

SOCI 2700 – POWER & EVERYDAY LIFE

ASSIGNMENT # 1 – MASS OBSERVATION

DUE OCTOBER 19, 2007

“In our haste to measure the historic, significant and revelatory, let’s not leave aside the essential: the truly intolerable, the truly inadmissible ... How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? ... How are we to speak of these ‘common things’, how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are...”

- from *Species of Spaces* by Georges Perec

“Mass Observation places a value on subjective experience, and descriptively rich material which can offer insights into everyday life ... The emphasis is on self-expression, candour and a willingness to be a vivid social commentator, and tell a good story.”

- from *Writing for Us* by Mass Observation

This assignment requires that you conduct six (6) hours of observation and write two (2) short essays.

Please choose one (1) of the following options:

OPTION 1 - PUBLIC TRANSIT HABITS & ATTITUDES

Places to observe: Bus stops and O-Train stations, lost & found offices, bus and train routes, park & ride lots, where passes and tickets are sold, etc.

Things to record: Locations, days of week, times of day, situations, activities, events, people you see, noises and conversations you hear, objects and materials around you, etc.

Essay questions:

1. Imagine you are contributing to the Mass Observation archive. Using the quotes on the previous page as inspiration, tell a story that expresses your observations, experiences, thoughts and feelings about people's everyday public transit habits and attitudes. Try to choose a theme or issue to focus on, and explain why you think it is interesting and important to understand.

2. Browse videos tagged "OC Transpo" on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/>), posts by the OC Transpo LiveJournal community (<http://community.livejournal.com/octranspo/>) and the field observations on the 73 bus journeys website (<http://www.studioincite.com/73urbanjourneys/field-ob.htm>).

2a.) Using specific examples, how do your experiences and observations compare and contrast with these accounts?

2b.) Which format(s) - blogs, videos, photos, sounds, essays, etc. - do you think best represent people's public transit habits and attitudes, and why?

OPTION 2 - LAUNDRY HABITS & ATTITUDES

Places to observe: Laundromats, shared laundry rooms, household laundry areas, where washers & dryers are sold, where cleaning products are sold, etc.

Things to record: Locations, days of week, times of day, situations, activities, events, people you see, noises and conversations you hear, objects and materials around you, etc.

Essay questions:

1. Imagine you are contributing to the Mass Observation archive. Using the quotes on the previous page as inspiration, tell a story that expresses your observations, experiences, thoughts and feelings about people's everyday laundry habits and attitudes. Try to choose a theme or issue to focus on, and explain why you think it is interesting and important to understand.

2. Browse James Hayes' "Guide to Ottawa Laundromats" (<http://chat.carleton.ca/~jhayes2/laundromat/>), photos tagged "laundry" on Flickr (<http://flickr.com/>) and videos tagged "laundry" on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/>).

2a.) Using specific examples, how do your experiences and observations compare and contrast with these accounts?

2b.) Which format(s) - blogs, videos, photos, sounds, essays, etc. - do you think best represent people's laundry habits and attitudes, and why?

Evaluation

Each assignment must include:

- 1) A cover page;
- 2) two essays (each 2 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. font); and
- 3) an envelope containing your observation notes.

ESSAY 1

Content (15 marks)

Essay reveals clear evidence of detailed observation; applies concepts from lectures and readings to personal opinions; takes a creative and critical perspective on something normally taken-for-granted.

Structure & style (5 marks)

Essay uses proper spelling and grammar; includes a descriptive title, introduction, body and conclusion.

ESSAY 2

Content (15 marks)

Essay demonstrates familiarity with web-based sources and effectively compares and contrasts them with personal observations; takes a critical and creative position on how different media express different aspects of everyday life.

Structure & style (5 marks)

Essay uses proper spelling and grammar; includes a descriptive title, introduction with clear thesis statement, body and conclusion.

TOTAL

40 marks – 20%