



Universiteit Utrecht

Advanced Trajectory

Comparative Media Studies



This booklet provides information about the advanced trajectory (verdiepingspakket) Comparative Media Studies within the BA programme Media en cultuur. An advanced trajectory is a coherent selection of four courses. In the trajectory Comparative Media Studies all four courses are in English and have an explicit media comparative perspective and interdisciplinary approach. Having completed both basic trajectories (basispakket 1 and 2) it is now time to further deepen your knowledge and skills. This booklet describes what is on offer in this trajectory, how the programme is composed, and what knowledge and skills you will develop. After completion of this trajectory you then take the Research Seminar (Onderzoeksseminar) and finally write your BA thesis on a topic in line with this trajectory.

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Picture cover
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FOR WHOM?

The trajectory in Comparative Media Studies is meant for students who have a broad interest in historical and theoretical topics with regard to media and performance within the broader context of our mediatised culture and society in which film, television, digital media, and theatre and dance, are increasingly interrelated in many ways and respects. More specifically, students following this advanced trajectory are interested in subjects like media and ecological issues, spectatorship, media and performance in transition, and the performativity and mobility of screen media. This trajectory is particularly recommended to students who prefer to study several objects – theatre and dance, film and television, and digital media – instead of mainly one of these, who want to be challenged in developing research skills, and therefore would like to prepare for the research master Media, Art and Performance Studies. This two-year programme is also characterised by a media-comparative perspective and a focus on media and performance technologies, ecologies, transitions and cultures within our contemporary mediatised culture and society.

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PROGRAMME

The Advanced Trajectory Comparative Media Studies consists of the following courses:

[Green media and civic engagement](#) (block 1): how can media address today's environmental challenges and how do we conceptualize the impact of (green) media from a media-comparative perspective?

[Audience & Spectatorship](#) (block 2): how does performance – in the broadest sense – construct spectatorship and invite different modes of looking, engaging and behaving?

Television in Transition (block 3): what are the major shifts in the development of television in the broader context and as part of the (historical) media ensemble?

Spaces and Screens (block 4): what are the (changing) relationships between screen technologies and media practices with respect to spatial, material and physical, and performative aspects?

TOPICS AND CONCEPTS

Green media and civic engagement

Contemporary media are used not only to entertain, but also to persuade people, raising their awareness and changing or reinforcing their attitudes and behavior for the good of society. "Green media" seek to contribute to ecological thought and to make people become ecological citizens. This course introduces students to key environmental issues as these are articulated in computer games (ecogames, eco-modding), virtual reality, social media, data visualizations, transmedia, film (art, Hollywood, science fiction, video essays), documentaries, television series, and theatre and dance performances. The underlying questions are: how can media address today's environmental challenges? How do we conceptualize the impact of (green) media from a media-comparative perspective? How can green media facilitate social change on a micro-, meso- and macro- level? How do green media construct (playful forms of) civic engagement by positioning users in medium-specific ways? What is the environmental impact of media production, distribution and reception? Examining the ways in which green media can influence the public's awareness of environmental issues, this course is a critical starting point for students researching and studying the growing field of green media studies as a subdiscipline within the environmental humanities.

Audience & Spectatorship

In this course we will examine in which ways performances – inside the theatre as well as outside – address audiences. Different modes of address invite different modes of looking, allow for different modes of engaging and behaving (while excluding others), and suggest different modes of interpreting? Special attention will be paid to the relationship between performance and media and how in both we may observe a general transformation ‘from audience to participant’. Key concepts are focalisation, modes of address, positioning, dramaturgy, audience and participation.

Television in Transition

This course reflects on technologies, regulatory regimes, industrial practice, and national contexts that shape the evolution of TV, both historically and in the contemporary digital context. These forces characterize the emergence of new media and play a vital role in ongoing debates about media identity, change, and convergence. The course surveys five themes:

- transmedia storytelling
- transnational television
- media regulation: what’s still stopping the global flow of television?
- participatory television and user-generated content (UGC)
- media citizenship

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Spaces and Screens

In this course we will investigate the relationship between screen technologies and culturally embedded screen practices, specifically in public and urban contexts. Screen phenomena beside the classical “cinematic” and “televisual” screen that will be discussed and analysed are urban screens, mobile screens, location-based technologies, VR and AR, video mapping and other outdoor light projections, interactive screen-based installations, media architecture, the staging of screens in live performances, etc. The focus of our analyses will be instances of change and innovation, as well as the comparison of different and/or converging media forms. Zooming in on moments when new spaces are created by new screens, screen-based constellations, and their spatial design, the

perspective that we will develop in this course is a historically informed comparative analysis. For this, we will reflect on theories about the specificity of screen technologies, location-based media practices, and spatial, material, physical, and performative aspects of screen uses, as well as the screens' users or spectators. Starting points for our inquiries will be offered by current debates about technological innovation, cultural change, transmediality, and intermediality, as well as questions about medium specificity, hybridity, and convergence, along-side reflections on materiality in an age of digitisation.

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Panorama van urban screens. Media Architecture Biennale, 2014
Foto © Nanna Verhoeff

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS, PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

As already mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this booklet, all courses in this trajectory are characterised by – what's in a name? – a

media comparative perspective and an interdisciplinary approach. Although each course more or less takes *one* of the objects concerned as a main reference point for orientation and discussion – respectively digital media and culture, theatre and dance performances, television and its technological ‘extensions’, and film and other screen media – the topics and concepts addressed will be relevant for and applicable to *all* objects. Moreover, they make us aware of the mutual relations between these objects within the broader context of a mediatised culture and society which they jointly constitute and in which they are used for many different purposes like information, communication, navigation, participation, and, last but not least, entertainment.

The four courses might be different in terms of their emphasis on a historical or theoretical perspective, but they all have in common that both perspectives remain interconnected, in as far needed for the sake of making sense and relevance. Also, in terms of methodologies, there are no strict distinctions or differences between the courses. They all share a common methodological orientation with respect understanding media and performance phenomena by means of case analyses. The applied theories and concepts are used in order:

- to define or even constitute the research object(s),
- to determine the perspective from and focus with which the object(s) will be studied (mainly phrased in terms of questions),
- to distinguish its/their characteristic features and the context in which it/they occur(s), and
- to develop a procedure or method (or decide which already existing procedure or method to follow) for analysis.

The course Green Media provides tools for a critical understanding of how (green) media – in the broadest sense – construct (playful forms of) civic engagement and how they can influence the public’s awareness of societal (environmental) challenges by building alternative possible (story)worlds, suggesting interpretations and positioning users in medium-specific ways.

The course [Audience & Spectatorship](#) provides exercises in making “critical analyses” and learning how all kinds of performances invite and guide their audiences in looking at and understanding the world. In contemporary performances in particular, spectators are expected to take up an active role in this respect.

The course [Television in Transition](#) provides theoretical concepts for describing the global television landscape and getting insight into the logics of the television industries and the different practices of television audiences. In this course the production, distribution and perception of global television are related to one another. The research methods that will be discussed are from political economy and discourse analysis.

The course [Spaces and Screens](#) provides theoretical concepts for understanding and analyzing (innovative) practices of screen media technologies and how these are used in public and (often) urban contexts.

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BESIDES?

Next to two *basispakketten* and a *verdiepingspakket* (like this advanced trajectory [Comparative Media Studies](#)), each bachelor programme entails a *profielingsruimte* (profiling space) of 60 ects. Half of this space is needed for a mandatory *profielingspakket*, a profiling trajectory, which may consist of

- a minor programme – a package of four thematically related courses – within Utrecht University *or*
- studying abroad (a valuable option for those who would like to live abroad for a while and get a sense of the international orientation of academic life) *or*
- a second “verdiepingspakket” within *Media en cultuur* (because of one overlapping course the student may freely choose a further profile course as the fourth one).

In exceptional cases the student may choose a combination of four courses not entailed in the options above as their profiling trajectory. For this

option the student needs the permission of the exam committee in advance.

The other half of the profiling space may consist of

- an [internship](#) (7,5 of 15 ec)
- a [workshop](#) (only in Dutch) (one or more)
- an [honours programme](#)
- a (second/third) *verdiepingspakket* within *Media en Cultuur*
- free courses

We recommend students following this trajectory to choose an internship and/or a practicum. Both are relevant for professional orientation, learning by experience, and developing a deeper understanding of how theory and practice could relate to one another.

AND THEN?

With the knowledge and skills mentioned above you should be well prepared at the end of this advanced trajectory of four courses to write – in combination with the *onderzoeksseminar* – a BA thesis on a topic that in one way or another relates to the many issues addressed and discussed during the programme. Ideally, the BA thesis is of such a quality that you would meet the standards of admission for the two-year programme of the research master [Media, Art and Performance Studies](#), which is in signature and orientation quite similar. You could of course also choose a one-year academic master's programme offered by the Department of Media and Culture Studies, namely [Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy](#), [New Media & Digital Culture](#), or [Film- en televisiewetenschap](#).

MORE INFORMATION?

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REFERENCES

Here you find a list of useful references. It contains both titles that are being used and discussed in the courses of this track and suggestions for extra reading if you want to deepen your knowledge of the different media objects: theatre and dance, film, television, and new media.

Theatre and Dance

Balme, Christopher B. 2008. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

A useful and clarifying introduction to theatre studies, including a chapter on dance.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. New York and London: Routledge.

With respect to contemporary theatre, this is one of the most quoted texts in theatre studies and practice.

Bleeker, Maaïke. 2008. *Visuality in the Theatre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Used in the course Audience and Spectatorship, this text provides key concepts like address, focalisation, theatricality, and absorption for analysing post-dramatic theatre and dance performances.

Brayshaw, Theresa and Noel Witts (eds.). 2014 (3rd edition). *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*. London: Routledge.

Includes mainly primary texts written by important theatre and dance makers of the 20th century (also online available via UU Library).

Carter, Alexandra and Janet O'Shea (eds.). 2010. *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. Abindon, Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Provides a broad introduction to dance and dance studies and insight in key concepts and methods.

New media and digital culture

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Jonas Heide Smith & Susana Pajares Tosca. 2015(3rd edition). *Understanding Video Games: The Essential*. London: Routledge.

Provides an extensive introduction to the complexity of the medium computer games as well as the interdisciplinary field of game studies.

Fernández-Vara, Clara. 2014. *Introduction to Game Analysis*. London: Routledge.

A textbook on methodological issues in order to expose the complexity of computer games by textual analysis.

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Sicart, Miguel. 2014. *Play Matters*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Sicart considers play as part of human nature and conceptualizes play as a theoretical lens for characterizing and analysing contemporary media use.

Schäfer, Mirko Tobias. 2011. *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Schäfer critically examines actual cultural media uses and activities of creative consumers now that they are accredited in the contemporary participation culture – sometimes mistakenly – increasingly more power and possibilities.

Van Dijck, José. 2013. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book provides a historical and critical perspective on social media as a techno-cultural but also social-economical phenomenon much has much influence on human interaction.

Scharff, Robert C. & Val Dusek (eds.). 2014 (2nd edition). *Philosophy of Technology: The technological condition - an anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

This book provides an extensive selection of exemplary texts about technology philosophy from Plato to Latour and from Aristotle to Haraway, essential for everyone who searches for a deepening perspective on new media and digital culture.

Van den Boomen, Marianne, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Sybille Lammes & Joost Raessens (eds.). 2009. *Digital Material. Tracing new media in everyday life & technology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009.

A collective edition of articles about issues that are characteristic for the new media staff members in the Department of Media and Culture Studies, published in order to mark the tenth anniversary of the discipline New Media and Digital Culture.

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Lister, Martin, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant & Kieran Kelly (eds.). 2009 (2nd edition). *New Media: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge. A well-known textbook which is always helpful for a clear explanation and discussion of themes and concepts for research on new media and digital culture.

Television and its transmedia extensions

Butler, Jeremy G. 2010. *Television Style*. New York: Routledge.

This book provides an overview of different television styles as well as a very good introduction on how you could analyse textual elements of television. You will find, for example, a discussion on how soap operas are filmed and how websites of television series are graphically designed.

Holt, Jennifer, and Alisa Perren (eds.). 2009. *Media Industries. History, Theory, and Method*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

The authors of this book explain the relevance of media industries as a separate field of research by integrating existing approaches of television,

which might help to get a sense of the complex forces by which media industries are guided and restricted.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York Univ. Press.

In this book, Jenkins, one of the leading scholars in contemporary media studies, examines which important cultural transformations occur in a period in which old and new media come together and become intertwined. Jenkins particularly pays attention to the changing role and the increasing power of the media consumer and to what this means for commercial media companies.

Lotz, Amanda. 2007. *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. New York: New York Univ. Press.

Lotz explains how the media landscape in the United States of America has recently changed and how the television industry responds to these changes. She discusses how the television industry has reacted on the introduction of new technologies, which new forms of production and distribution have emerged and how modes of advertising and of watching television have changed.

Allen, Robert C. (ed.). 1992. *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled. Television and Contemporary Criticism*. Chapel Hill/London: Univ. of North Carolina Press.

This collection of eight essays introduces the reader into several important theories within the domain of culture studies, from semiotics, narrative theory, reception theory, feminist theory to genre theory. It shows how these theories could be used for a critical study of television.

Bignell, Jonathan, and Andreas Fickers (eds.). 2008. *A European Television History*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

First collection of essays in which the authors specifically pay attention to the European television history and to the complex role television plays in technological, economic, political, cultural and social changes in European societies.

Gray, Jonathan, and Amanda D. Lotz. 2011. *Television Studies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Provides an overview of the history of television studies and of its main theories and methods.

Thompson, Ethan, and Jason Mittel (eds.). 2013. *How To Watch Television*. New York: New York Univ. Press.

The authors of this collective edition discuss different approaches of studying television and demonstrate by means of specific examples different ways of analysing television programmes.

Journals

Many texts on television are published in journals. Via the University Library you will have access to journals like:

- *Critical Studies in Television*
- *Television & New Media*
- *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*
- *Convergence*
- *Media, Culture and Society*
- *Flow* (<http://www.flowjournal.org>)
- *View* (<http://viewjournal.eu>)

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Film and other screen media

Thompson, Kristin. *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

The author discusses the principles of a neo-formalist text analysis.

Bordwell, David. 2006. *The Way Hollywood Tells It*. (Berkeley: University of California Press.

The author discusses developments in the classical and the new Hollywood style.

Friedberg, Anne. 2009. *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

The author explores different conceptions about the cinema screen and other screens.

Huhtamo, Erkki and Jussi Parikka (eds.). 2011. *Media Archaeology: approaches, applications, and implications*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca and London: University of California Press.

This book introduces an archaeological approach to the study of media - one that sifts through the evidence to learn how media were written about, used, designed, preserved, and sometimes discarded.