Popular Culture

Spring 2011
UNST 254, CRN 63802
Tuesday and Thursday 3:30-4:45
Cramer Hall – Room 224

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Course Description

We live in a society that is saturated in the media generated by popular culture. The average individual encounters 3,000 advertisements per day. A young person growing up in America over the last several decades had already viewed 10,000,000 advertisements by the time they turned 18. Americans spend over six hours every day watching TV, surfing the internet or accessing videos on mobile devices. This rate has been on an upward trajectory as new technology has allowed access of high quality streaming audio and video almost anywhere in urban environments. The web of information from science fiction that is both ubiquitous and instantly accessible is in many ways a reality.

Popular culture is often absorbed without thinking critically about its content or consequences. This is remarkable given the enormous impact it has on our lives, our identities and our consciousness. We often do not stop to think or question the underlying assumptions of popular culture, nor do we think about for what or whom such assumptions or content may support. Questions of power and ideology are deeply interwoven in popular culture despite their seeming absence. Additionally, popular culture has an incredible impact on how we view ourselves as individuals and in relation to others.

Popular culture has shifted radically over the last several decades. Indeed, the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have been marked by a continuous and arguably accelerating shift in cultural practices and the mental environment. Somewhat counter intuitively this shift has been gradual enough to mask the stark nature of the changes in the cultural landscape. What does it mean to spend over a third of our waking hours absorbing media that did not exist for our grandparents in their youth? How does social networking shift the nature of our social interactions? How has this affected the mental environment? What impact has this had on our society and social relations? How, if at all, has this privileged certain groups of people or changed power relations? Have these changes had a democratic or anti-democratic effect?

These are examples of the types of questions that this class will examine as we engage in critical thinking about popular culture. We will explore the discipline of cultural studies and different approaches to examining popular culture. These tools will allow us to begin to unpack the underlying assumptions of the popular culture we consume on a daily basis and begin to examine underlying issues of power and ideology.   Lastly, it will allow us to reflect upon the contemporary state of popular culture, its change over the decades and what impacts that has had on us both individually and socially.

Teaching/Learning Philosophy
I strive to create a participatory learning community in the classroom. I believe that all participants in a course, not only the instructor, have valuable knowledge, insight and analysis to contribute as co-learners. Furthermore, I believe that students should be part of selecting the topics of inquiry in collaboration with the instructor. This insures that not only do we pursue topics which the class is interested in and passionate about but also that we are selecting topics that are relevant and important based on the perspective of all participants in the course.

I have structured the course in an intentional fashion in order to foster this learning community. The course will not only be discussion driven, but the shape and form of the discussion will be directed by the students through the creation of discussion questions. Additionally, with the topic selection paper and final presentations the students will select two entire weeks of subject matter. Lastly, the reading journal and writing assignments will encourage a reflective learning practice that facilitates a deeper processing of course concepts and which encourages connection to real world issues. This structure is reflective of a commitment to the values of democracy, decentralization and a rich form of participation, which I hope will provide for a dynamic learning experience.

Course learning objectives
By the end of this course, you should be able to:
1. Explain different understandings of culture and popular culture.
2. Describe the intersection of corporations, consumerism and culture.
3. Reflect upon the individual and social consequences of both popular culture and technologically driven cultural changes.
4. Analyze a variety of different theoretical approaches to popular culture, in particular those relating to Antonio Gramsci.
5. Understand political and ideological dimensions of popular culture.
6. Comprehend concepts of globalization, race, class and gender as they relate to popular culture.
7. Produce multimedia including edited, oral interviews and online blog entries.
8. Apply course components to critical thinking about the popular culture experienced in your day-to-day existence.

University Studies Goals
University Studies has four principal learning goals: inquiry and critical thinking, communication, the diversity of human experiences and ethics and social responsibility. These learning goals seek to empower students as active, self-motivated learners, who have a dynamic capacity for communication. They further aim to foster understanding of the rich complexity of human experience in all its manifestations and better comprehension of the effect of individual and social choices on others and on society. This course will engage these learning goals over the course of the term. More information can be found at the University Studies webpage (http://www.pdx.edu/unst/).

Grading Criteria

Attendance at class and mentor sessions	(15%)
Participation in class and mentor session activities	(10%)

       Participation in mentor sessions
       Participation assignments
       Completion of the blog assignments

Online Discussion/Mentor Session Presentation	(10%)
Reading Journal	(20%)
Writing/Assignments/Quiz	(30%)

       Ideology and advertising (Blog)
       Quiz – Theory
       Theory and media
       Topic selection paper (Blog)
       Popular culture analysis (Blog)
       Interview – Popular Culture Exploration
       Interview – Cultural Change
       Final reflection

Final Presentation	(15%)

The standard 90/80/70/60 grading scale will be used.

Course Components

Attendance

Attendance in both the main and mentor sessions is important to your learning experience over the course of the term. Engagement with the lectures, films, discussions and other activities is a critical component of this course. A sign-in sheet will circulate at the beginning of both the main and mentor session. It is important that you arrive on time so as not to disturb you fellow classmates. If you are late you will miss the attendance points for the day.

Participation in Mentor Sessions

It is important that you participate in both the main and mentor session discussions. As co-learners we each hold knowledge that can add to our collective inquiry into popular culture. In the smaller and more intimate environment of the mentor session it is critical that you engage in the discussions each week. In particular this session allows for a rich discussion with your peers. Each mentor session you will receive one point for speaking at least once during the discussion portion of the class. If you do not speak during the discussion portion you will not receive this point for the day.

Participation Assignments

Over the course of the term there will be a variety of short, simple assignments. These assignments will be graded simply on the basis of completion. If you complete and turn in the assignment you will receive full credit.

Course Blog Entry

You will be asked to submit three entries to the course blog. This assignment will in many ways mirror your writing assignments, only you will be asked to make this available for other students to see. You will also be asked to accompany the entry with some media (video, audio, images, etc.). You should discuss popular culture that you are engaging in the normal course of your life. You will need to upload the content yourself, which we will learn how to do in both the main and mentor session. If you need additional assistance please visit me during office hours *before* the assignment is due. These entries will be graded with the same criteria used for the writing assignments.

You are encouraged to view the entries by other students throughout the term and discuss them in class and mentor sessions. We will intentionally use these entries as a subject of discussion at least twice during the term.

Online Discussion/Mentor Session Presentation

As discussed above we will seek to create a learning community in which all participants in this course relate to one another as co-learners. Part of this will be submitting and responding to weekly discussion questions.

Once during the term you will submit one question about the readings and ideas that will be discussed that week. As appropriate these questions can and should connect to previous class concepts and/or popular culture. These questions will need to be posted to blackboard by noon on the day of your mentor session.

This question will be based on the week's reading material and will also connect to a brief presentation you will do in mentor session. You will sign up to facilitate a discussion during one of your mentor sessions. This will involve preparing discussion questions, introducing the topics and facilitating the discussion. The student mentor will assist you in preparing for these presentations.

Each week you will need to write two responses to questions from that week. These may either respond to the original question or, when appropriate, to another student's response. Both responses must be submitted by noon of the following Monday, however, you are highly encouraged to respond prior to that.

When appropriate these questions will be used in class to organize and direct the discussion component of the main and mentor sessions. Furthermore, over the course of the term the responses will allow for an extra layer of discussion to occur. The goal of this component is to make the learning organic and responsive to the interests of the participants of this learning community.

Reading Journal

After each assigned reading or other media you will need to write a short, informal response. These journals will serve to keep you accountable to the readings and create a practice of reflection. It is important to stop for a moment and think, process and reflect upon new ideas. Your entries may be short and may take the form of a summary, a connection to another idea, reading or assignment, an

application to popular culture in your life, etc. Each response will receive either 1 or 0 points. In terms of this grading I will be solely looking for evidence that you completed the assigned reading or other media. However, three times during the term I will read and grade your entry closer as well as provide feedback. This will occur randomly over the course of the term. I would encourage you to use this exercise as a way to more fully process the material engaged in this course. **Lastly, a minimum of 50% of reading journal entries are required to be completed in order to pass the course**.

Writing Assignments

The writing assignments will engage the course material in a way that allows for an exploration of these ideas with the popular culture experienced in your everyday existence. These short papers should be about 2-3 double-spaced pages. The papers will be graded on the following 20-point scale:

Paper follows the assignment guidelines:	4 points
Paper is well-organized and well-written:	6 points
Paper demonstrates critical thinking and analysis:	6 points
Paper demonstrates synthesis with other course components, other relevant courses or your life experience:	4 points

Interviews

You will conduct two interviews during the term. These interviews will be recorded and edited using equipment available through University Studies. Training and technical assistance will be provided to enable you to have the skills and confidence necessary for this activity. The interviews will average about an hour and you will edit them down to 8-10 minutes. Interviewing as a mode of inquiry offers a unique, social form of engagement with the issues we will be exploring. It is included to empower students in the creation of multimedia and to provide a diversity of assignments.

Final Presentation

You will complete a final presentation on a topic of your choosing in a small group. Each mentor session will divide into two small groups for the purposes of this presentation. You will have the opportunity to share ideas and self select into a group that shares common interests. Over the course of the term you will have the opportunity within the mentor session to work with your group to develop your presentation. However, successful completion of this assignment will require additional meetings outside of class. Your presentation should take the ideas and concepts that we have been engaging over the course of the term and apply them in an academic inquiry of popular culture. This could take the form of analyzing a TV show, music album, film genre, internet sub-culture, artistic style, mode of transportation, food practices, etc.

Useful Texts:
The following texts provide broad overviews of popular culture as a topic of academic inquiry. We will be reading excerpts from some of these texts over the course of the term. They are provided here as additional resources for background information or additional research.

Crothers, L. (2007). *Globalization and American Popular Culture.* Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Danesi, M. (2008). *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives.* Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Duncombe, S. (2002). *Cultural Resistance Reader.* New York: Verso.

Storey, J. (2009) *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* San Francisco: Pearson Longman.

Storey, J. (1998) *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader.* Atlanta: The University of Georgia Press.

Sturken, M. & Cartwright, L. (2003). *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Magazines, Journal and Websites
Here are four interesting places that you might want to poke around in to find critical inquiries and analysis on popular culture:

Adbusters Magazine: Journal of the Mental Environment

Bitch Magazine: A Feminist Response to Popular Culture

Cultural Studies Association

Portland Center for Public Humanities

Online Course Reserves
Over the course of the term some readings may be made available via the online course reserves provided by the library. Any readings will be found on the course reserves section on the library webpage (http://psu-eres.lib.pdx.edu/eres/courseindex.aspx?&page=search). After searching by instructor name, course number, etc. you will find the readings for the course. The password for the readings is my last name.

On-line Access to Course Information
The course syllabus, handouts, assignments, selected readings and additional resources will be made available on-line through Desire2Learn. To access this information, you must have a PSU ODIN account. Your Desire2Learn ID will be the same as your ODIN username and your password will be the last four digits of your PSU Student ID number. You will log into the course by going to http://www.psuonline.pdx.edu and entering your id and username in the "Online Course Login" section to the right of the page.

Course Blog
I have created a blog for this course (www.psupopculture.wordpress.com). This will be a place where I will post images, audio and video that are shown in class so that you can easily access them as needed. Assignments, the syllabus, and other course relevant information can be found here in addition to Blackboard. It will also include additional information and links for you to explore for those topics that

are of particular interest to you. Lastly, each student will be required to complete two blog entries to share with the class (described above).

Student Conduct and Technology
It is strongly encouraged that you read the Student Conduct Code (http://www.pdx.edu/dos/student-code-conduct). It details your rights and responsibilities as a student and as a member of the Portland State community. To foster a positive, respectful environment, free of distractions for all participants, there is a zero-tolerance cell phone policy. When you enter the classrooms, turn off or silence your phone and put it away. Similarly, laptops and other hand-held devices are not to be used during class, unless you have an exemption cleared with the professor and the mentor. Additionally in mentor sessions, checking email or using the internet is considered non-participation and will be marked as such.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities who may require accommodations are encouraged to contact the PSU Disability Center (http://www.drc.pdx.edu/) and the instructor at the beginning of the term.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is the act of claiming someone's work as your own through copying it without giving the creator of the work credit. Plagiarism can also include using another person's theories, ideas, or phrases without proper attribution. The simplest way to avoid plagiarizing is to always cite the sources from which you gather information or develop arguments. Plagiarism is a serious issue and is a violation of the PSU Student Conduct Code. University policy calls for severe sanctions for any form of academic dishonesty.

Late Assignments
Writing and participation assignments are due at the end of the assigned class period unless otherwise indicated. Reading journals are due each class period for any assigned readings. Assignments and the reading journal will receive a reduced grade (10%) for each day that it is late. Assignments will not be accepted by email. However, if you are absent you may send me a copy of the assignment so that I know you have completed it. You must then bring a printed copy when you come to the next class session.

Weekly Schedule
Our tentative weekly schedule is included below. Please note that the schedule is subject to change.

Course Schedule, Spring Term 2011
Popular Culture

Week 1 – Introduction to Popular Culture

3/29
Introductions, course overview

3/31
What is popular culture?

Assignment Due: Popular Culture – Self Guided Tour
                        Media Use Survey

Readings: Course syllabus

Week 2 – Looking vs. Seeing: Representation, Images, Ideology, Meaning and Cultural Populism

4/5
Looking at culture and ideology

Readings: Storey, J. (2009) *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* Chapter 1 – What is Popular Culture? (Pg. 1-19)

                  Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2003) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* (10-24).

                  Morris, E. (2008, August 11). Photography as a Weapon [Electronic version]. *The New York Times.* Retrieved on September 26, 2010, from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/11/photography-as-a-weapon.

4/7
Meaning and Cultural Populism

Readings: Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2003) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* (45-70).

Week 3 – The Culture Industry

4/12
Culture Industry

Readings: Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2003) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* (165-168).

                  O'Brien S. and Szeman, Imre (2004) "The Culture Industry Thesis." *Popular Culture: A User's Guide*. (Pg. 101-112)

Assignment Due: Ideology and advertising (written version)

4/14
Corporations, media consolidation and the contemporary culture industry

Introduction to Gramsci and popular culture as a site of negotiation
Film excerpt: *The Merchants of Cool*

Readings: Storey, J. *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* Chapter 1 – What is Popular Culture? (Pg. 10-11, review Storey's 5th definition of popular culture)

Storey, J. *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* Chapter 1 – What is Popular Culture? (Pg. 79-82, section on hegemony)

Week 4 – Antonio Gramsci, Ecology and the Virtual

4/19
Avatar and sustainability

Readings: Bennett, T. (1998) "Popular Culture and the 'turn to Gramsci'", in Storey, John (ed). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.

Gramsci, A. (2002) "From the Prison Notebooks", in Duncombe, S. (ed). *Cultural Resistance Reader.*

Gramsci, A. (1998) "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State'", in Storey, John (ed). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.

Hunt, J. (2010, October 22). An Ineffective Truth. [Electronic version]. *Vanguard.* Retrieved on October 26, 2010, from http://www.psuvanguard.com/arts-culture/an-ineffective-truth-1.2377889.

Television Clip: "Banksy Opening." The Simpons. Fox. 10 October 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1iplQQJTo&feature=player_embedded

Assignment Due: Ideology and advertising (revisions and blog version)

4/21
Street Art and capitalism
Film except: *Exit Through the Gift Shop*
QUIZ – Popular culture theory

Readings: TBD

Week 5 – The Mass Media, Democratic Potential and the Public Sphere

4/26
Mass media and the public sphere
Film: *Digital Nation* (Chapters 5-9)

Readings: Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2003) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* (151-161, 168-172, 177-183).

Film: *Digital Nation* (Chapters 1-4, approximately 50 minutes)

4/28
Social media and revolution through three theoretical lenses

Readings: Gladwell, M. (2010) Small Change. *New Yorker.* October 4, 2010.

Gladwell, M. (2011) Egypt [Electronic Version]. *New Yorker Blog.* February 2, 2011. Retrieved on February 22, 2011 from http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/ newsdesk/2011/02/does-egypt-need-twitter.html.

Brandzel, B. (2010) What Malcolm Gladwell Missed About Online Organizing and Creating Big Change [Electronic Version]. *The Nation.* November, 15, 2010. Retrieved on December 29, 2010 from http://www.thenation.com/article/156447/aiming-hydrant-what-malcolm-gladwell-missed-about-online-organizing-and-creating-big-?rel=emailNation.

Supplemental Readings (not required):

Barry, Ellen. (2009, April 7). Protests in Moldova Explode, with Help of Twitter. [Electronic version]. *New York Times.* Retrieved on October 20, 2010, from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html

Stone, Brand and Cohen, Noam. (2009, June 15). Social Networks Spread Defiance Online. [Electronic version]. *New York Times.* Retrieved on October 20, 2010, from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/world/middleeast/16media.html.

Cohen, Noam. (2009, June 20). Twitter on the Barricades: Six Lessons Learned. [Electronic version]. *New York Times.* Retrieved on October 20, 2010, from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/21/weekinreview/21cohenweb.html.

Goodman, Amy. (2009, October 6). Twitter Crackdown: NYC Activist Arrested for Using Social Networking Site during G-20 Protests in Pittsburgh. [Electronic version]. *Democracy Now!.* Retrieved on October 20, 2010, from http://www.democracynow.org/ 2009/10/6/twitter_crackdown_nyc_activist_arrested_for

Esfandiari, Golnaz. (2010, June 7). The Twitter Devolution. [Electronic version]. *Foreign Policy.* Retrieved on October 20, 2010, from http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/07/the_twitter_revolution_that_wasnt.

Assignment Due: Theory and Media

Week 6 – Corporations, Celebrity, Advertising and Youth Culture

5/3
Corporations, advertising and youth culture

Readings: Klein, N. (1999) *No Logo*. Chapter 2 – The Brand Expands (Pg. 27-62)

Haddow, D. (2008, July 29) Hipsters: The Dead End of Western Civilization. [Electronic Version] *Adbusters Magazine.* Retrieved on February 2, 2011, from http://www.adbusters.org/magazine/79/hipster.html.

Previous student papers TBD

Lasn, K. (1999) *Culture Jam*. Ecology of the Mind. (Pg. 10-27)

Greenfield, S. (2008). *Debate in the House of Lords.* Retrieved November 9, 2010, from http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90212-0010.htm. – Read only the section where Baroness Greenfield is speaking, which is marked by her name.

5/5
Topic selection

Assignment Due: Blog Entry - Topic Selection

Week 7 – Race and Gender

5/10
Film: *Reel Bad Arabs*

Readings: Oregon Public Broadcasting. (2010, December 21st) Contrasting Coverage. [Electronic Version] *Think Out Loud.* Retrieved on February 7, 2011, from http://www.opb.org/thinkoutloud/shows/contrasting-coverage/.

Piece from Reed dude?

5/12
Gender and Feminism

Readings: Bordo, S. (1993) "Hunger as an Ideology." *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Assignment Due: Interview – Popular Culture Exploration

Week 8 – Gender Continued and Globalization, Local Culture and Sub-cultures

5/17
Film: *Killing Us Softly 4*
Sex and advertising

Readings: Previous student papers TBD

Bitch Magazine (http://bitchmagazine.org/)
- Read one article of your choice from the magazine (click articles under the tab "Bitch Magazine")
- Explore the blogs section of the website

5/19
Globalization, local culture and sub-cultures

Readings: Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2003) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* (CH 9 – 389-426).

Week 9 – Topic TBD and Social/Cultural Change

5/24
Topic TBD

5/26
Topic TBD
Social change and cultural change

Week 10 – Group Presentations and Conclusions

5/31
Final presentations

6/2
Final presentation and conclusions

Assignment Due: Interview – Cultural Change

Finals Week

6/6
Assignment Due: Final reflection