

**COMM 380**  
**Media Criticism**  
**FALL 2022**

**Professor: Gyu Tag Lee**

Time: Tuesday & Thursday 01:30 pm – 02:45 pm

Room: TBA

Email: [gleeg@gmu.edu](mailto:gleeg@gmu.edu)

Office: #547

Office Hours: Tuesday 03:00 pm - 05:00 pm or by appointment

**Course Description:**

This course provides an in-depth introduction to the practice of critical media studies, with a particular focus on the analysis of visual and internet culture. Drawing on the concepts of critical media studies, this course offers: (1) a review of concepts related to the practice of media criticism and textual analysis, including cultural studies and semiotics analysis, (2) an introduction to diverse visual media including photography, film, TV, advertisement and internet, and (3) a critical examination of those media – how to read and interpret them critically. Along the way, we will discuss theories and concepts which attempt to explain the role of media and popular culture in contemporary life. Although many of course materials will focus on visual and digital culture, the analytical tools students will learn can be applied to the study of texts and audiences within any medium of communication.

**Class Objectives:**

Upon successful completion of this course, it is expected that each student will

- Provide students with the tools of textual analysis, including an intermediate-level discussion of cultural analysis and rhetorical analysis/media semiotics.
- Provide students with an opportunity to apply these tools of analysis to a particular object/text of popular culture.
- Provide students with tools for analyzing the impact of digitization and digital networks on media production and consumption, including issues of media convergence, intellectual property, online harassment, and the digital surveillance.
- To develop analytical and writing skills that are fundamental to a liberal education, to effective citizenship, and to professional success.

**Course Textbooks:**

- **There's no required textbook for this class.** However, the following books are recommended for further understanding:
  - ♦ Barnes, S. (2011). *An Introduction to Visual Communication: From Cave Art to Second Life* (1<sup>st</sup> Edition). New York: Peter Lang Inc.
  - ♦ Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2017). *Practices of Looking: An introduction to visual culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  - ♦ Ott, B., & Mack, R. (2020). *Critical media studies: An introduction* (third edition).

Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

- ♦ Vaidhyathan, S. (2018). *Anti-social media: How Facebook disconnects us and undermines democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Most of the required/recommended course texts will be made available on Blackboard (<https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>) or will be provided by email. It is your responsibility to print these texts or read them electronically, and take good notes. Please check Blackboard regularly for course texts and announcements. Also, PowerPoint materials used in the class would be available on the Blackboard.
- Another important “text” for this course is your official **GMU email account**. I will be periodically sending out updates, announcements, and syllabus changes to your GMU email addresses and **it is one of your primary responsibilities to regularly check your email** and maintain space in your inboxes. The phrase “I did not get your email” or “I have not opened your email yet” is not an acceptable excuse.

## Course Policies and Student Responsibilities:

### 1. Attendance

- a. You are expected to **attend all classes**, arriving **before** the class begins and remaining engaged for the duration of each class meeting. If you cannot attend class due to illness or other emergency, you should notify your professor directly or by email before class.
- b. Arriving late or leaving early is equal to 1/2 absence. **Any more than 3 absences** will result in a grade penalty in participation.
- c. If a student misses **more than 6 classes** (7 absences or more) he or she would be fail, regardless of his/hers performance in the class.

### 2. Class Preparation and Participation

- a. **Class Preparation and Participation**
  - Students must prepare in advance for every class meeting (recommended reading and written homework). Class participation means that you actively engage in the discussions/activities and that you take notes during discussions and lectures.
  - **DO NOT WORK ON OTHER CLASS ASSIGNMENTS, TEXT MESSAGE/KAKAO TALK, READ EMAIL, FACEBOOK OR ENGAGE IN OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA DURING CLASS TIME.** Your grade will be seriously lowered if the instructor find you doing those things.
- b. **Mobile Phones and Other Electronic Devices** (Laptops, Tablets, etc. )
  - During class all mobile phones should be switched off or to silent mode, and put away out of sight. Mobile phones on your desk, lap, or within sight are not allowed. Using phones without permission can negatively impact your participation grade. If mobile phones or other devices use continues after the start of class you may be asked to leave the classroom, which could also affect your attendance score.
  - Students should keep in mind that this is a **laptop ban class** when we have a face to face meeting.

**c. Homework and Written Assignments**

- You must complete the homework and written assignments *independently and individually*. **Copying homework and/or a written assignment from a current or former student is cheating.** University policies for cases of academic integrity can be found at: <http://oai.gmu.edu/>. *If you have any questions about these policies, please ask your professor before completing the assignment.*

**d. Course Readings and Worksheets**

- You are responsible for completing reading homework for every class meeting if there is any. You should be prepared to share the main ideas from each reading and have the written assignments ready for in-class discussions/activities. *Your professor may check to see if your homework is complete at any time. These homework checks are part of your Preparation and Participation Grade. Do not email “missing” or late worksheets to your professor. You must be present in-class to receive credit for homework.*

**e. Graded Assignments**

- These must be typed using MS Word. All text must be in **12-point font** and **double-spaced**. Please check spelling and grammar prior to submitting your assignments.

※ If you want to get advising for your writing assignment, you can visit GMUK Academic Resource Center. Please find more information about it at the end of this syllabus.

**3. Late Work**

: You must get permission from the professor to submit work after the posted due date. Otherwise, *late work will not be accepted and will result in a “zero” grade.* Even when permission is given, late work may be subject to a certain percent grade penalty (20% or more will be deducted from the expected grade).

**4. Technology**

: You are expected to use Blackboard to access course materials. Also, you should be able to access your GMU e-mail account.

**5. Quizzes/Exams**

: *No make-up quizzes/exams will be given.*

**6. Time Management:** You are encouraged to make an appointment with the course professor as soon as you experience difficulty in the course or have questions about an assignment or exam. Do not wait to get help. *Keep in mind that poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on the part of your professor (i.e. if you wait until the last minute to make an appointment with your professor, you may not have the opportunity to do so).*

**Students with Disabilities**

: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 032-626-5060. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the Office.

### **Mason Diversity Statement**

: George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason's commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed.

**Course Assessments and Grading Scale**  
**FALL 2022**

Your course grade will consist of the following:

1. Quizzes (three [3] total)	25% (total 250 pts)
2. Short Essays	15% (total 150 pts)
3. Individual Media Criticism Paper (Final Assignment)	25% (250 pts)
4. Blackboard Discussion	10% (100 pts)
5. Participation	25% (total 250 pts.)
5.1 Attendance	10% (100 pts.)
5.2 Classroom Discussion Participation	15% (150 pts.)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (1,000 pts)</b>

**Grading Scale**

- A+ = 97.0~100, A0 = 93.0~96.9, A- = 89.0~92.9
- B+ = 85.0~88.9, B0 = 81.0~84.9, B- = 77.0~80.9
- C+ = 73.0~76.9, C0 = 69.0~72.9, C- = 65.0~68.9
- D or F = below 65.0

**Overview of Course Assignments**

**1. Quizzes: 25% (70 + 90 + 90 = total 250 pts)**

- During the semester, students will be given three quizzes. Quizzes will be based upon just the readings and lectures. The objective is to keep you on top of readings/lectures so that you do not fall behind. Taking quizzes will help you to understand big ideas of readings/lectures.

**2. Short Essays: 15% (150 pts)**

- To provide an opportunity for everyone in the course to reflect critically on the issues happening around us, students will be expected to write three (3) to five (5) informal, 350-word Short Essays that respond to questions assigned by the Professor during the semester.
- Basically, students should view these Short Essays as an opportunity to think about what we are experiencing through media, as a means to prepare for active participation in our class discussions.
- The essay does not have to be very formal and strictly academic. You can write your thoughts, opinions, and arguments more freely than the typical academic essay.
- **Avoid summarizing** the readings and other references – move quickly into an analytical response and show your own arguments/opinions. This essay should be

argumentative, rather than too descriptive and/or informative.

- If your answer is well-made and seems more insightful/interesting than usual, you will get some extra points. Therefore, if you get those extra points for some of your essays, your total points can be more than 150 pts.
- Note on grading: When marking this, I will NOT be strictly looking for grammar, organization, and so on. I will be looking for evidence that you are engaged with what we've done during the class, and your own thoughts/reflections/opinions about the topic that you choose to write about. Papers that simply re-hash the lectures or the readings, or that fail to show an explicit connection to the class **will receive reduced or zero credit.**

### **3. Individual Media Criticism Paper: 25% (250 pts)**

- During the semester, students will be asked to complete one solo-authored example of media criticism, drawing on the concepts presented in the course. Students will present a proposal in early November and complete the paper at the end of the semester.
- Students may analyze a text drawn from any form of visual media (photograph, film, television, advertisement, computer game, web-distributed visual text, etc.). Regardless of the choice of text or genre, however, students must draw on the theories, concepts, and analytic tools covered in class to offer their analysis of the cultural and political significance of their cultural object/text/practice.
- Papers will be evaluated on how accurately, and how creatively, authors apply the concepts covered in class to discuss the cultural and/or political significance of their cultural object.
- The word count for this paper will not be long – 1700-2000 words (about 5-6 pages of double-spaced text). Good examples of this form of media criticism can be seen on Flow, an online journal maintained by the Department of Radio-TV-Film at the University of Texas, Austin. Check out their website ([www.flowjournal.org](http://www.flowjournal.org)).

### **4. Blackboard Discussion: 10% (10 pts)**

- During the semester, the Professor will create five (5) or six (6) Blackboard Discussion forums. Students will get a couple of discussion questions sometimes with reading materials (such as newspaper/magazine articles) or videos through each Discussion forum. Please read the assigned article(s) and make your own thoughts and replies to others' thoughts on the Blackboard.
- You will make comments on others by the different due date from your own discussion. Details will be announced on each Discussion forum.
- If your answer is well-made and seems more insightful/interesting than usual, you will get some extra points. Therefore, if you get those extra points for some of your essays,

your total points can be more than 100 pts.

- If you don't make reply to others' answers when participating in the discussion, 2-3 pts will be deducted.

**5. Participation: 25% (total 250 pts.)**

In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole.

**5.1 Attendance: 10% (100 pts.)**

: Refer to the course policy section

**5.2 Classroom Discussion Participation: 15% (150 pts.)**

- Class participation is crucial to one's overall grade. It will be assessed by your participation during other students' presentation and other usual class participations.
- ***This is separate from your general attendance. They are separately graded. It means your attendance does not count as classroom discussion participation.***
- It will be counted based on how many times you participate. Therefore, you can get zero if you do not make any participation during class discussions in the semester. You can get the full participation grade when you make seven or more participations through the whole semester.
- Just saying 'yes' or 'no' will not count as participation.

**Class Schedule:**

(All dates are subject to change.)

**Week 1 (08. 23 / 02. 25)                      Course Introduction**

**Week 2 (08. 30 / 09. 01)                      Why Study the Media?**

**Reading:**

Ott & Mack, *Critical media studies: An introduction*, Ch. 1: Introducing Critical Media Studies

**Week 3 (09. 06 / 09. 08)                      Images and Visual Media**

**Reading:**

Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An introduction to visual culture*, Ch. 1: Images, Power, and Politics.

**\* No Class on 09/08 (THUR.): Fall Recess**

**Week 4 (09. 13 / 09. 15)                      Cultural Studies Media Analysis**

**Reading:**

Ott & Mack, *Critical media studies: An introduction*, Ch. 6: Cultural Analysis.

**Week 5 (09. 20 / 09. 22)                      Media Semiotics**

**Reading:**

Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An introduction to visual culture*, Ch. 2: Viewers Make Meaning.

Barnes, *An Introduction to Visual Communication: From Cave Art to Second Life*, Ch. 4: Language of Images: Signs, Symbols, and Semiotics.

**Week 6 (09. 27/ 09. 29)                      Media Semiotics (cont.) / Quiz 1**

**Reading:**

Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An introduction to visual culture*, Ch. 4: Realism and Perspective.

**Week 7 (10. 04 / 10. 06)                      Frame and Narrative**

**Reading:**

Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An introduction to visual culture*, Ch. 6: Media in Everyday Life.



**\* NO CLASS on 10/04 (TUE.): Make-up day for Monday classes**

**Week 8 (10. 11 / 10. 13)                      Photograph – The Beginning of Visual Media**

**Reading:**

Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An introduction to visual culture*, Ch. 4: Realism and Perspective.

Barnes, *An Introduction to Visual Communication: From Cave Art to Second Life*, Ch. 8: The Photographic Image.

**Week 9 (10. 18 / 10. 20)                      Film – The Essence of Visual Media**

**Reading:**

Barnes, *An Introduction to Visual Communication: From Cave Art to Second Life*, Ch. 9: Motion Pictures and Film.

Lane Crothers (2013). Chapter 5 from *Globalization and American Popular Culture* (pp. 85-106). Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

**Week 10 (10. 25 / 10. 27)                      Film – The Essence of Visual Media (cont.) / Quiz 2**

**Week 11 (11. 01 / 11. 03)                      Film Week: *Blade Runner***

**Week 12 (11. 08 / 11. 10)                      TV – Everyday Media for Everyone**

**Reading:**

Barnes, *An Introduction to Visual Communication: From Cave Art to Second Life*, Ch. 10: Television.

Gray, J. (2008). Chapter 4 from *Television entertainment*. New York: Routledge.

**Week 13 (11. 15 / 11. 17)                      Other Visual Media: Advertisement and Video Recording**

**Reading:**

Barnes, *An Introduction to Visual Communication: From Cave Art to Second Life*, Ch. 11: Digital Media.

Wu, T. (2015). Chapter 21 – Here comes everyone. In *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*. New York: Penguin.

**Week 14 (11. 22 / 11. 24)**

**Media Ethics: The Harm of Surveillance**

Reading:

Wu, T. (2015). Chapter 20 – The Kingdom of Content: This Is How You Do It. In *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*. New York: Penguin.

Vaidhyathan, S. (2018). Chapter 1 & 2 – The Surveillance Machine. In *Anti-social media: How Facebook disconnects us and undermines democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Week 15 (11. 29 / 12. 01)**

**Media Ethics: Copyright and Others / Quiz 3**

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**In the interest of everyone's safety, students and faculty must follow these guidelines during the FALL 2022 semester.**

1. Wear a face mask at all times indoors. Clean your seat and desk space with disinfectant wipes before you begin class. Use hand sanitizer regularly, and avoid shaking hands or other forms of physical contact. Do not share pens, pencils or other personal items. Limit your use of the elevators, and use stairs to travel between floors of the building. Students are expected to purchase their own masks for personal use. Disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer will be available in each classroom.
2. Observe rules and regulations, and protocol regarding COVID-19 at all times during the class period and while in Mason's building or other public areas of the campus. Refer to FAQs on our MK webpage (<https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/corona/faqs>). This includes during class breaks, in small group work (in or out of class), meetings with your professors during office hours, tutoring sessions at the Academic Resource Center, socializing in common areas, or any other activities on campus.
3. Make sure windows and doors remain open during the class period to promote circulation of outside air. Classrooms without windows have mechanical systems that vent air, but doors should be kept open at all times.
4. All faculty and students must abide by these rules in the classroom. If you see others who are not observing the rules outside the classroom, you may report this to your instructor, student affairs or academic affairs.
5. Do not enter the Mason building or come to class if you have symptoms such as fever, chills, sore throat, persistent cough, shortness of breath or other respiratory difficulties. If you must miss class for this reason, send an email immediately to the professor prior to the beginning of class. You will not be penalized for missing class for this reason, but you may be asked to provide documentation that you sought medical diagnosis or treatment. You are responsible for making up any missed assignments or tests as a result of your absence.
6. Students who come to class with visible signs of illness will be asked to leave the classroom immediately and seek assistance from the IGC Health Clinic. Faculty will report your name and symptoms to the Office of Student Affairs ([mksa@gmu.edu](mailto:mksa@gmu.edu)) to confirm that you have

sought medical assistance.

7. Failure to comply with any of these guidelines may result in disciplinary action through the Student Code of Conduct.

### **Academic Integrity**

: George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, Plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited.

: All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

### **Enrollment**

: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.

: Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. Deadlines each semester are published in the Academic Calendar available from George Mason University-Korea website (<https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/academic-calendars/academic-calendars>).

: **Last day to add – Aug 29, 2022**

: **Final Drop Deadline (with 100% tuition refund) – Sep 5, 2022**

: **Unrestricted Withdrawal Period (100% tuition liability) – Sep 30, 2022**

: After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

: Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the website for selective withdrawal procedures.

### **GUMK Academic Resource Center**

: The Academic Resource Center, GMUK is in the business of looking at your papers and problems to improve your academic achievement in the area of Writing, Mathematics, Accounting, Statistics, and Economics. You are invited to utilize the faculty and student tutor services at a variety of stages in your academic activities, checking to see that your project specifically meets the directions specified by your instructor.

While tutors are ‘fixing’ your writing or projects, they do help you become conscious of particular error patterns that emerge in your work. For more information, please contact Professor Eunmee Lee, director of Academic Resource Center ([elee45@gmu.edu](mailto:elee45@gmu.edu), office #521).