a reading or readings for that day, communicating that you understand the author's main argument or arguments. Since you have to post your clip, link, etc. the written component does not require a summary or description of the example, but really needs to be an analysis of your example with respect to the readings. Therefore, you may want to begin your analysis by summarizing the author's main arguments and then proceed to discuss how your example relates -- your example doesn't always have to reinforce the author's arguments, it can challenge them even, but you need to communicate how it does in either case.

**Special Accommodations**

If you have a disability that may require classroom, test-taking, or other reasonable modifications, please see me as soon as possible and be sure to register with the Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980).

**RECAP OF DUE DATES**

- Sept. 23: Everyday Life of Media Paper due by 5pm on Blackboard
- Oct. 14: Take-home Midterm Exam due by 10pm on Blackboard
- Oct. 19: Topic choice for Media & Social Movements Paper due in class
- Nov. 4: Project Proposal Due by 5pm on Blackboard
- Nov. 14: Preliminary Bibliography for Media/Social Movements Paper due in class
- Nov. 28: Draft Thesis Paragraph for Media/Social Movements Paper due in class
- Dec. 9: Media & Social Movements Paper due by 10pm on Blackboard
**COURSE MATERIALS**

**Required Books** [available at the campus bookstore] as well as on Reserve at Bobst Library

Abu, Lughod, Faye Ginsburg & Brian Larkin, Eds.

Boyer, Dominic

Jhuhasz, Alexandra
2011  *Learning from YouTube*. MIT Press. [This is an open access video-book; it can be accessed at the following URL http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/]

Miller, Daniel
2011  *Tales from Facebook*. Polity Press.

- There will also be a series of readings available for you to read/download/print from the course’s Blackboard site, these will be marked with a B on the syllabus

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

1. **Theoretical Foundations**

9/7 (Wed)  **Introduction**
Suggested Reading:
Ginsburg, Faye, Lila Abu-Lughod, & Brian Larkin

**Week 2: Intellectual Antecedents**

9/12 (Mon)  **Nationalism**
Readings:
Anderson, Benedict

9/14 (Wed)  **Transnationalism & Global Cultural Flows**
Readings:
Appadurai, Arjun

**Week 3: Toward an Anthropology of Media**

9/19 (Mon)  **NO CLASS**

9/21 (Wed)
Readings:
Boyer, Dominic
2007  *Understanding Media: A Popular Philosophy*. [ALL]

McLuhan, Marshall
II: Audiences, Consumption, And Identity Formation

Week 4: The Experience and Practice of Cinema
9/26 (Mon)  Active Audiences
Readings [B]:
Michaels, Eric

Hahn, Elizabeth

Kulick, Don and Margaret Wilson

9/28 (Wed)  The Social and Material Life of Cinema
Readings:
Armbrust, Walter
1998 “When the lights go down in Cairo: Cinema as secular ritual.” *Visual Anthropology* 10(2-4): 413-442. [B]


Week 5: Television and the Cultural Politics of Nation-States
10/3 (Mon)  Gender and Subjectivity
Readings:
Abu-Lughod, Lila. “Egyptian Melodrama—Technology of the Modern Subject?” *Media Worlds* ch. 5

Mankekar, Purnima “Epic Contests: Television and Religious Identity in India.” *Media Worlds* ch. 6

10/5 (Wed)  The Nation and Temporality
Readings:

Wilk, Richard R. “Television, Time, and the National Imaginary in Belize.” *Media Worlds* ch. 8

Week 6: Reframing Reception
10/10 (Mon)  COLUMBUS DAY HOLIDAY

10/12 (Wed)  Media as Material Objects
Readings:
Peterson, Mark Allen

Spitulnik, Debra. “Mobile Machines and Fluid Audiences: Rethinking Reception through Zambian Radio Culture.” *Media Worlds* ch. 17

III: The Cultural Work Of Mass Media Production

Week 7: Producing “Bollywood”
10/17 (Mon)  Guest Lecture: Anjum Rajabali, screenwriter and head of the Screenwriting Department, Whistling Woods International Institute for Film, Television, Animation and Media Arts, Mumbai, India

Readings:

10/19 (Wed)
Readings [B]:
Ganti, Tejaswini.
2012 “A Day in the Life of a Hindi Film Set”; “The Structure, Organization, and Social Relations of the Hindi Film Industry”; “Sentiments of Disdain and Practices of Distinction: The Work Culture of the Hindi Film Industry” In Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry. [In-press manuscript] chs. 4-6

Week 8: The Social Sites of Film and TV Production
10/24 (Mon)  The Exigencies of Commercial Filmmaking
Readings [B]:
Ganti, Tejaswini
2012 “Risky Business: Managing Uncertainty in the Hindi Film Industry.” In Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry. [In-press manuscript] ch. 7

Martin, Sylvia J.

10/26 (Wed)  The Constraints of Public Television Production
Readings:

Week 9: Producing Reality – Journalism and Advertising
10/31 (Mon)  News as Social Practice
Readings [B]:
Gursel, Zeynep Devrim

Bishara, Amahl

11/2 (Wed)  The Local and the Global in Advertising
Readings:
Moeran, Brian

IV. Small Media: Materiality, Circulation, Everyday Life & Social Transformations

Week 10: Indigenous Media and Cultural Activism
11/7 (Mon)
Readings:
Ginsburg, Faye D. “Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media.” Media Worlds ch. 1

11/9 (Wed)
Readings:
Ginsburg, Faye D.

Week 11: The Social and Material Lives of Cell Phones
11/14 (Mon)
Readings [B]:
Corbett, Sara
Goggin, Gerard
Campbell, Heidi
Uy-Tioco, Cecilia

11/16 (Wed) AAA Meetings – NO CLASS

Week 12: Circulating Subjects
11/21 (Mon) Photography and Agency
Guest Lecture: Lee Douglas
Readings [B]:
Strassler, Karen

11/23 (Wed) Digital Selves
Readings:
Miller, *Tales from Facebook*, preface, chs. 1-4.

**Week 13: Media as Social Infrastructure – The Case of Facebook**
11/28 (Mon)
Readings:
Miller, *Tales from Facebook*, chs. 5-9

11/30 (Wed)
Readings:
Miller, *Tales from Facebook*, chs. 10-13

**Week 14: Learning from New Media**
12/5 (Mon)  The Anthropology of Facebook
Readings:
Miller, *Tales from Facebook*, Part II – All [introduction, A-C, conclusion]

12/7 (Wed)  The Possibilities & Constraints of YouTube
Readings:
Juhasz, *Learning from YouTube*:
• “How to use this video-book”
• Pre-Tour “YouTube Is …” [videos 1-15]
• YouTour “Bad Video/Corporate Media” [videos 2, 4, 5, 6, 7]

**Week 15: YouTube (Cont.)**
12/12 (Mon)
Readings:

12/14 (Wed)  Wrap-up/Conclusions

12/19  *FINAL EXAM*