The Mediated City

MODULE CODE: ARMC173S6
CREDITS/LEVEL: 30 CATS/Level 6
ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS: Students taking this module will have normally passed an academic media-related module at Level 5
CLASS TIME: Wednesdays, 6-9pm
CLASS DATES: 9 January – 20 March 2013
VENUE: Room STB 9, Stewart House, 32 Russell Square, WC1B 5DN
Map: http://goo.gl/maps/4ghkE
SATURDAY MEDIA TOUR: 12 January 2013, 10am-1pm (details below)

MODULE TAUGHT BY

Dr Scott Rodgers
Scott is Lecturer in Media Theory in the Department of Media and Cultural Studies at Birkbeck. His research is located at the intersection of media studies and urban studies, and his broader interests include journalism, medium theory, new media, media history, creative industries, urban sociology, cultural geography, public culture and ethnographic methodologies. Scott is currently writing Media and Urban Public Life, a book that explores the evolving relationship of the newspaper and the city. He is also in the early stages of two new projects, one focused on emerging technologies of hyperlocal and city-focused journalism, and the other on how digital and networked media are potentially reshaping the workings of housing and real estate markets.

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AIMS
This module explores media through the lenses of urban spaces and city living. Beginning with a media tour of London’s West End, you are encouraged to examine some perhaps more unconventional sense of ‘media’, such as: television as a suburban medium; personal sound devices as urban coping tools; the city as an advertising machine; the architectural aesthetics of large screens; graffiti as alternative street media; cinema-going as intrinsically place-based; and software as a subterranean urban text.

OUTCOMES
On successful completion of this module you will be expected to be able to:
- Demonstrate an understanding of and engagement with the relations and tensions between distinct theoretical perspectives on media and cities
- 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/online discussions
- Write and communicate to a scholarly standard, especially in coursework essays
- Critically observe and reflect upon the role of media in your everyday urban 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 explores ‘the mediated city’ by placing a strong emphasis on your own everyday experience of living in and moving through London. 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) to provide some initial insight into the many forms of media which surround us in the city. Partly based on the introduction this tour provides, you will then go on to keep an ongoing online inventory of media forms, practices, technologies and content observed across various urban milieus. These inventories must be updated weekly (at minimum) until the end of the module, as they will be used to provide afford examples for our class/online discussions.

An equally important learning method you will employ in this module is independent reading of academic literature. Reading every week will be crucial in your preparation for discussions in class and online, as well as in becoming familiar with the various literature you will be expected to draw upon in all coursework. Though readings at this level will be more difficult, we will discuss effective reading techniques, which will hopefully develop your skills in research and essay writing in media studies.

Class sessions will take the form of combined lecture-seminars, meaning a combination of short lectures and class exercises. You can expect the class exercises to vary from session to session (e.g. working in pairs and groups, screenings, reading discussions and other set activities). Our interaction in class will be augmented by frequent use of online resources and communication tools on Moodle, including online discussions.

You are each offered up to two individual tutorials upon request, which provide an opportunity to resolve any difficulties, and discuss with me solutions to problems, particularly around coursework.

COURSEWORK AND ASSESSMENT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessed Component</th>
<th>Basic Requirements</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>1500 words essay on a set question, making reference to 1 item from your in-progress urban media inventory</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12th February 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban media inventory</td>
<td>Online inventory of urban media, kept throughout the module</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22nd March 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>2500 words essay on chosen set question</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26th April 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading discussant</td>
<td>Group discussant for assigned reading during at least one class reading 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 Moodle</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tbody>
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All assignments must be submitted by the above deadlines. Coursework is submitted online through Turnitin (through this module’s Moodle web site). Further details on the assignment requirements will be available on Moodle.

**MODULE EVALUATION**

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

**MODULE CONTENT**

**Session 1: 9th January 2013 – Introduction: media, space and the urban**

This session provides an introduction to the aims, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessments in this module, while also being the first opportunity for you all to meet one another and discuss your existing perceptions of different media studies approaches. We will dedicate special attention to introducing the urban media inventory assignment, as you will build this online inventory week-by-week. In addition, we will introduce some key concepts that will help us conceptualise the intersections of media and cities, focusing in particular on recent theories and approaches related to the geographical dimensions of media and communications.

**Required reading:**


**SATURDAY WORKSHOP: 10am-1pm, 12th January 2013 – Media tour: West End London**

We meet at the southwest corner of Fitzroy Square. Map: [http://goo.gl/maps/lJwab](http://goo.gl/maps/lJwab)

This module explores media as it appears to us in our everyday urban places and routines. So 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 media city. NOTE: Although the actual tour will likely offer the best insights into the above issues, for those that are unable to attend a DIY version will be provided, through which students can do a self-led tour (desk-based or walking).

Session 2: 16th January 2013 – The newspaper-city nexus and beyond
Our explorations of the mediated city in this module will be multifaceted; but we will begin with the humble newspaper. Why? At least historically, the newspaper has been understood to be in a sort of nexus with the city, from the industrial revolution through the postwar period. In this session, we will consider the evolution and, some would say, decline of the newspaper-city nexus. This will take us in two directions: first, to consider how urban spaces nevertheless today remain the prime setting for journalism activity (professional and amateur) as news phenomena itself; and second, to consider the rise so-called ‘hyperlocal’ media platforms and practices in the wake of stagnating local news media.

Required reading

Further reading:

**Session 3: 23rd January 2013 – The cinematic city**

Much like the newspaper, film is a medium often seen to be inherently related to the city. Many film researchers have been especially interested in how urban spaces and places enter into the representational structure of film texts. In this session, however, our starting point is a little different: rather than focusing on the connections between specific film texts and cities, we will be directing our attention to the more general connections of cinema and urban life. To begin with, we will consider the material sites of cinema-going and cinema-watching, in part by looking at a recent campaign to ‘save’ a local London cinema. But we will also seek to ask deeper questions about how film might not just draw on urban location in its texts, but also how film as a medium might affect the ways we feel, perceive and regard urban space.

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**

**Session 4: 30th January 2013 – Public spaces in private: television and suburbia**

You may already be familiar with the idea – largely coming out of ethnographic audience studies – that television-watching is a notably ‘domesticated’ practice: it is perhaps defined by the home environment (although televisions are hardly confined to homes, as we’ll explore in a later class), and arguably central to the structuring of family life. 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 Western cities, and the related proliferation of a suburban mentality. Thus, in political terms, they argue that television brought about a suburbanised, or more privatised, public sphere. In short, television allows us private access to a public world.

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

**Further reading**:

**Session 5: 6th February 2013 – Private spaces in public: media on the move**
For many of us, navigating the city involves ‘managing’ our experience of daily urban life: that is, limiting, coping otherwise making more pleasant its noise, complexity, drudgery, dreariness, excitement and strangeness. This session considers the role of media technologies and practices in such urban management both generally, but also with some particular attention directed towards the contemporary use of personal sound device. Many of us use them ourselves, and most of us will have at least noticed how prolific their users are: on the tube, the train, the bus, the street, or in cars. Starting from the birth of the personal sound device with the Sony Walkman (a portable cassette player), we consider in this session the ways in which such devices have arguably flourished most as a tool for ‘coping’ with and negotiating daily urban life. As an aside, we also will take a look at the migration of radio from homes to automobile environments. We will critically consider whether personal media use in urban spaces (and personal sound devices in particular) should be thought of as introducing private worlds into public spaces.

**Required reading**:
Further Reading:

Session 6: 13th February 2013 – **Blurring public and private I: location-aware media**
The ‘new’ form of media that seems to generate the most excitement for those trying to study the connections of media and cities today is the ‘location-aware’ portable media device. For our purposes, this will refer to any sort of personal and portable device (e.g. smart phones, media players, tablet computers, netbooks) that can be wirelessly connected to the Internet. Why are such devices significant for thinking about media and cities? In the main, it is because their combination of portability and connectivity afford new possibilities for geographic location to play a role in users’ content access or creation. Location-aware media offer us a distinct case vis-à-vis the personal sound devices considered in the last session. They don’t so much provide users a private world to augment a public urban world, but rather they thoroughly blur what are public or private spaces of the city.

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**
Session 7: 20th February 2013 – Blurring public and private II: urban screens

Another way to look at the blurring of public and private is to examine the ways in which many cities (London included) increasingly exhibit various sorts of screen surfaces. First of all, we can take note that televisions are not as confined to domestic environments as often imagined in media studies. Instead, we see televisions scattered across all sorts of mundane places such as pubs, cafes, airport gates, and doctor’s waiting areas. At the same time, we can also take note of the increasingly sophisticated screen surfaces being built into buildings and other structures. In this class we consider the possibilities and issues urban screens pose for public life in cities, looking at both what is new about urban screens, as well as what is old, in that similar forms of display have existed in cities past (such as billboards, banners and posters).

**Required reading:**


**Further reading:**


Session 8: 27th February 2013 – Between subversion and normalisation: graffiti and the new street art
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 acceptance and legitimation it has received more recently, both in the art world as well as in the eyes of municipal authorities, which some would argue has been all about its normalisation and even decline as a subversive urban art form. We will also consider the activities and distinctiveness of the new generation of so-called ‘street artists’ such as Banksy, Invader and Swoon.

Required reading:

Further reading:

Session 9: 6th March 2013 –The city as an advertising machine
Each of us will recognise that moving through a city such as London entails regular exposure to a whole plethora of advertising. Of course, advertising creeps into virtually every form of media imaginable, from magazines to social media. But the recent growth of advertising in outdoor


and indoor public spaces deserves our special attention: such advertising relies on our movement through the city; it has grown because advertisers know that in a fragmented media market, these are ads which are more difficult for us to avoid 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.

This session will include a screening: This Space Available (Gwenaëlle Gobé / 2011 / USA / 90’)

Required reading:

Further reading:
Gold, J.R. and Ward, S.V. (eds.) (1994) Place promotion: the use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons

Session 10: 13th March 2013 – The programmable city: software as (hidden) urban texts
Many of the media forms and practices that we have discussed in this module so far are visible in one way or another to us as people living in and moving though urban spaces. 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 possible implications of some of such apparently hidden media texts (i.e. software code) and their associated technologies for urban living.
Session 11: 20\textsuperscript{th} March 2013 – \textit{Media clusters, urban scenes and ‘creative cities’}

It is sometimes claimed that, in a digitally-connected world, work can take place almost anywhere. Yet the practitioners, professionals, organisations and firms of the so-called ‘creative industries’ are noted for the way in which they come together, agglomerate and thrive in cities and even specific urban neighbourhoods. Indeed, there has been a strong contemporary push by local and national agencies to brand themselves as specifically ‘creative cities’. Why should this be the case? In this session, we critically explore various answers to this question, and place a particular focus on a tension between two claims. On the one hand, there are the grand claims by the likes of Richard Florida and Charles Landry, that particular cities embody special characteristics that make them attractive to creative workers and seedbeds for creativity and collaboration. On the other hand, there are analyses that explore the interactive and generative powers of spatial agglomeration, such as trust, reciprocity and innovation between firms, as well as the ‘cool factor’, in which the creative industries are seen to thrive in settings where practitioners can fluidly interweave their work and social lives.
Required reading:

Further reading:
GENERAL READING

Below are some general sources of reading on media, cities and space (some of these are already cited in the above session readings):


Rodgers, S., Barnett, C. and Cochrane, A. (draft paper available on Moodle) 'Communicative practices and the city: the mediated phenomenologies of urban politics'


Virilio, P. (1991) *The lost dimension*, New York: Semiotext(e) – Chapter 1