

## **SOCI 137 - 601: MASS MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE**

University of Pennsylvania, College of General Studies

Fall 2004; T 6:00-9:00

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### **Course Description:**

We have two main goals for this class: to introduce us to the theories that guide the research in the field and to foster media literacy. We will begin by taking a creative and critical look at the theoretical texts that gave sociology and other social sciences the conceptual tools to study mass media and popular culture. We will relate these texts to the contemporary examples from popular culture and discuss how they can help us understand the world we live in. These discussions are intended to foster an awareness of the need for media literacy. Since media and other forms of popular culture provide explanations of how the world works and teach us how we should live our lives, we will be asking ourselves the following questions: How does this knowledge come about? What do advertisements, news, shopping, rap music, fashion, internet chat rooms, or cartoons teach us about ourselves, others and the world? We will look at political and social implications of this knowledge production and discuss the responsibilities with which our global citizenship entrusts us. You are expected to activate your intellectual energies through creative thinking, critical analysis, and constructive discussion about new ways of looking at things we see and hear around us in our every day life.

### **Course Requirements:**

Four response papers on the readings Week 1-5, 20%

Two memos on the readings Week 6-13 and their presentation in class, 20%

Research Report: 30%

Final Exam: Comprehensive, 30%

Response Papers: The first five weeks we will be discussing the key theoretical sources for the study of media and popular culture. These are classics and should be in the educational repertoire of every college graduate. They are not always a coffee shop read so take your time to read them carefully. For your response paper, choose one of the two readings for the week and write a one-page, single-spaced summary and commentary of the main points and their contemporary relevance as you see it. E-mail the response paper to me on the Monday before class by 6PM. Mark your e-mail as SOCI 137 – RESPONSE TO... and your name.

Memos: From Week 6-13 you will write two memos on a discussion reading of a given week. A one page single-spaced critical summary should consist of the following: 1) What is the article discussing? What are its main points? What are its conclusions? 2) How does it approach the topic? What kinds of arguments are used to present the point? What is left out that you think should have been included? 3) How is the article related to the topic and how does it complement other articles discussed that week? 4) Take-home points for the class? and 5) A set of questions emerging from the reading that you want to discuss in class. You will e-mail me your report no later than 6 PM on a Monday before the class. I will comment on your memo and send it back to you that same evening to help you prepare for your presentation in class on Tuesday. No credit will be given for late memos. Mark your memo as SOCI 137 – MEMO and your name.

**Research Report:** Starting with Week 5 through Week 12, I have proposed two research topics each week for you to explore. You can choose one of my topics or come up with your own. The idea is to conduct original research by actively observing and analyzing different forms of popular culture. You will present a short summary of your research in class and turn in, on that same day, a five page report with all your supporting materials. Remember to summarize your presentation with the take-home points you will have for the class. No credit will be given for late reports.

**Final Exam:** Final exam is a comprehensive take-home exam through which you will demonstrate that you have read all the readings and thought about the issues they discuss. The exam consists of two parts. In the first part, you will be asked to choose five concepts and explain in about a page for each what it means and how it has been used in the literature we discussed. The second part of the final is about a four page essay question that will provide you with an opportunity to critically evaluate what you have learned in this class. There is no make-up exam for a final.

**Required Readings:**

Reading packet is available from Wharton Reprographics. (BP)  
Other readings are available on line through Van Pelt Library on E-Journals (E-J)  
(click E-Resources; E-Journals; Sociology; choose the journal title)

**Media Activism: To Check Out on Your Own (if You Want)**

You may want to explore on your own some alternatives to the mainstream popular culture and the politics-as-usual.

<http://www.moveon.org>

<http://www.about-face.org>

<http://www.papertiger.org> (Paper Tiger Television)

<http://www.fair.org> (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting)

<http://www.mediaaccess.org/index.html> (Media Access Project)

<http://www.rcfp.org/homefrontconfidential/> (Reporters Committee and the Freedom of the Press.)

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**WEEK 1 – Sep. 14: Approaches to Popular Culture**

General introduction to the course

Immanuel Kant. 1784. An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?

<http://www.blackmask.com/books91c/whatenli.htm>

**WEEK 2 – Sep. 21: The Frankfurt School**

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. 1944. The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception. In: *Dialektik der Aufklarung (Dialectic of Enlightenment)*.

<http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hist100.96/cultureindustry.html>

(Review available on <http://www.popcultures.com/theorist.htm> )

Walter Benjamin. 1968 (1936). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In: *Illuminations*. (Trans. Hanna Arendt). Fontana/Collins.

Go to this website and under ‘Select Author’ choose ‘Benjamin, Art’

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

### **WEEK 3 - Sep. 28: British Cultural Studies**

Raymond Williams. 1958. *The Sociology of Culture*. In: *Society and Culture, 1780-1950*. Columbia University Press. (BP)

(For a short excerpt from his essay of 1958 'Culture is Ordinary' go to [http://www.wsu.edu:8001/vwsu/gened/learn-modules/top\\_culture/culture-definitions/raymond-williams.html](http://www.wsu.edu:8001/vwsu/gened/learn-modules/top_culture/culture-definitions/raymond-williams.html) )

(For a review on Williams and his work go to <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/williamsray/williamsray.htm> )

Stuart Hall. 1979. Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect.' In Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott (Eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Sage. (BP)

SCREENING: *The Ad and the Ego*

### **WEEK 4 - Oct. 5: Postmodernism and Poststructuralism**

Jean-Francois Lyotard. 1984 (1979). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (trans. Bennington and Massumi). University of Minnesota, 3-37. (BP)

Jean Baudrillard. 1996. Disneyworld Company. *Liberation*. March 4. <http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/disneyworld.html>

(Read excerpt from *Simulacra and Simulation*. (1981) <http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/precession.html> and a synopsis <http://www.uta.edu/english/hawk/semiotics/ baud.htm> )

SCREENING: *The Matrix*

(A commentary on the Culture Industry, poststructuralism and The Matrix at: <http://www.poppolitics.com/articles/2003-08-05-cultureindustry.shtml> )

### **WEEK 5 – Oct. 12: Civil Society and the Public Sphere**

Frazer, Nancy. 1992. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in: Calhoun (Ed) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 109-142. (BP) (Electronic Version in: 1990. *Social Text*, 25-26: 56-80.)

Poster, Mark. 1995. CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere. On line article. <http://www.hnet.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html>

## POLITICS OF PRESENTATION

### **WEEK 6 – Oct 19: Media Ownership and Regulation**

SCREENING: *Fear and Favor in the Newsroom*. California Newsreel. 1996.

Discussion:

McChesney, Robert. 1999. 'U. S. Media at the Dawn of the twenty-first Century' in *Rich Media*,

*Poor Democracy*, pp. 15-78. (BP)

John Noakes. 2003. Rationalizing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26(4): 728-749. (E-J)

Richard Ward. 2002. Golden Age, Blue Pencils: the Hal Roach Studios and Three Case Studies of Censorship During Hollywood's Studio Era. *Media History*, 8(1): 103-119. (E-J)

Michael Wayne. 2003. Post-Fordism, Monopoly Capitalism, and Hollywood's Media Industrial Complex. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1): 82-103. (E-J)

**Research Report:** Choose a headline and compare its coverage and commentary between the mainstream media such as *New York Times* or *Newsweek* and independent media such as *The American Prospect*, *In These Times*, *Mother Jones*, or *The Nation*.

Or: Compare the prime time news format, content and style between different countries around the world.

## **WEEK 7 – Oct. 26: SPRING BREAK!**

## **WEEK 8 – Nov 2: News Crafting and the Making of Social Memory**

### Discussion:

Clayman and Reisner. 1998. Gatekeeping in Action: Editorial Conferences and Assessments of Newsworthiness, *American Sociological Review*, 63 (April):178-199. (BP)

Atkinson, Philippa. Ch. 8. Representations of Conflict in the Western Media: the Manufacture of Barbaric Periphery, pp. 102-108. (BP)

Stephen Cooper. 2003. Press Controls in Wartime: The Legal, Historical, and Institutional Context. *American Communication Journal*, 6(4). Summer  
<http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol6/iss4/articles/cooper.htm>

Paul Grange. 2002. Remembering the 'American Century': Media Memory and the Time 100 List. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5(2): 201-219. (E-J)

Barbie Zelizer. 1995. Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12(2). June. (BP)

**Research Report:** Discuss the relationship between the myth of Pocahontas, the Powhatan Renape Nation, and the Disney's Animated Film.

Or: Choose another screening that deals with a historical topic and discuss the controversies involved and its implications for the collective memory of a group.

Or - a challenger: Provide examples of 'conspiracy theory.' What is it? When, why, and how does it emerge?

## **WEEK 9 – Nov. 9: Advertisement and the Shaping of Identity**

Berger, Arthur Asa. 2000. Analyzing Print Advertisements, in: *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society*, pp. 103-117. **(BP)**

### Discussion:

Wasko, Janet. 2001. Analyzing the World According to Disney, in: *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy*, pp. 108-152. Cambridge: Polity. **(BP)**

Awas, Omer. 1998. The Representation of Islam in the American Media. *Hamdard Islamicus*, 19(3): 87-102. **(BP)**

Gloria Steinem. 1990. Sex, Lies, and Advertising. *Ms.* July/August. 18-28. **(BP)**

Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. 1998. Beavis and Butt-Head: No Future for Postmodern Youth. In: *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World*, pp. 74-99. Blackwell. **(BP)**

William Romanowski. 2000. Evangelicals and Popular Music: The Contemporary Christian Music Industry. In: Bruce Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (Eds). *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. University of California Press. **(BP)**

**Research Report:** Media images: Use Berger's method to analyze an ad (or series of ads) in magazines representing gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality...or a movie (*The American Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, etc)

Or: Report from a Tattoo place: who gets tattoos where, how, and why

## LIVING POPULAR CULTURE

## **WEEK 10 – Nov. 16: Consumption as Lived Experience**

Gottdiener, Mark. 2000. 'Approaches to Consumption: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives' in Gottdiener (Ed) *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification*, pp. 3-32. **(BP)**

### Discussion:

Cohen, Lizabeth. 1998. The New Deal State and the Making of Citizen Consumers, in: *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 111-125. **(BP)**

Valentine, Gill. 1999. Consuming Pleasures: Food, Leisure, and the Negotiation of Sexual Relations, in: *Leisure/Tourism Geographies*, pp. 164-180. **(BP)**

Fredriksson, Cecilia. 1997. The Making of a Swedish Department Store Culture, in: Falk and Campbell (Eds) *The Shopping Experience*, pp. 111-135. **(BP)**

Kathy Davis. 2002. A Dubious Equality: Men, Women, and Cosmetic Surgery. *Body & Society*, 8(1): 49-65. **(E-J)**

**Research Report:** Consignment/Thrift/Second Hand Store: who shops there, why, and how.

Or: A comparative study of an 'All You Can Eat' place and a middle-priced restaurant.

## **WEEK 11 – Nov. 23: Taste and Differentiation**

Thorstein Veblen. 2000 (1899). Conspicuous Consumption. (From *Theory of the Leisure Class*)  
In: Schor and Holt (Eds) *The Consumer Society Reader*, pp. 187-204. **(BP)**

Pierre Bourdieu. 1984 (1979). The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction. (From  
*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*). In: Schor and Holt (Eds). *The Consumer Society Reader*, pp. 205-211. **(BP)**

### Discussion:

Agnes Racamora. 2002. Fields of Fashion: Critical Insights into Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture.  
*Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2(3): 341-362 **(E-J)**

John Storey. 2003. The Social Life of Opera. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1): 5-35.  
**(E-J)**

Holt, Douglas. 2000 (1998). Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption? In: Schor  
and Holt (Eds) *The Consumer Society Reader*, pp. 212-252. New York: The New Press.  
**(BP)**

Ostrower, Francie. 1998. The Arts as Cultural Capital Among Elites: Bourdieu's Theory  
Reconsidered. *Poetics*, 6:43-53. **(BP)**

**Research Report:** Fresh Fields/The Body Shop/La Colombe Coffee Shop, etc.: who are the  
clients, what and how they order or buy  
Or: My parents' décor and furnishing

## **WEEK 12 – Nov. 30: Resistance and New Social Movements**

Check out the Ad Busters site at <http://www.adbusters.org>

### Discussion:

Kristen Schilt. 2003. 'I'll Resist with Every Inch and Every Breath': Girls and Zine Making as a  
Form of Resistance. *Youth & Society*, 35(1): 71-97. **(E-J)**

James Lewes. 2001. Envisioning Resistance: the GI Underground Press During the Vietnam War.  
*Media History*, 7(2): 137-150. **(E-J)**

W. Bennett. 2003. Communicating Global Activism. *Information, Communication & Society*,  
6(2): 143-168. **(E-J)**

Jose Seoane and Emilio Taddei. 2002. From Seattle to Porto Alegre: The Anti-Neoliberal  
Globalization Movement. *Current Sociology*, 50(1): 99-122. **(E-J)**

**Research Report:** Choose an artist, a musician, poet, media celebrity or other public personality  
and analyze his/her style of protest/resistance and the public's response to it (i.e. Dixie, Chicks,  
Rickie Lee Jones, Johnny Cash, Bruce Cockburn, Michael Moore, etc.)  
Or: Choose a New Social Movement, review its history and agenda and look into chats rooms for  
people who are willing to answer your questions about why they are a part of the movement (i.e.  
Global Environmental Movement, Anti-Globalization Movement, etc.)

**WEEK 13 – Dec. 7: Globalization and Cosmopolitanism**

Leslie Sklair 2000 Globalization. In Taylor (Ed) *Sociology: Issues and Debates*, pp.321-345 **(BP)**

Discussion:

Tomlinson, John. 1999. Globalised Culture: The Triumph of the West?, in: Skelton and Allen (Eds) *Culture and Global Change*, pp. 22-29. **(BP)**

Worsley, Peter. 1999. Culture and Development Theory, in: Skelton and Allen (Eds) *Culture and Global Change*, pp. 30-41. **(BP)**

Gaete, Rolando. 1999. The West, Its Other and Human Rights, in: Skelton and Allen (Eds) *Culture and Global Change*, pp. 193-200. **(BP)**

Nussbaum, Martha. 1994. Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism. *The Boston Review*.  
<http://www.soci.niu.edu/~phildept/Kapitan/nussbaum1.html>

**Final exam distributed in class, DUE (via e-mail) by midnight, Friday, Dec. 10.**

**HAVE A NICE VACATION!!**