

Teaching

I have taught, and continue to teach a range of topics, including media history, sociology of mass media, international communication, culture & technology, religion & society, and social theory. For 2010-2011, my teaching is concentrated in the area of media history. See below for descriptions of courses I have taught in the recent past.

I have supervised graduate students in various areas relating to my principal field of research interest -- religion and media -- and I welcome the opportunity to work with new students interested in this area of study. If you are interested in religion and media, and you are considering graduate studies at Concordia, please read the "Research" section of this website, where you will learn more about this work. Please note further that I am actively recruiting graduate students (both MA and PhD) to work with me on various projects (both current and planned for the future). I am especially interested in working with students who want to concentrate on one of the following topics:

- Spiritualism in the nineteenth century
- Media and magic
- The visual culture of secularism
- Religious forms of popular culture

- Religion and technology

- Iconoclasm, blasphemy, and other 'image wars'

- Religion and the body
- The cultural history of electricity (and especially 'electricity and the occult')

If you are interested in pursuing one or more of these topics in your graduate studies, I can offer unique opportunities to supervise you (and where appropriate, to involve you in both national and international research projects, conferences, and other activities).

For more details on admissions, application procedures, etc, see:

<http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/comm/programs.html> .

Longer term funding and research opportunities are also being planned. I hope you will consider applying to Concordia.

Here are some examples of courses I regularly teach at Concordia, as well as some of the courses I taught at McMaster University: COMS 220: History of Communication and Media (Concordia University)

This course aims to foster an appreciation of the historical depths of mediated communication, and an understanding of the major historical changes in technological, institutional, and economic arrangements of media forms, as they relate to larger questions about human societies and cultures. The course is very broad in scope, moving from antiquity to the late twentieth century, and covers such phenomena as the origins of writing, the invention of print and the development of print culture, the rise of 'modern' media in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (photography, the telegraph, the telephone, radio, cinema, etc), the television age, and finally, the emergence of computer-mediated communication and new forms of multi-media that characterize the contemporary mediascape.

COMS 620: History of Media (Concordia University)

The aim of this Masters-level graduate course is to survey and assess the rapidly growing scholarship in media history, with particular attention devoted to the history of media technologies and their cultural reception. The course is organized as a seminar based on weekly readings. These alternate between theoretical texts dealing with issues in historiography and historical methodology, texts dealing with the broad 'sweep' of media history (from antiquity to the digital age), and texts focussing on specific moments/objects/cultural contexts in media history. Some of the authors we read include: Bakhtin, Foucault, Gitelman, Innis, Kittler, Mattelart, Mumford, Peters, Schivelbusch, Scott, White, and Zielinski.

CMST 4D03: International Communication (McMaster University)

Flows of information and cultural products across borders and around the world have commanded attention for a very long time: at least since the nineteenth century, and arguably much longer. But over the course of the past couple decades, with the rapid growth of electronic information and communication technologies, the need to understand the sphere of international communication has grown more urgent. In this respect, communication scholars have been engaged in a series of debates about how best to conceive the transnational, and increasingly 'global' dimensions of flows of information and culture, and how to address the questions of cultural difference and power that invariably emanate from these flows. The debates have centred on such questions as: What is the role of the modern

state in managing international communication flows? What are the roles of multilateral institutions and transnational business interests? Who are the other significant actors involved in international and transnational communication? How do the dynamics of international communication relate to questions of global inequalities, development and underdevelopment, or economic dependency? Are the expanding technological capacities for international communication rendering the world more homogeneous or more heterogeneous? Is a model of 'cultural imperialism' still a valid way of understanding global communications? Was it ever a good model? Or are we better off thinking of international communication in terms of processes of hybridization, creolization, and cross-fertilization? How does the sphere of international communication relate to the ideals of equality, global security, and the preservation of cultural uniqueness? In this course, we will address such questions through a survey of recent literature concerning international communication. We will assess various theoretical models for the analysis of emerging processes, technologies, and institutions of transnational and global communication, as well as the ways these have local effects. Students will undertake collaborative projects as well as maintain an electronic journal that will investigate, report, and critically reflect on the transformative effects of international communication in different regions of the world, including North America, Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, South and East Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

CMST 4M03: Communication, Culture and Technology (McMaster University)

A key concern of communication and cultural studies is to study the place of technology, and of media technologies in particular, within systems of cultural meaning, production and consumption. How ought we to understand the relationship between technology and culture? In what ways is each determinative of the other? Are media technologies simply raw material for the expression and spread of cultural ideas? Or are technologies capable of transforming culture itself? If the latter, how have these transformations been effected over time, in different geographical and social contexts? In this course, we will address these and related questions by drawing upon literature, themes, and debates from various sources, including communication studies, cultural history, popular science studies and art history. We will analyse the role of technology in society and cultural imagination, comparing and assessing various theoretical vantage points. The particular focus of this course is the great media revolutions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The period in question spans from the invention of the 'analytical engine' (a primitive computer, designed by Charles Babbage in 1833), the daguerrotype camera (1839), the telegraph (1844), the typewriter (1868-1873), the telephone (1876), the phonograph (1877), the electric lightbulb (1879), the moving cinematic camera and projector (1893-5), the discovery of X-rays (1895), the wireless radio (1899-1902), and finally, the development of television (1926-7). We will also consider a number of less-known media inventions or ideas for new technologies (many of which were wildly impractical) which also proliferated during this period, but which did not survive into the present, such as the zoopraxiscope or the physiognotrace. By undertaking this historical survey, our goals will be: (a) to assess debates about the role of technology in culture and society (e.g., does technology determine cultural forms, or vice versa?); (b) to trace the diverse patterns of reception and adaptation of new technologies in both popular and elite circles (including scientific, religious, economic and political elites); (c) to study interactions of specific technologies with the social construction of (gendered) bodies, everyday life patterns, the social organization of space and time, and cultural distinctions between human/machine, physicality/virtuality, freedom/determinism, etc, and (d) to think critically about how the 'new media' of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were constituted, and to ask what have been the consequences of these developments for us in the present.

CMST/SOC 3C03: Media and Social Issues. 2007 Course Subtitle: Media Scandals and Panics (McMaster University) The aim of this course is to explore the relationship between mass media and mass society, and to understand how modern communications media help to create, sustain, regulate, transform, resolve, or suppress social problems. We will begin the course by assessing a longstanding argument which claims that 'the masses' (crowds, audiences, consumers, 'the man in the street', etc) are essentially irrational and easily manipulable by leaders. Theories of the irrational masses date back to the late-nineteenth century (if not earlier), but they continue to play an important role in social theory today, and they also present what might be described as part of our 'common sense' account of the power and influence of mass media in society. In particular, many claims about how media define social problems (such as homelessness or corruption in government or deviant youth), how media recommend solutions to these problems, and how media mobilize people to act accordingly, rest on vague and undefended assumptions about the relationship between media and the masses. In order to develop this debate, we will turn our attention to a series of case studies and related theoretical discussions. Our focus will be on mass-mediated moral panics and scandals, including panics about the dangers of paedophiliacs, comic books and rap music, and scandals about the secret sex lives of politicians. In our analysis, we will be concerned to understand how panics and scandals are represented in the media and how different social actors relate to these representations. Rather than simply assuming that people are being 'irrational' when they get caught up in media-fuelled panics or scandals, we will study how such events point to deeper transformations in the boundaries between public and private life, and the way such changes relate to the social construction of ideas about innocence and responsibility, social stability and danger, or moral rectitude and shame. By the end of the course, these case studies will lead us to propose some new theoretical generalizations about the relationship between modern media and 'the masses'. SOC 708/REL 780: Religion and Society. 2007 Course Subtitle: Between Science, Religion, and Entertainment: Explorations of 19th C Spiritualism (McMaster University) Spiritualism was one of the most capacious and culturally productive movements of the nineteenth century. Centred around the practice of communication with the dead, and with the various benefits accrued from such communications, including personal solace, health, prestige, and even the authority to undertake

moral or political campaigns in the public sphere, the term Spiritualism encompasses a family of movements, including Victorian (i.e., American, British, and Canadian) Spiritualism, Theosophy, French, Brazilian and Cuban Spiritism (a.k.a. Kardecism), and Christian Science, all of which emerged in the mid- to-late-nineteenth century, and quickly spread to all corners of the world, attracting literally millions of adherents, ranging from relatively marginal populations to distinguished scientists, artists, politicians, and other ‘celebrity’ figures. One thing that distinguishes Spiritualism from other forms of popular religion was its uniquely intense involvement in the cultural, scientific, and economic transformations responsible for the rise of so-called Western modernity. For this reason (among others) Spiritualism has been the object of intense scholarly interest in recent years, the movement having been cited for its influence on such disparate phenomena as the birth of psychoanalysis, the rise of first-wave feminism, the development of new investigative techniques and techno- scientific practices in experimental psychology, neuroanatomy, and electrical engineering, the continued influence of ‘para’ or ‘popular’ sciences (such as Mesmerism or phrenology), or the entrenchment of various forms of popular and high culture, from poetry to stage hypnosis to cinema-going. The aim of this course is to take stock of Spiritualism as a movement located at the fertile intersections of religion, techno-science, politics, and popular culture, in an age of intense social upheaval and rapid technological change. Students will read a selection of primary and secondary sources, participate in seminar presentations, and produce a research paper related to the overarching theme(s) of this course.