

SC 07601 Sociology of Popular Culture
Spring 2007
T Th, 9am

Instructor: Johanna Pabst

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:15am - 12pm and by appt

Course Objectives

This course is dedicated to investigating popular culture, its nature and role in our lives, and its broad effects on American society and culture, as well as its global effects. All of you come to the class with some knowledge of the subject under investigation, and this course is designed to take advantage of that fact.

We'll be looking at a variety of sociological perspectives to examine the role of media and popular culture in everyday life, with a particular emphasis on the organization of the mass media industry, the relationship between cultural consumption and social status, and the social significance of leisure activities from sports to shopping. We will explore definitions of "popular culture," as well as those who create it and consume it. We'll look at gender, race and ethnicity as they are expressed in mainstream popular culture and subculture. You'll also have chances to explore aspects of popular culture of particular interest to you.

As this is a core course, we will be looking at the sociology of popular culture with an eye towards the following concerns:

- 1) **The Perennial Questions** : What is culture and what is "popular culture"? How is it shared among different people? Why is popular culture so essential to our identity as Americans? Who controls culture?
- 2) **Cultural Diversity**: A number of readings will address the issue of cultural diversity in 21st century society, in order to appreciate the great variety of ethnic, racial, cultural perspectives and influences.
- 3) **Historical Perspective**: We'll look at popular culture in a historical context, especially with regard to the development of cultural theory and the evolution of various types of popular culture.
- 4) **Methodology**: We'll pay attention to the various ways popular culture can be studied, including thick description, interview, and content analysis. You'll learn how to study popular culture from a sociological perspective.

- 5) **Writing Component:** There is a strong writing requirement in this course. You'll be expected to react to the works we read and be able to perform your own analyses of popular culture, as well as integrate the cultural perspectives considered in class.
- 6) **Creating a Personal Philosophy:** You're encouraged to develop your own philosophy about the importance and relevance of popular culture, both in your life and in an academic sense. Popular culture was undoubtedly a part of your life before your class. Hopefully, you will view it with a new lens by the end of the course.

Course Requirements

Please silence your cell phones before class!

- 1) **Class Attendance and Participation:** Everyone is expected to attend class and participate in discussions and exercises. I also encourage you to bring in relevant material/articles for discussion, i.e. that connect what we are learning to current pop culture issues.
- 2) **Assigned Reading:** You should come to class having read all assigned material.
- 3) **Weekly Reactions:** You will be expected to contribute well-thought-out reactions to the WebCT class discussion list. You must contribute at least 10 times throughout the semester.
- 4) **Papers:** There will be 2 paper assignments throughout the semester. These will be an opportunity for you to critically connect concepts introduced in class with topics of interest to you. More detailed assignments will be given out when the time comes. Late papers will be penalized.
- 5) **Exams:** There will be a final in-class exam which will cover the core material of the course.

Weekly Responses:

This class deals with ideas that require regular **completion of reading** and regular **attendance**. To encourage reading and thought, you are required to write **ten 150-200 word thought-pieces on the week's readings, to be posted on the class Web CT website**.

Thought pieces should be posted as a **reply** to the appropriate posting within the discussion group. They should discuss at least two of the readings listed in the heading in the context of issues raised in the class, or connected thoughtfully to issues of interest to you. These writings can be quite informal, but thoughtless, cursory or late pieces will not receive credit. Four of the ten postings should respond, or at least make reference, to comments previously posted by classmates. Thought-pieces must be posted **by 8:00 PM on the evening before class for the next day's readings**. Only one posting a week will be counted as part of the required ten.

These pieces will be contract-graded, (10 = 100; 9 = 90 etc.). Doing all ten guarantees you 100% for this portion of your grade, but every missing thought-piece at semester's end will cost you ten percent of this portion of your course grade. These responses are worth 20% of your grade.

Grading

Your grade will be based on the following elements:

1) Class Attendance and Participation	10%
2) Weekly Responses	20%
3) Paper 1: 5-6 pages	20%
4) Papers 2: 7-8 pages	25%
5) <u>Final Exam</u>	25%
Total:	100%

Academic Honesty

You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty in your Student Handbook.

Disability Statement

If you have a disability, please let me know about it at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

Keeping in Touch with Me

I encourage you to drop by during my office hours if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or concepts in general. I can also make appointments outside of these hours if you check with me. The best way to contact me is through my email listed at the beginning of the syllabus. I check my email frequently and will get back to you as soon as possible.

Required Readings

- Gamson, Joshua. *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. University of California Press. 1994.
- Klein, Naomi. *No Logo*. Picador Press. 2002.
- Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance*. University of North Carolina Press. 1991.
- Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Wesleyan University Press. 1994.
- Online Course Reserves and WebCT Readings
 - (*) Indicates reading is in the library's online course reserve system
 - **WebCT**: Reading is on course's WebCT page

Course Schedule

PART I. WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE?

Week 1: Introductions

Jan 16 Introduction

Jan 18 What is Culture and Popular Culture?

- *Raymond Williams, "'Culture' and 'Masses'" p. 87-93 and p. 192-197
- **WebCT:** Philip Smith, "What is Culture? What is Cultural Theory?" from *Cultural Theory: An Introduction*: p. 1-5

Week 2: Theories of Popular Culture

Jan 23

- *Howard Becker, "Art as Collective Action," *American Sociological Review*, 1974: p. 767-776
- *C. Lee Harrington, "Constructing the Popular: Cultural Production and Consumption," p. 1-15
- **WebCT:** Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" p. 64-71

Jan 25 The Elite and the Masses

- *Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America" from *Rethinking Popular Culture*: p. 374- 397
- **WebCT:** Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," p. 39-46

PART II. MASS MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

Week 3: Mass Media and Advertising

Jan 30 Consumer Society

- *Adorno & Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *The Consumer Society Reader*: p. 3-19
- *Thorstein Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption," from *The Theory of the Leisure Class*: p. 43-62

Feb 1 The Business of Media

- *Croteau & Hoynes, "The New Media Giants" and "How the Media Business Influences Society" from *The Business of Media*: p. 71-107, 183-206

Week 4: Mass Media and Advertising, a Critical Approach

Feb 6

- Naomi Klein, *No Logo*: Ch. 1-4

Feb 8

- Klein, *No Logo*: Ch. 6, 8, 12

PART III. VIEWS OF FILM, TV AND PRINT

Week 5: Television

Feb 13 TV: For Better or Worse?

- *Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: Ch. 6, 10
- *Steven Johnson, *Everything Bad is Good for You*: “Television”: p. 62-116

Feb 15 News and a Culture of Fear

- *Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear*: Intro and Ch. 2, p. xi-xxviii and 23-49

Week 6: Queer Culture and Film

Feb 20

- View *The Celluloid Closet* in class
- **WebCT**: Judith Halberstam, “Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance,” p. 429-440

Paper 1 due

Feb 22

- *Danae Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism” from *Out in Culture*: p. 484-500

Week 7: Feminist Views

Feb 27 Shopping, Gender and Resistance

- *John Fiske, “Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance,” *The Consumer Society Reader*: p. 306- 328
- *Susan Bordo, “Hunger as Ideology,” *The Consumer Society Reader*: p. 99-114

Mar 1 Pornography

- **WebCT**: Laura Kipnis, “(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading Hustler” p. 223-240

*******SPRING BREAK: March 5 – 9*******

Week 8: Reading the Romance

Mar 13

- Radway, *Reading the Romance*: Chapters 2-4

Mar 15

- Radway, *Reading the Romance*: Chapters 6-7

PART IV. YOUTH CULTURE AND SUBCULTURE

Week 9:

Mar 20

- *Paul Hirsch, “Processing Fads and Fashions” from *Rethinking Popular Culture*: p. 313-334
- *Harris Friedberg, “‘Hang Up My Rock and Roll Shoes’: The Cultural Production of Rock and Roll,” p. 154-164
- *Mary Kosut, “An Ironic Fad: The Commodification and Consumption of Tattoos,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 39, No. 6, 2006: p. 1035-1048

Mar 22 Skateboarding and Subculture

- **WebCT:** Michael Nevin Willard, “Séance, Tricknology, Skateboarding, and the Space of Youth,” p. 462- 478
- View *Dogtown and Z-Boys* in class

Week 10: Hip-Hop Music

Mar 27

- Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*: Ch. 1-4

Mar 29

- Rose, *Black Noise*: Ch. 5

Week 11: TBA

Apr 3

- TBA

Apr 5: NO CLASS, EASTER BREAK

PART V. OTHER AREAS OF POPULAR CULTURE

Week 12: Celebrity and Fandom

Apr 10

- Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame*: Introduction and Ch. 3-4

Apr 12

- Gamson, *Claims to Fame*: Ch. 6 and Conclusion

Week 13: New Technologies and Popular Culture

Apr 17 The Importance of Medium

- *Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
- *Croteau and Hoynes, “Media Technology and Social Change,” from *Media/Society*: p. 261- 275

Apr 19 The Internet

- *Nakamura, “Head-hunting on the Internet: Identity Tourism, Avatars, and Racial Passing in Textual and Graphical Chat Spaces” p. 520-533*

Week 14: Globalization and Popular Culture

Apr 24

- *Inderpal Grewal, “Traveling Barbie: Indian Transnationality and New Consumer Subjects,” p. 168-183*
- *Henry Yu, “How Tiger Woods Lost his Stripes: Post-Nationalist American Studies as a History of Race, Migration, and the Commodification of Culture,” p. 197-209*

Apr 26 Japan

- *Anne Allison, “Portable Monsters and Commodity Cuteness: Pokemon as Japan’s New Global Power,” *Postcolonial Studies*, vol.6, n.3, 200: p. 381-395
- *Brian McVeigh, “How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool and Camp,” *Journal of Material Culture*, v. 5(2), 2000: p. 225-245

Week 15: Future of Popular Culture

May 1

- TBA

Paper 2 due

May 3 Conclusion

- Wrap up and Review

FINAL EXAM: Mon, May 14

9:00 A.M.