

ESSAY 2: THINKING ABOUT PRINT CULTURE

Due Fri. 10/17 (over email to section leader as a Word document): Suggested length: 5 pg, plus bibliography.

The goal of this essay is to enable you to engage in a critical analysis of an aspect of contemporary print culture (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers). Below are some options for the essay. However, if you have another suggestion for a topic, please submit a proposal (over email) to your section leader by Friday Oct.3.

1. Some theorists contend that the print text “inevitably directs, governs, controls, indeed determines the reader’s response to it.” (Radway, p.467). Janice Radway, however, asks us to consider “other reading theories...that call for a rethinking of the concept of literacy...because they maintain it is the reader who controls the reading process, not the text.” (Radway, p.467) In the context of this debate, research at least two different fiction or nonfiction communities (e.g. science fiction, mystery/thriller, romance) on the Internet. How does your analysis compare with Radway’s notion of interpretive community? (Note: For the purposes of this assignment, it’s a good idea to be familiar with the genre of literature and at least a few of the books being discussed.)

2. Stuart Hall, et al. in “The Social Production of News” see news as constructed from a “frame of meanings familiar to the audience.” (Hall, et. al, p.646.) These “background assumptions”, according to Hall, may have biases and limitations that are less-than-visible to readers. Drawing upon Hall as well as other writers, analyze the coverage (print and photographic) of at least one domestic or foreign policy issue in two newspapers with some difference in orientation (e.g. Boston *Globe* and *Herald*, U.S. paper and paper from another country). If you wish, you may also integrate analysis of some TV news coverage into your essay. Comparatively, what “frames” (e.g. conflict, consensus) do you identify as operating in the stories? Where do the stories differ? Where do they converge? What aspects of the stories seem to be missing? What are the implications of your analysis for the ideal of objectivity in journalism?

3. For some communications scholars, such as Neil Postman, print culture is dying, losing its appeal in the age of televisual and digital technology. Analyze the “*Harry Potter*” craze in the light of Postman’s contention. Draw upon some newspaper and magazine articles to support your argument.