Media, Mediation and Crises

2016 – 2017 - Week 11- 20

Lecture and Workshop:  Wednesdays 11:00 – 13:00, Bowland Nth SR 11

Moodle:  https://modules.lancaster.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=17385#section-6
Please visit Moodle regularly to check on any updates.

Course Convenors

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About this Course
How are crises visually and discursively represented? How do these mediations shape everyday practices and public concerns? This course examines practices of mediation – such as news reports, photography, popular film, financial modelling, cultural narratives, crowdsourced crisis mapping, and celebrity humanitarianism – and explores what they reveal about community, society, threats, technology, nature, as well as the global and the local. Such mediations affect political decisions, ethical values, scientific research, and social action. Focusing on theories of mediation, students will learn techniques through which to analyse how different representational forms shape how we come to understand and act on the world around us. Through readings, real world examples, and case studies, this course will address diverse historical and contemporary forms of crisis to explore how we come to know crises through media, in crisis response, in government planning, and in activist communities. Among the crises covered will be Y2K, the 2008 global financial crisis, political crises, refugee crises, Hurricane Katrina, 2010 Haiti Earthquake, 2015 UK floods, climate change, air pollution, antimicrobial resistance.

Students will learn how to document and analyse practices of mediation, analyse their social, cultural, and political implications, and employ the theories from the course to construct their own research projects. In the readings, students will examine a range of approaches to mediation and methodologies employed to think about crises. In workshop discussions we will examine specific examples of crises as they manifest in different social, political and cultural contexts. In our discussions we will employ critical analysis of narratives, representations, and case studies to interrogate how practices of mediation shape knowledge and action. Students will also develop skills to think critically about their own practices of presenting their ideas for different audiences.

Assessment and Deadlines

Small weekly assignments 10%
Submit on Moodle, due 23:00 Monday of each week
For each week’s reading, write 3 questions.
  1) one about a concept in the reading that you find interesting
  2) one about something you did not understand,
  3) one that connects the reading to a real world event not mentioned in the reading.
These should not be “what happened on this page” or “where is this concept mentioned in the article” but written so as to help explore the substance of the arguments made in the readings. From each week’s questions we will select a few to address in lecture and to guide discussions.
Group Poster Project

*Assigned week 4, due in class week 6 20/2/2017*

A poster produced in small groups and presented in class in Week 6. The poster should present an analysis of one specific crisis using theories and concepts discussed in the course. The main expectations are that the students can consider the effects of how a crisis is mediated through a basic application of theories. More details will be provided when it is assigned in Week 4.

Essay

*Due 1pm 24/4/2017*

Guidelines on writing essays will be discussed in Workshops.

Final Exam

30%

In accordance with University rules, coursework should be submitted to the Part II Co-ordinator (Karen Gammon, Bowland North) and electronically via MOODLE by the due date set. Applications for extensions must be made at least 3 working days before the deadline. Extensions will normally be granted only for medical or personal problems (e.g. bereavement). Applicants are expected to provide medical or other evidence where appropriate.

Formal Statement of Learning Outcomes

The overall aims of this course are for students to:

- Gain an understanding of a range of theories of mediation, including a sense of how media can be studied as structure, product, and content.
- Develop an awareness of the relationship between media and various social problems and aspects of society.
- Apply those theories to the analysis of specific media and case studies
- Explore the complex ways in which crises emerge from different social cultural contexts and scales.
- Investigate how perceptions of risks are tied to media strategies.
- Understand different methodological approaches to the analysis of media.
- Gain insight into practices of memory, marginalization, affective politics, surveillance, collectivity, objectification, witnessing, visibility, and justice.
- Examine a range of crises from financial to refugee, climate, hunger, pandemic, and political crises.
- Improve critical analytical skills in relation to examining multiple media.
- Acquire critical thinking skills that allow us to recognize the social, cultural, political, and environmental implications of crisis rhetoric.
- Become more reflexive about our connection to global crises and humanitarian issues.
At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Critically engage with numbers, models, maps, images, narratives, and arguments as media as well as in terms of their messages.
- Explain how various media shape the meaning of crises, the narratives of their causes and implications, including the cultural and ethical consequences of the social construction of crises.
- Express how crises are situated in large complex socio-technical assemblages.
- Discuss how mediation affects how we communicate & what is communicated.
- Express how we develop an understanding of self as we represent others.
- Apply the theories from the course to engage more critically with the representational process as a whole.
- Identify the importance of discourse, language, and art in crisis policy.
- Express sensitivity to racial and imperial aspects.

Please note – Nature of this Course
The course content may vary in response to current events (watch the news!). Certain topics in this course may require discussion of potentially distressing or disagreeable human or animal suffering or actions. There will be time in Workshops to address your responses to these. You are always welcome to discuss any questions or any matters with your tutors in their office hours.

Course Website
All the information you need for the course will be on MOODLE. This includes:

- Lecture slides (usually available at 3pm on the previous day)
- This course outline
- Required readings
- Further readings
- Essay questions

Because some books may only be available in hard copy in the library and copyright reasons, not all the essential readings may be available for download on Moodle.
Core course readings


Course Outline

**Week 01  Mediation and the Public Constitution of Crises**

What makes a crisis a crisis? For whom? Why do analysts argue that ‘there is no such thing as a natural disaster’? And what does declaring something a crisis do? In this first session we will discuss examples of different kinds of crises, introduce and compare some definitions, and explore the role of media and mediation in how crises are constituted. How and when we define crises matters immensely, blurring the boundaries between the epistemological, ontological, ethical and political. Definitions of crises mediate the nature, scope and scale of our vulnerability to, understanding of, and responses to crises. We will also introduce course requirements, assessment and arrangements.

**Key Concepts:** Social construction, mediation, crisis realism, global crises

**Required Reading**


Come prepared to introduce yourself, to describe a crisis that you remember from the media or through experience, and to answer the questions: what interests you about mediation in relation to this crisis?

**Further Readings**


**Week 02   Why Crisis?**

We may live in a century of disasters (eScience 2012), and humanity may be in danger of collapse (Diamond 2006, Urry 2016). Why should we care about the mediation of crises? In this session we discuss how we make sense of crises. We argue that this is important, firstly, because risk and crises are socially constructed and how we construct them shapes our lives. Secondly, as they engender a breakdown of normality, crises also allow us to glimpse alternatives and to re-imagine ourselves and society differently.

**Key Concepts:** media publics, events, ritual, responsibility, moral community, solidarity, cosmopolitanism

**Required Reading**


**Further Readings**


Week 03 Disaster Myths

If there is no such thing as a natural disaster, and no such thing as a single response, why do we seem to see the same trends over and over again during and after disasters? Are there things that people naturally do when faced with a disaster, such as panic or loot? Do survivors of disaster need to be controlled or assisted? This week focuses on the media myths that exist around disasters that are often used when describing and explaining the events around a given disaster. What work do they do in defining disaster, mitigating risks, and constructing cultures of expectation in relation to the disaster? Exploring mediation as a practice more directly, this week looks at the complexity of crises, including what is often considered or overlooked when disaster is represented, to assemble a theoretical toolset to address the questions above.

Key Concepts: myth, agency, remediation, immediacy, disaster narrative, social distance and difference, social and cultural remembering, resilience
**Required Reading**

**Further Readings**


**Week 04 Framing, Claiming the News**
We cannot ‘construct’ crises as we please. So what mechanisms are shaping the social construction of crises? In this session we explore the effects of news values and journalistic norms of authority, dramatization, and balance. We examine how journalists ‘professional, well-intentioned behaviour can actually decrease the possibility of precise, proper’ coverage of crises, using the example of climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff 2007:1191), and we discuss how diverse stakeholders exploit the dynamics of mediated debate to frame, make and, contest claims about crises.
**Key Concepts:** News values, framing, banal nationalism, calculus of death, claims making, merchants of doubt, power

**Required Reading**


**Further Readings**


Hannigan, John (1995) *Environmental Sociology*. London and New York: Routledge (especially ch.5 on ‘Social construction of environmental issues and problems’ and ch.6 on ‘Media and environmental communication’)


**Week 05  Risk Society**

What macro-level processes underpin the dynamics we have explored so far? Ulrich Beck’s thesis of a world risk society’ is a seminal contribution to research on this question. He shows how in modern societies the central challenge is no longer just ‘the production and distribution of ‘goods’ such as wealth and employment ... but the prevention or minimization of ‘bads’, that is, risks’ (Lupton 2013:78-79). In the ‘risk society’, three different processes of individualization, reflexivity and globalization come together to shape how we produce, experience and address risks. In this session we discuss these processes with a focus on measurement and its influence on how knowledge and ‘non-knowledge’ circulate and shape our experience and approaches to crises.

**Key Concepts:** Risk society, reflexivity, pluralistic rationality claims, measurement, ignorance, individualization

### Required Reading


Watch 'A2-B-C' (TRAILER 予告編) thyroid cysts and nodules in Fukushima children - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD9yGONdEUY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD9yGONdEUY).

### Further Readings


**Week 06   Whose Crisis?**

Accidents are inevitable. But how they are managed, mitigated, and remembered, is not. This session builds upon what we started last week. Risk society suggests that risks cannot be contained or overcome through science, technology, politics, or economics alone. In this session we will explore how crises are translated into the language of expertise, such as science or law as means to act upon risks within society to help offer relief and support yet also delimit what and who can be considered affected by a risk. Throughout it all, we will look at how remembrance mediates technological risk assessments and conceptions of safety and how just because we build more knowledge about risk does not mean those involved will have a unified picture of the world.

**Key Concepts:** normality, remembrance, continuing liability, future anterior, invisibilities, justice, immediacy, politics of identity

**Required Reading**


Poster presentations this week in class

**Further Readings**


Week 07  Disasters, Voices, and Listening

This week examines the question of how we know disasters by focusing on the voice. Who has a voice and how are voices heard when disasters occur? Such questions also highlight the significance of listening. How do we voice and listen to disasters? What kinds of relationships to disasters do different ways of voicing and listening suggest? The voice and listening will be investigated both literally and metaphorically, and will be used to draw attention to different registers and media technologies that mediate our understanding of disasters.

Key Concepts: media events, media rituals, indicative, subjunctive, liminal, spectacle

Required Reading


Further Readings


**Week 08  The Cultural Politics of Emotions**

Having explored the dynamics of myth, framing, claims-making, measurement, categorisation and voice, this session investigates the affective dynamics of making (sense of) crises. How do emotions feature in the mediation of crises? Where do emotional reactions come from and what do they do? Specifically, we will examine examples of hate, fear, pity, trust, hope, and expectations, where we find complex contradictions of suffering, solidarity and responsibility.

**Key Concepts:** affective politics, collective problematization, digital humanitarianism, mediated ethics of care, cosmopolitanism

**Required Reading**


http://www.onthemedia.org/story/debunking-migration-memes/

Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikvwPgD4KYM
Further Readings


Week 09 Course Review

Using the week’s reading as a stepping stone towards summarising the course so far, this week’s sessions will focus primarily on a review of the course material. The review is aimed to make sure you have grasped the course concepts. It is also designed to support you in asking questions that will strengthen your final essays and exam responses.

**Required Reading**


**Further Readings**

Week 10 Disaster Fictions / Essay Writing Session
In the previous weeks we have looked at various discursive, scientific, political, representational, and media practices that mediate how disasters and crises come to be known and understood. Today we will explore how disasters are mediated by fictional accounts, specifically science fiction and film. To do so, we will analyse film clips from two perspectives: 1) to see how the different forms of mediation from the course appear in the film; and 2) to see how the film itself might shape our own expectations of how disasters unfold, response is managed, and how responsibility is spread. During the second half of the class, we will break out into smaller working groups to support each other in writing the final essays.

Keywords: dystopia, popular imagination, fantasy, expertise, identity, immediate representation of the extraordinary, aesthetics of destruction, moral simplification, spectacle, depersonalisation

Required Reading

Further Readings


**Selected Bibliography**


Hannigan, J. (1995) Environmental Sociology. London and New York: Routledge (especially ch.5 on ‘Social construction of environmental issues and problems’ and ch.6 on ‘Media and environmental communication’)


