Media, Technology and Everyday Life

**MODULE CODE:** ARMC015S6 ACD

**CREDITS/LEVEL:** 30 CATS/Level 6

**ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS:** Passed one of: Cultural Identity and the Media; or Journalism and Politics; or Media and Society

**CLASS TIME:** 6.30pm – 8.30pm

**CLASS DATES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First meeting</strong></td>
<td>28/09/2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Last meeting</strong></td>
<td>07/12/2010</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**VENUE:** Room K318, Westminster Kingsway College, The King’s Cross Centre, 211 Grays Inn Road, London, WC1X 8RA
http://www.westking.ac.uk/home/find-us/

**MODULE TAUGHT BY**

**Dr Scott Rodgers**

Scott is Lecturer in Media Theory within the Department of Media and Cultural Studies at Birkbeck. His own research is located at the intersection of media studies and urban studies, but he is interested more broadly in journalism, medium theory, new media, media history, urban politics and cultural geography. Scott is currently working on a book that explores the evolving relationship of the newspaper and the city.

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**AIMS**

Competing theories of media and technology abound, yet at some level, most share the idea that our engagement with and experience of media is utterly ‘everyday’. In other words, that the social, political and cultural importance of ‘the media’ ultimately comes down to how we encounter its specific forms as part of our everyday routines. This module places an emphasis on those approaches which have paid special attention to media and technology in terms of everyday life. This implies a fairly specific point of view on media: as cultural artefacts and technologies experienced, used and created through everyday practices; and, at the same time, as interwoven into various material environments. In introducing students to this way of thinking about media, the module connects not only to core media studies debates, but also an interdisciplinary range of
approaches including cultural studies, human geography, sociology, science and technology studies, social anthropology and urban studies.

A core feature of the module is student-led observations of both of their own exposure to media as well as the mediated environments through which they pass in their everyday lives. This ‘media ethnography’ will not only be the basis of the 1st assignment for the module, but also will act as a repository of experience which will be drawn in class discussions during the first block, focused on different aspects of media, technology and the everyday. In the second block, attention is then turned towards the intersections of media and specifically urban life, focusing on the distinctive types of media experience entailed by daily life in a city such as London. The module concludes by asking students to reflect on the sort of media politics that understanding media in terms of everyday life and the city might push to the foreground.

OUTCOMES
On successful completion of this module a student will be expected to be able to:

• Demonstrate an understanding of and engagement with theoretical approaches to media, technology and everyday life
• Articulate theories at an abstract level, while also connecting such theories with practical, relevant and creative applications and case examples
• Effectively research, evaluate and employ academic literature in coursework and class discussions
• Write and communicate to a scholarly standard, especially in coursework essays
• Critically observe and reflect upon the role of media and technology in her/his everyday experience, and be able to articulate such observations and reflections verbally in class, as well as in written and visual form

TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS
This module is based around a series of seminars, consisting of short lectures and class exercises, augmented by frequent student use of online resources and communication tools on Blackboard. Students can expect class exercises to vary from meeting to meeting (e.g. working in pairs and groups, screenings, discussions and set activities). Early in the module there will be a Saturday media tour of West End London (with a do-it-yourself version available for those who cannot attend the tour). In addition, throughout the duration of the module students will be expected to undertake independent reading and observation outside of class meetings. Independent reading will form a crucial aspect of preparing for focused discussions in class and online, as well as in developing an awareness of the various academic literature students will be expected to draw upon in all coursework. The module also involves students keeping an ongoing record of observations (writing a dairy, taking photos/video, recoding audio) on media and technology in their own daily lives, as well as across various urban milieux, which will be regularly drawn upon in class/online discussions, and help form the foundation of the assessed media ethnography.

Individual tutorials will also be offered, upon request, to provide students with an opportunity to resolve any difficulties, and discuss solutions to problems, particularly around coursework. In addition, time in some class meetings will be dedicated to developing study skills such as finding academic materials, using online resources effectively, writing essays, and media observation and analysis.
COURSEWORK AND ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessed Component</th>
<th>Basic Requirements</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media ethnography</td>
<td>Research diary of daily media experience (optionally combining written, photo, video and audio); along with theoretically-informed 1500 words reflection</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23rd November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>1250 words</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1st February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>2500 words</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22nd March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading summary</td>
<td>Verbal commentary (approximately 5 minutes) on one assigned reading during a class seminar discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class/online participation</td>
<td>Participation in class discussions and activities, as well as set online discussions on Blackboard</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
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All assignments must be submitted by the above deadlines: (1) online through this module’s Blackboard web site (click ‘Submit Assignment’ on the menu); and (2) in hardcopy with a coversheet to the module tutor.

Note that to qualify for module credit, you must submit a coursework portfolio to Birkbeck at the end of the module, containing your marked assignments and the tutor’s comments.

MODULE EVALUATION
At the end of the module, students will be asked to complete an evaluation form, which gives an opportunity to feedback on all aspects of their learning experience.

MODULE CONTENT

Session 1: 28th September 2010 – Module overview
This class is an introduction to the aims, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, assessment and content of this module. It is also an opportunity for students to meet one another and discuss their perception of different media studies approaches, while responding to two key provocations introduced in the recommended class readings: (1) that media analysis needs to go beyond interpreting the meanings of media texts; and (2) that in a world where everything seems to be mediated, the idea of a ‘mediated centre’ must be questioned.
Required reading:

Further reading:

Session 2: ***Saturday, 9th October 2010, 11am-1pm*** – Media tour: West End London
As this module explores media in terms of everyday as well as urban life, it stands to reason that we might begin by leaving the classroom and taking a look at Birkbeck’s immediate local setting, which is after all the highly interesting West End of London. On this special Saturday tour we will (rain or shine...) examine the multiple ways media technologies, texts, practices and organisations surround us in our everyday urban environment of London, a major global city. NOTE: Although the actual tour will likely offer the best insights into the above issues, for those that are unable to attend there will be a DIY version online, which students can view – and even potentially do a self-led tour at a more convenient time.

Required reading (read at least two of the below):

Session 3: 12th October 2010 – Doing media ethnographies
The first assignment of this module asks you to conduct a ‘media ethnography’. This implies that you will keep a research diary of your daily media experience, which might include any combination of written, photo, video and audio entries, and then offer some reflections on the diary with a theoretically-informed 1500 words reflection essay. You will also be asked to bring examples from your diary for discussion in sessions 4-8. In this class we discuss the possible meanings of ‘ethnography’ in the content of this assignment, and the resulting practical considerations to keep in mind when doing your own media ethnography during this module.

Required reading (read at least two of the below):
Block 1: MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY AND THE EVERYDAY

Session 4: 19th October 2010 – Routines, practices, mobilities
One important theme in approaching media in terms of everyday life is considering how we encounter media as part of our daily routines, for example, in the home, the workplace, on our transport journey, or walking along the street. Building on students initial diary observations, in this class we will consider how we might understand the nature of everyday media routines by focusing on social practices.

Required reading:

Further reading:

Session 5: 26th October 2010 – Mediums, artefacts, technogenesis
Those who have researched media in everyday life have also tended to pay a great deal of attention to media as technologies or artefacts (rather than, for example, as texts or institutions). But what are technologies? And what are media technologies specifically? In this class, we consider different ways of understanding media as technologies enrolled in everyday life, and also introduce some more methodologically-inclined research approaches, such as actor-network theory, which have often involved detailed ethnographies of the use and creation of technologies.

Required reading:

Further reading:
Session 6: 2nd November 2010 – Mediations, interactions, communication

One unique quality we usually associate with media technologies is their role in ‘mediating’ everyday communication and social interaction. We know this perhaps most notably in how major media (e.g. television, newspapers) ritually provide us with a social world we share and can talk about. But we might say that media also help constitute communication and interaction more subtly and on smaller scales, for example between family members in the lounge, colleagues in the workplace, and social networks using web-based media like facebook or twitter. In this class we explore how theories of communicative interaction might connect with studying media.

Required reading:

Further reading:

Session 7: 9th November 2010 – Emotions, affects, disembodiment

Many feminist and cultural studies thinkers have argued that one foundational way in which media have effects is on a more intangible, almost emotional, plane; that, essentially, our connection with media is on some level ‘pre-cognitive’. In others words – and quite distinct from traditional approaches that measure media effects – by the time we’ve even thought or reasoned about media, the moment has already passed and had certain effects (or more correctly, ‘affects’) on us. Nevertheless, in this class we will draw on our diaries and attempt to reflect on how our experience of media might be understood in such terms as emotion, mood, feel, sensation and bodily movement. We will also consider debates around the possible political use of media affects, to mobilise and even manipulate others (often without them knowing it).

Required reading:
Further reading:

Session 8: 16th November 2010 – Geographies, topologies, environments
Questions about geography are an important feature of all the preceding approaches to media in everyday life (i.e. focused on media practices, technologies, communication and affects). However, questions about mediated spatiality (for example: how we encounter media in or as we move through certain environments; how media connect us to far-away places; or how the media industries appear to differ from context-to-context) have usually been left implicit in media studies. In this class we will focus on researchers who have argued that we need to be more explicit about the geographies of media, engaging with such geographical concepts as space, place, scale and topology.

**Required reading:**

Further reading:

Session 9: 23rd November 2010 – Producers, creators, elites
Studies of media in everyday life have been overwhelmingly focused upon ‘ordinary’ users of media – the activities of so-called media audiences. However, all of that which has been discussed in previous classes also applies to various forms of media production. Media workers and organisations have everyday lives too, with related routines, emotions, forms of talk, and spatial settings. Moreover, those working in what we usually call ‘the media’ tend to think (a great deal) about how their audiences consume their media product in terms of the everyday. In this class, we will consider the nature of everyday media production, first using the example of newspaper journalism, but also exploring possible similarities and differences we might find in other media production settings.

***NOTE: this class session will be held in The Newsroom at 43 Gordon Square***

**Required reading:**
Further reading:

Block 2: THE MEDIATED CITY

Session 10: 30th November 2010 – Histories and futures of the newspaper-city nexus
Beginning this class, we turn our attention to the urban setting as a lens for understanding media, technology and everyday life. Our first point of departure is the newspaper, which has, at least historically, been understood to be in a sort of nexus with the city, both having co-evolved and grown in importance during the industrial revolution. Leading from urban sociologist Robert Park’s classic essay on the newspaper, this class will consider what the histories and potential futures of the newspaper-city nexus might tell us about the notion of a ‘mediated city’ more generally.

Required reading (read Park (1925) and choose one other):

Further reading:

Session 11: 7th December 2010 – The places of cinema-going
Much like the newspaper, film is a medium often seen to be inherently related to the city. However, most of the attention film theorists have directed towards the city has been around how urban life or spaces get represented in various film texts. In this class, we will take a different starting point, focusing on cinema-going as a practice taking place at the material – and quite often urban – site of the cinema. We will also situate cinema-going in relation to other modes of watching film (e.g. DVDs, online).
Required reading:

Further reading:

--- HOLIDAY BREAK ---

**Session 12: 11th January 2011 – Television, home and suburbia**

We are likely all familiar with theories television-watching as a highly domesticated practice situated in the home (although televisions are hardly confined to homes, as we’ll explore in a later class). Some authors have gone a little further with this idea, arguing that television has co-evolved with suburbia – that is, the growth of suburban areas around cities, and the related proliferation of what we might call a suburban mentality. Thus, in political terms, they argue that television brought about a suburbanised (or more privatised) public sphere. In this class we will discuss this theory, critically considering how accurately it reflects urban life as we know it in London.

**Required reading** (read at least two of the below):

**Further reading:**

**Session 13: 18th January 2011 – Radio mobilities and urban time-space**

Radio, like television today, was once a very important medium in many people’s homes. Its central place in the home, however, was eventually displaced as the availability and affordability of television expanded after World War Two. Yet radio has hardly withered away; rather its qualities have allowed it to transform, and fit into those times of daily urban life not taken up by other media, such as over breakfast and while commuting by car. This class
considers the ways in which the variety of urban life has often allowed media forms like radio to evolve and find new niches.

**Required reading:**

**Session 14: 25th January 2011 – Personal sound on the move**
Many of us are regular users of personal sound devices, and all of us will have at least noticed how prolific their users are: on the tube, the bus or the street. Starting from the birth of the personal sound device with the Sony Walkman (a portable cassette player), we will consider the ways in which such devices have arguably flourished most as a tool for ‘coping’ with and negotiating daily urban life. And, in anticipation of Session 15, we will also discuss how recent developments have led to a convergence of the personal sound device with other media (e.g. phone-based music players, web-based music purchases, podcasts, etc).

**Required reading:**

**Session 15: 1st February 2011 – Mobile devices and mapping urban life**
Seemingly the ‘new’ form of media generating the most excitement in relation to cities such as London are portable devices that can be wirelessly connected to the Internet (e.g. smart phones, tablet computers, netbooks). The way in which these devices combine portability and connectivity also means that geographic location can play a role in the content that might be accessed or created by their users. In this class we consider some of the emerging possibilities of wirelessly-connected mobile devices for living in the city.

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**

**Session 16: 8th February 2011 – Media work, urban regions, city lifestyles**
Just as cities represent intensities of media-in-use, so too are cities places where media creators, professionals, organisations and firms all come together. But why is this the case? In principle, our web-connected world ought to allow us to work from almost anywhere. But many
who have researched the cultural industries have argued that urban areas, even specific urban
neighbourhoods, embody special characteristics which make them seedbeds for creativity and
collaboration.

**Required reading:**
Pratt, A. C. (2002) 'Hot jobs in cool places: The material cultures of new media product
spaces; the case of the South of the Market, San Francisco' *Information, Communication
and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 27-50.
industries*, London: Sage – Chapter 1

**Further reading:**

**Session 17: 15th February 2011 – Graffiti as urban media arts**
Although graffiti was once (and sometimes still is) derided as vandalism, even as criminally-connected, today it is just as often celebrated as a distinctive and valuable form of underground urban media arts. In this class we consider the transformation of graffiti from its beginnings in 1970s New York City to the wider acceptance it has received more recently in certain quarters, which some would argue has been all about its normalisation and even decline as an urban art form.

**Required reading:**
Austin, J. (2001) *Taking the train: how graffiti art became an urban crisis in New York City*,
New York: Columbia University Press – Chapter 2
No. 1, pp. 82-98.

**Further reading:**

**Session 18: 22nd February 2011 – Urban screen environments**
In many cities, London included, there has been a proliferation of various sorts of screen
surfaces. This includes the more mundane distribution of televisions in places like pubs, cafes,
airport gates, and doctor’s waiting areas, as well as the increasingly sophisticated screen
surfaces being built into buildings and other structures. In this class we consider what is new
about urban screens, compared for instance with similar forms of display in cities past (such as
billboards, banners and posters), and what possibilities and issues urban screens pose for public
life in cities.

**Required reading:**
University Press – Introduction

**Further reading:**
New York: Columbia University Press – Chapter 4
Session 19: 1st March 2011 – The city as an advertising machine

The visual canvas of cities is not only – or even mainly – taken up by screens however; being in the city entails regular exposure to a whole plethora of advertising. Advertising may creep into virtually every form of media imaginable, from magazines to Facebook, but the growth of advertising in outdoor and public spaces has some distinct qualities. These are ads that rely on our movement through the city, and which are more difficult to ignore completely (though it’s possible). Moreover, new technologies imply we are not very far away from advertising that recognises you (or your media device) when proximate – just as portrayed in the film Minority Report.

Required reading:

Further reading:
Iveson, K. (2010 forthcoming) 'Branded cities: outdoor advertising, urban governance, and the outdoor media landscape' Antipode

Session 20: 8th March 2011 – Software and the automation of urban life

Many of the media forms and practices discussed in the preceding classes are visible in one way or another to the average person living in the city. But what about media we don’t see? Some authors have observed that beyond its surface features, urban life is becoming increasingly regulated and controlled by pervasive and ‘intelligent’ forms of automated software control and surveillance. We will discuss the implications of some of the more subtle media effects generated by these rising techniques and technologies.

Required reading:

Further reading:

**Block 3: POLITICAL REFLECTIONS**

**Session 21: 15th March 2011 – Everyday media politics: or, when media environments get polluted**

In this, the first of two class reflecting on ‘politics’, we consider more explicitly what sort of political issues or concerns arise out of a focus on media in terms of everyday life. As we have learned, focusing on media in everyday life means thinking about how we exist in a kind of ‘media environment’; it follows, as some authors have argued, that we might then need to pay critical attention to how our daily media environment gets ‘polluted’.

**Required reading:**

**Session 22: 22nd March 2011 – Urbanised media politics: or, when intensities of media matter**

We end by reflecting on the how media and politics looks when we start to think about how media intersects with urban life in particular. We will discuss whether living in a city such as London means we have a certain sort of media experience, and what this means for how we understand the connections of media, politics and public life more generally.

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**
- Rodgers, S., Barnett, C. and Cochrane, A. (draft paper) 'Communicative practices and the city: the mediated phenomenologies of urban life'

**RECOMMENDED READING AND RESOURCES**

It is recommended that in addition to accessing the above readings, students purchase the following books:


Students are expected to conduct their own additional research of readings and resources beyond those listed above under module content – in particular in preparation for the module assignments. This module’s Blackboard site contains plenty of additional links to research and learning resources that will be helpful in this regard.