

CMN 538-CF: The Problem of the Public

Spring 2015

Wednesdays, 2-5 pm

4103 Lincoln Hall

Professor Cara Finnegan

Office: 4098 Lincoln Hall

Phone: 217-333-1855 (office; voice mail)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-1:45 pm and by appt.

E-Mail: caraf@illinois.edu (best way to reach me)

Course Web Site: <https://learn.illinois.edu/course/view.php?id=9774>

Library Resources for Rhetorical Studies:

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/cm/guides/course/rhetresource.html>

Course Description

Most formulations of communication assume the existence of something called “the public.” As citizens, we behave *as if* there is a public in which our participation matters. As teachers, we teach *as if* there is a public to be addressed and influenced by our students. As researchers, we study rhetoric and politics *as if* it exists in a public space that we are capable of locating, grasping, and describing. As activists, we work *as if* it is possible to change norms of public engagement. But what precisely is this thing we call “the public”? In the 1920’s John Dewey wrote about “the public and its problems.” This seminar tweaks Dewey a bit to suggest that the public *is* the problem. That is, if we wish our work to speak to or about “the public,” scholars of communication must come to terms with ongoing contestation over the term itself.

This seminar will engage a range of critical and theoretical literature so that students may familiarize themselves with this foundational construct of rhetorical, communication, and political theory. Questions we will engage include: How best should we conceptualize “the public”? Is it a space? A mode of communication? An attitude? A habit? How are we to understand what happens “in public”? What is the role of media and digital culture in framing our experiences of publicity? What modes of citizenship are enabled or disabled by the ways we choose to be “in public”? How do race, class, gender, citizenship status and sexuality influence our sense of what constitutes “the public”? In exploring these and other questions, a number of interesting tensions will emerge, including those between public/private, civility/dissent, civil society/the state, unity/division, and rational/spectacular.

Because the goal of this course is to introduce you to core concepts in the field, the assignments emphasize reading, understanding, questioning, and synthesizing existing material rather than conducting original research.

The course is ideal for master’s and doctoral students interested in rhetoric, argumentation, political communication, media, and/or communication theory. You do *not* need previous coursework in rhetoric to take this course.

Some Thoughts on “Theory”

We will read a lot of dense, rich, conceptual work this semester. I assume that most of you have only a passing acquaintance with this body of literature, if you have any acquaintance at all. Do not be intimidated. Throughout the semester, we will be guided by rhetorical scholar Stephen Mailloux’s useful description of theory as “practice about practice.” That is, theory is not abstract, “out there” stuff with no connection to everyday practice. Rather, theory is a form of critical practice, a way of helping us to make sense of how things are in the world and how we want them to be.

Assignments (total of 250 points)

- (1) *Discussion leader.* You and a partner will lead discussion for one class period (beginning 3/4/15). You should prepare: (a) a 2-page handout to be circulated to the class; in it, you should identify what you see as the major themes of the week’s readings, themes that you will orchestrate the discussion to address; and (b) an annotated bibliography listing 5-8 additional sources beyond that week’s readings that you would like the class to know about (also circulated to the class). 75 points.
- (2) *Show and tell presentation.* On the last day of class (5/6), each of you will present a 5 minute formal presentation discussing how ideas we have discussed in class might be brought to bear on your specific research interests. The presentation should make explicit links to our readings and offer specific examples to illustrate your claims. Each presentation will be followed by 5 min. of Q & A. 50 points.
- (3) *Final, take-home essay exam.* The exam will cover the entire semester’s work. It serves two purposes: (a) to challenge you to engage course materials, synthesize concepts from readings, and demonstrate mastery over major themes of the course; and (b) to offer examples of typical questions for a comprehensive exam or dissertation literature review in this area. There will be some choice among questions. 100 points.
- (4) *Seminar participation.* You are successfully participating in the seminar when you (a) read carefully and bring detailed reading notes and questions to class; (b) engage productively in class—that is, ask questions, raise issues, deliberate with others in the room; (c) listen and respond to others critically yet charitably; and (d) avoid behaviors that block productive classroom conversation, such as monopolizing discussion, remaining silent, or offering comments that are merely informational or (un)appreciative. 25 points.

Readings

The following books are required. They have been ordered from the Illini Union Bookstore, but you’re welcome to procure them anywhere:

Jodi Dean, *Publicity’s Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Cornell, 2002)
 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press, 1927/1954)
 Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT, 1991)
 Linda Herrera, *Revolution in the Age of Social Media* (Verso, 2014)
 Jenny Rice, *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis* (Pittsburgh, 2012)
 Anna Young, *Prophets, Gurus, Pundits: Rhetorical Styles and Public Engagement* (SIU, 2014)

We will also read articles via a collection of links and PDFs on our Moodle site.

You may wish to consult these reference texts; all explain key terms we're exploring this semester and offer useful bibliographies of concepts in rhetorical and political theory.

Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (Oxford, 2006). Available full text online in our library.

Jasinski, James. *Sourcebook on Rhetoric* (Sage, 2001).
(worth purchasing if you're a rhetoric student)

Sloane, Thomas, ed. *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2000).
Available full text online in our library.

Administrative Miscellany

- (1) Use Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) for all class writing. For CMS help see <http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/citations.html#chicago>
- (2) I will refuse to read work that does not conform to minimum standards of grammar, spelling, mechanics, and citation for graduate-level work. Proofread all papers carefully. Double-space everything.
- (3) All written work should be turned in on paper and in person unless we have mutually agreed otherwise. I do not accept graded assignments via email.
- (4) Students who are found to have violated the University's academic integrity policies should expect to fail the course.
- (5) Barring serious family or medical emergencies, I will give no incompletes for this course.
- (6) If you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, feel free to contact me to discuss your specific needs.
- (7) Laptops, tablets, etc. are welcome in class for notetaking, referring to readings, and other activities directly related to class discussion. I reserve the right to declare "screens down" at any point during class. Please turn off your cellphones or set them on silent mode when you come to class. No text messaging during class.

Schedule of Readings

Key: PDF=article on Moodle site
 W=web link on Moodle site
 FYE: for your edification (optional readings, things to file away for later, etc.)

Note: Do each week's readings in the order I have listed them here; I arrange readings in a way that I feel best tells that week's story.

1/21 Introductions; Popular Narratives of Declining Publicity

Fairlie, "The Decline of Oratory" (PDF)
 Lasch, "Journalism, Publicity, and the Lost Art of Political Argument" (PDF)
 Zarefsky, "The Decline of Public Debate" (PDF)
 Gore, "Keynote Address at *We Media* Conference" (W)
 Gladwell, "Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted" (W)
 Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media" (PDF)
 Wexler, "Public Humanities in Vulnerable Times" (W)
 Hsu, "The Civility Wars" (W)

1/28 Modernism's Progressive Publicity

Peters, "The Problem of Communication" (PDF)
 Lippmann, excerpts from *The Phantom Public* (PDF)
 Dewey, *The Problem of the Public* (chapters 1-4)
 FYE: Stuhr, "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy" (PDF)

2/4 Modernism's Progressive Publicity, cont.

Dewey, *The Problem of the Public* (chapters 5-6)
 Asen and Brouwer, "John Dewey and the Public Sphere" (PDF)
 FYE: Finnegan, "Elastic, Agonistic Publics" (PDF)

2/11 Bourgeois Publicity

Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere" (PDF)
 Habermas, *Structural Transformation* (pp. xi-140)

2/18 Publicity, Civility, and Dissent (visitor: Prof. Bill Keith, UW-Milwaukee)

See Moodle for readings Professor Keith has assigned us

2/25 Bourgeois Publicity, cont.

Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" (PDF)
 Habermas, *Structural Transformation* (pp. 141-250)

3/4 Critiques of Bourgeois Publicity

Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere?" (PDF)
 Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere" (PDF)
 Robbins, "Introduction: The Public as Phantom" (PDF)
 FYE: Strum, "A Bibliography of the Concept of *Öffentlichkeit*" (PDF)
 FYE: Social Science Research Council, "Public Sphere Guide" (W)

3/11 Gendered Publicity: The Public and the Private

Ryan, "Gender and Public Access" (PDF)
 Landes, Introduction to *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (PDF)
 Fraser, "Sex, Lies, and the Public Sphere" (PDF)
 Ryan, "The Public and the Private Good" (PDF)
 Landes, "Further Thoughts on the Public/Private Distinction" (PDF)

3/18 Visual Culture and Publicity (visitor: Michael Shaw, publisher, BAGNews Notes)

Finnegan and Kang, "'Sighting' the Public"
 Lucaites and Hariman, "Visual Rhetoric, Journalism, and Public Culture"

Before class, familiarize yourself with bagnewsnotes.com and watch one BagNews Salon (see Moodle for link). Come with three questions for Shaw that connect to ideas about visual culture, rhetoric, and the public sphere.

3/25 SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

4/1 Counterpublicity

Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics" (PDF)
 Asen and Brouwer, "Introduction: Reconfigurations of the Public Sphere" (PDF)
 Brouwer, "ACT-ing UP in Congressional Hearings" (PDF)
 Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere" (PDF)
 Pezzullo, "Resisting National Breast Cancer Awareness Month" (PDF)
 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" (PDF)

4/8 Technology, Culture, and Capitalism

Dean, *Publicity's Secret*

4/15 Global/Transnational Publicity

Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere" (PDF)
 Ugarteche, "A Critique of Fraser" (PDF)
 Kang, "Coming to Terms With Unreasonable Global Power" (PDF)
 Herrera, *Revolution in the Age of Social Media*

4/22 Subjectivity and Public Space

Rice, *Distant Publics*

4/29 Publicity and Public Intellectuals

Young, *Prophets, Gurus, and Pundits*

5/6 Show and Tell: How Publics Theory Connects to My Work

Each student will prepare a 5-minute, formal presentation outlining how publics theory as we have discussed it this semester connects to her/his specific research interests. Each presentation will be followed immediately by 5 minutes for Q&A with the classroom audience.

5/13 FINAL EXAM DUE between 2:30-4:30 pm in CF's office (4098 Lincoln)