Study Questions

Use these questions as a guide both to your initial reading of course materials and as study aids for the exams.

1. Life in the Matrix May 24 - June 2
   1.1. Global Culture - May 26
   1.2. The Puzzle of Modernization - May 27, 28

What happens when people go from living close to the land, an agricultural life, to a modern one dependent on modern technologies and giant, abstract modern institutions? And what role do communication media play in that process? What is meant by "stages of development" in social theory? What are some common way of categorizing the stages, and how are they relevant to understanding media? What are some of the differences between oral and print societies? What is mobile privatization? What is its importance for media?

1.3. Media and the Modern World - May 28, 29

Why is the textbook titled 'MediaMaking'? What are the differences between interpersonal media, mass media, and network media? How can media be distinguished according to channel modalities, economic modalities, institutions, technological manifestations, content, and information technologies? What are institutions, cultural forms, and mediation? What are the differences between a transmission and a cultural model of communication? How can media power be understood as effects? as determination and control? What are the differences between the conflict and consensus models of society?

What are the differences between Braudel's event, conjuncture, eras, and epochs? What are the different theories of mass society? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What happens in the transition from oral to print to electronic culture? What is technological determinism and what are the problems with it? What are modernization, modernism, modernity, and postmodernism?

What distinguishes manuscript, oral, and print cultures? What were the limitations of preprint written culture? How did the rise of print shape science? the Protestant Reformation? the formation of dissident political movements?

1.4. Why is TV one way? The Power of Institutions in Making Media, May 29 - June 2

What did Bertolt Brecht hope for when radio was a new technology? How was the formation of radio broadcasting early in the twentieth century like the formation of the internet today? What were the contributions of Marconi, and De Forest to radio? What were the first uses of radio technology? What role did amateurs play in radio's history? the military? How and why did
government regulation arise in radio? Why are radio and television systems one-way? What does Raymond Williams offer to help explain why?

2. News, Politics, And The Public June 3 - June 7

2.1. Part 1: the Sociology of News June 3- June 5

Why is news important to modern democracies? What factors constrain news gathering and dissemination? How do reporters decide what is news? How does economics influence their decisions? Why is it hard to define newsworthiness? What are news beats? How do reporters routinize the unexpected? What is the news net? Why do some worry about reporters’ tendency to "go native"? Where does the initiative for most news stories come from? Why do news reports in different media so frequently resemble each other? Why does journalist objectivity fit the standards of an ideology? How do media influence political behavior? What are opinion leaders? Early-, campaign-, and late-deciders? What is agenda-setting? priming? third person effects? the spiral of silence?

2.2. Part 2: Do Media Serve Democracy? June 5 - June 7

What are some different definitions of the public? Why do some say the public is in decline? What are the different ways of representing the public? What is civic or public journalism? What roles do media and campaign advertising actually play in elections today?

What is the theory of objective journalism? What is its history? What news practices and techniques is it associated with? How do these techniques influence the content of news? What are some of the limits to and criticisms of news objectivity? What is the difference between criticizing the news for bias and analyzing it as socially constructed? Why does Jay Rosen think contemporary news practices produce "a politics that is dumber than spam"?

3. People And Organizations June 8-9

What are the different levels of analysis for understanding people and organizations in media? How do they relate to one another? What is the resource dependence perspective? What are roles, reference groups, and routines and how do they matter in the media? How do formulas, trackrecords, predictability, efficiency, and "borrowing" work in the media? What are the forms of censorship? What other ways does government relate to media? Other institutions to media institutions?

What is meant by the "television-industrial-complex?" What does it have to do with the relation of program producers to their audience? What is the difference between direct and structural forms of advertising influence on television content? How do the structures and characteristics of television contribute to the industrialization of culture? How are program ideas and programs created? What does Todd Gitlin mean by "the problem of knowing"?
4. Media Economics June 10-13

What are monopoly, oligopoly, and limited competition in media structure? What are the differences between freedom of consumer choice and consumer control? What are the differences between direct and indirect payments for media products? What is vertical integration? "Synergy?" What are use value, exchange value, commodities, the labor theory of value, surplus value, and economies of scale? What are the different sources of media support? What forms of competition are important to media? What are the roles of break even points, royalties, hit-to-release ratios, and secondary markets? How do media try to reduce risk?

What role does marketing and advertising play in a modern industrial consumer economy? Why are packaging and trademarks important in the history of advertising? Why did some industrialists advocate shorter hours and higher wages for workers at the turn of the century? Why is their strategy important to understanding consumerism, advertising, and media?

5. Midterm Exam June 14


6.1. Basic Concepts June 15-16

What is the role of signs in culture and society? What are some problems with representational and conceptual theories of meaning? What is semiotics? What is its theory of meaning? On what principles is semiotics based? What is the principle of difference? of the arbitrariness of codes? What is the meaning of the following terms, and how are they related: sign, signifier, signified, iconic sign, arbitrary sign, indexical sign? metaphor, metonymy, paradigm, syntagm, denotation, connotation, myths, codes, articulation? How does one conduct a semiotic analysis? What role can semiotic codes play in social life? How does semiotic competence matter for media and children?

What questions does an interpreter ask of a text? Why is the notion of the author and the author's intention problematic? What are the following techniques of interpretation: theme and symbol analysis, content analysis, genre theory, and narrative analysis? What is the meaning of the following terms: discourse, narrator, narratee? What is the commutation test? What are binary oppositions? What is polysemy? aporias? What are the techniques for analyzing visual texts?

6.2. Semiotics, Society, and Ideology June 17-18

What is realism? the willing suspension of disbelief? What are realist, phenomenal, and social constructionist theories of ideology, and what are their strengths and weaknesses? What is interpellation? How does it relate to ideology? What are the varieties and sources of identity in the modern world? How do these matter to understanding the media? What are the different ways of constructing the audience as a market? What are their social implications? What is the difference between essentialist and nonessentialist ways of understanding identities? What is subjectivity?
6.3. The Politics of the Sign - Semiotic Guerilla Warfare June 18-21

What are two different traditions in representing war? What is semiotic guerrilla warfare? detournement?

7. Understanding Audiences: Consuming the Media June 22-24

What factors make the audience "mysterious" to media producers and social scientists? What is the long term historical context of media consumption? What is meant by the term "mass" in "mass media?" What does it connote about the audience? What are some limitations to the term? How does the industry tend to view the audience? What are the key features of the audience ratings system for television? What aspects of the system have led the audience ratings to become the major measure of success of television programming? What are the major criticisms of the ratings system? What current technologies are troubling the traditional relations of media to the audience?

Why is it helpful to say that meanings resides in audiences, not in texts? What is the encoding/decoding model? What are preferred, oppositional, and negotiated meanings? What is functionalism? What are the different kinds of functions of media? What are the assumptions of functionalist approaches to the audience? What are some problems with functionalist accounts? How are they circular and conservative? What are the three main aspects of the social psychology of consumption of media? How do the differences between public, private, and transitional spaces matter to the sociology of consumption? What is the role of the home in the sociology of consumption? How do anonymous, institutional, and family relations influence the sociology of media consumption? What are fans, fashions, and subcultures, and how do they matter to media consumption?

Why is Oscar Gandy concerned about audience surveillance? What role does information gathering play in modern industry? What is the significance of the metaphor of the panopticon?


8.1. What is a Good Media? June 25 -28

What is the enlightenment heritage? What are classical liberal ideas of press freedom? Why have they eroded in the twentieth century? What are social responsibility theories? What are the Marxist critiques of the media? What are cultural arguments about ideologies?

8.2. Media Policy for the Future, June 28

What are some problems with the criticism of "media monopolies"? How has media changed in the "neo-network" era? How are media different and how are they the same from the past? How has intellectual property replaced fixed networks as a means for dominating the media?
8.3. The Intellectual Property Wars, June 28-29

Why is there a debate over intellectual property these days, and what are the key issues for both sides of the debate?

8.4. The Global Politics of Media Structure and Control June 29 - July 1

What conditions underlie international communication? What is media imperialism? What are theories of hegemony and globalization? How are modern and postmodern theories of hegemony different? What is "semiological guerrilla warfare?" What does it have to do with the nature of contemporary media?

9. Final Exam July 2