

COMM 123: Critical Perspectives on Popular Culture

Summer 2017 - 11 Week Session

Tuesday/Thursday, 5:30-7:20pm

Room: TBD

Instructors:

Rosemary Clark

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Office hours by appointment

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Course description:

Popular culture has been dismissed as mere trivia: “just entertainment.” It has been condemned as propaganda, a tool of mass deception. Its consumers have been dubbed cultural dupes, fashion victims, and couch potatoes. *Critical Approaches to Popular Culture* introduces students to some of the most important critiques of culture since the 1930s, and to different kinds of research that can help us understand popular culture and its effects. We will take a step back from simply *consuming* popular culture to investigate how different cultural forms communicate ideas about the world. Overarching questions for the course include: What is popular culture? What are the boundaries between popular and “high” culture and who polices them? How have intellectuals, artists and other cultural commentators responded to popular culture? How do we consume popular culture and why do we consume popular culture in the ways that we do? How do people create their own popular culture and how has this production changed in the digital age?

To answer these questions we will explore a range of media and genres, including television, film, journalism, advertising, music, books, and social media. We will also consider how popular culture operates in places both public (eg: stores) and private (eg: dorm rooms). Crucially, we will investigate both what popular culture does to people and what people do with popular culture. Throughout the semester students will learn to assess the value of different critiques of popular culture. The course will help you develop critical thinking skills that can be applied to both scholarly and popular texts across multiple disciplines.

Required reading:

All readings are available on Canvas. Please note that the following syllabus is provisional; we may add, delete or switch reading materials as we go. Any such alterations will be clearly communicated. Some sessions might include an in-class writing prompt or other *non-graded* activities.

General Expectations:

Comm. 123 requires that students:

- (1) come to class having read and engaged with the assigned homework articles or media texts;
- (2) come to class ready to answer questions about the assigned homework;
- (3) be interested in analyzing and critiquing cultural theories and cultural texts (if you're not interested in critically examining the popular culture you live and breathe, this isn't the class for you!)

Assignments and Grades

Class Attendance and Participation - This course is structured as an interactive seminar, so attendance is crucial. Students may miss one class session without penalty. Subsequent absences will be reflected in the final participation grade. In addition, students are expected to come to class prepared to engage with course readings and with each other. This means offering opinions and insights, asking questions, sharing examples, and participating in class discussions, activities and exercises. **(15 points)**

Short In-Class Pop Culture Artifact Presentation - Once over the course of the summer, students will be responsible for bringing to class a pop culture artifact that relates to that week's readings. More details on these short presentations will be given on the first day of class. **(15 points)**

Pop Culture Portfolio - Over the course of the summer, you will also be engaged in the ongoing, in-depth analysis of your own artifact of popular culture. Through a series of writing prompts, you will be asked to analyze your item from a variety of perspectives and theoretical lenses. Together, these writings will comprise a pop culture portfolio. A detailed overview of this assignment will be given on the first day of class. **(40 points)**

Final Exam (last day of class) - A final exam featuring multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank and short answer questions will be given on Thursday, August 3. **(30 points)**

Extra Credit - One extra credit opportunity (content and points to be determined) will be offered during the course.

Class Policies

Laptops and Cellphones - Class time is a scarce resource and engagement is essential for learning. Emerging research demonstrates that students retain more information [when they handwrite notes](#) and [when they are not being distracted](#) by their devices or their classmates' devices. As such, students are **not** permitted to use laptops or smartphones during class, unless directed to by the instructors. Lecture slides will be made available on Canvas to supplement students' notes.

Academic Honesty - All work for this class must be your own and be specific to this class. Any work recycled from other classes or from another, non-original sources will be rejected with serious implications for you. Plagiarism, that is, "knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise" is unacceptable. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, please take a look at the Provost's website where Penn's Code of Academic Integrity is housed: <https://provost.upenn.edu/policies/pennbook/2013/02/13/code-of-academic-integrity>

Accessibility - This course should be accessible to all interested students. We are happy to talk with anyone about course accessibility (from different learning styles to "documented" accommodations).

Please let us know about specific accommodations as soon as you can. To make arrangements for accommodations through the University, contact Student Disability Services in the Stouffer Commons, Suite 300, 3702 Spruce Street, Phone: (215) 573-9235, TDD: (215) 746-6320, FAX: (215) 746-6326, E-mail: sds@mail@zimbra.upenn.edu

Respect in the Classroom - Respectful discussion and debate are the foundations of this course. Throughout the semester we will engage with some heavy theoretical concepts, a variety of media, and sometimes, hot-button topics. Some of the media we watch and discuss are offensive. We feel it is vitally important to interrogate these media messages and how they inform our worldviews and the cultures we live in. In order to maintain a respectful and welcoming atmosphere in the classroom, we ask all to participate. This means coming to class having engaged with the material, listening to your peers, and voicing your own thoughts in a considerate, respectful manner.

Campus Resources

As a Penn student this summer, you have access to all of the university's wonderful resources. Some that we'd like to highlight:

- Weingarten Learning Resources Center (<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/>) and the Marks Family Writing Center (<https://upenn.mywconline.com/>) provide a wealth of resources for academic work, including instruction and tips on time management, reading, and writing.
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers free and confidential services to all students. If you are feeling depressed, overwhelmed, would like support for any aspect of your well-being, or need advice on how to help a friend, do not hesitate to contact CAPS. <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps/>

A note on co-teaching: Rosie and Sam equally share the work of teaching this course, and we are both available to answer questions on class material. On this syllabus, we have noted in parentheses which instructor took the reigns on selecting and teaching each day's readings. Please direct questions to the appropriate instructor on the material you would like to discuss.

Syllabus

(subject to change)

WEEK ONE

Tuesday, May 23 - Introduction (Rosie and Samantha)

No reading

Thursday, May 25 - Class Cancelled, Supplementary assignment

WEEK TWO

UNIT 1: DEFINITIONS AND CULTURAL CATEGORIES

Tuesday, May 30 - What is Popular Culture? (Samantha)

Storey, John. 2009. "What is Popular Culture?" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, pp. 1-16.

Schudson, Michael. 1987. "The New Validation of Popular Culture" in Storey (ed.) 1998 *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 2nd Edition, U of Georgia Press, pp. 495-503.

Thursday, June 1 - Who Criticizes Pop Culture and Why? I (Samantha)

Macdonald, Dwight. 1957. "A Theory of Mass Culture" in B. Rosenberg and D. Manning (eds.) *Mass culture: The popular arts in America*. New York: The Free Press, pp. 59-73.

Ferreira, Jim. 1990. "Cultural Conservatism and Mass Culture: The Case Against Democracy." *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 1-10.

WEEK THREE

Tuesday, June 6 - Who Criticizes Pop Culture and Why? II (Samantha)

Adorno, T and Horkheimer, M. 1944. "The Culture Industry—Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). pp. 1-12. **Warning: This is a difficult reading!** As you read, underline sections you understand, don't get discouraged about the sections you don't understand. Kellner (below) will provide some context, feel free to read Kellner first.

Kellner, Douglas (ed). 2007. "The Frankfurt School" in *Cultural Theory, Classical and Contemporary Positions*. Sage Publications (the extract will help contextualize the Adorno and Horkheimer reading), pp. 3-11.

Thursday, June 8 - Who Defends Pop Culture and Why? I (Rosie)

Gans, Herbert J. (1974) 1999. *Popular culture and high culture: An analysis and evaluation of taste*. New York: Basic Books. Chapter 1, pp. 27-88.

WEEK FOUR

Tuesday, June 13 - Who Defends Pop Culture and Why? II (Rosie)

Fiske, John. 1989. "Commodities and Culture" in *Understanding Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 23-47.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992 "Get a Life!: Fans, Poachers, Nomads." In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 9-50.

Thursday, June 15 - A Philly Case Study: The Barnes Foundation (Rosie)

Perl, Jed. (2012, August 24). "The Barnes Foundation's Disastrous New Home." *New Republic*.
<https://newrepublic.com/article/106435/barnes-foundation-move-philadelphia-tod-williams-billie-tsien>

Schjeldahl, Peter. (2012, May 28). "Moving Pictures: The Barnes Foundation's New Home." *The New Yorker*. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/28/moving-pictures-12>

In class viewing: *The Art of the Steal* (live Twitter feed)

WEEK FIVE

Tuesday, June 20 - Postmodernism (Samantha)

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Chapter 9. Postmodernism (extract) pp. 181-197.

Seabrook, John. 1999. "Nobrow Culture" *New Yorker*, Sept 20, pp. 104-111

<http://www.critical-theory.com/understanding-jean-baudrillard-with-pumpkin-spice-lattes/>

UNIT 2: THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Thursday, June 22 - Intro to the Politics of Representation (Rosie)

Hall, Stuart. 1997. "The spectacle of the 'Other.'" In S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Newbery Park, CA: Sage, pp. 225-249.

Jhally, Sut. 2003. Image-based Culture. In Dines and Humez (Eds) *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 249-257.

USC Annenberg 2016 Report on Diversity in Entertainment - Executive Summary.

WEEK SIX

Tuesday, June 27 - Politics of Representation: Race (Samantha)

Hall, Stuart. (2003). "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media." pp. 89-93. In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dyer, Richard. (2005). "The Matter of Whiteness." pp. 9-13.

Drew, Emily. (2011). "Pretending to be Postracial: The Spectacularization of Race in Reality TV's *Survivor*." *Television and New Media*, Vol. 12, Issue 4. Pp. 326-46.

Thursday, June 29 - Politics of Representation: Gender (Rosie)

Gill, Rosalind. (2007). "Gender in Magazines." In *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 180-217.

Serano, Julia. (2016). "Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depicts the Trans Revolution in Lipstick and Heels." In *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*.

Zeisler, Andi. (2016). "Empowertise me!" *Bitch Media*.

WEEK SEVEN

Tuesday, July 4 - No Class, Fourth of July

Thursday, July 6 - Politics of Representation: Sexuality (Rosie)

Gross, Larry. (2001). "Sexual Minorities and the Media" and "Subversion and Resistance." pp. 12-20. In *Up From Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Raymond, Diane. (2003). "Popular Culture and Queer Representation." In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 98-110.

Sender, Katherine. (2004). "The Business and Politics of Gay Marketing." In *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 1-23.

WEEK EIGHT

Tuesday, July 11 - Politics of Representation: Class (Samantha)

Butsch, R. 2002. "Ralph, Fred, Archie, and Homer: Why Television Keeps Re-creating the White Male Working-Class Buffoon." In G. Dines & J. M. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader* (2nd Edition) pp. 575-585. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kirby, Lisa. 2013 "Cowboys of the High Seas: Representations of Working-Class Masculinity on Deadliest Catch." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 46, No. 1 pp. 109-118

Lee, Michael J. and Leah Moscovitz. 2013. "The Rich Bitch: Class and Gender on the Real Housewives of New York City." *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 pp. 64-82.

UNIT 3: PARTICIPATION, INTERACTION, ENGAGEMENT

Thursday, July 13 - Active/Activist Audiences (Rosie)

Clark, Rosemary. (2014). “#NotBuyingIt: Hashtag feminists expand the commercial media conversation.” *Feminist Media Studies* 14(6), p. 1108-1110.

DeLaure, Marilyn & Fink, Mortiz. (2017). “Introduction.” In *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 1-38.

View before class: *RIP: A Remix Manifesto*

WEEK NINE

Tuesday, July 18 - Reality TV (Samantha)

Murray, S. and Ouellette, L. (2014). “Introduction.” *Reality TV: Remaking television culture*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 1-13.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/05/the-case-for-reality-tv/305791/>

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/12/wolcott-200912>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/12/the-new-reality-tv/511907/>

Thursday, July 20 - Fandom (Rosie)

Gray, Jonathan, Sandvoss, Cornel, Harrington, C. Lee. (2007). “Introduction: Why Study Fans?” In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 1-17.

Jenkins, Henry. (2012). “‘Cultural acupuncture’: Fan activism and the Harry Potter Alliance.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10.

WEEK TEN

Tuesday, July 25 - Pop Culture and the Past (Samantha)

Edgerton, Gary R. “Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether.” pp. 1-16. In *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Yolocaust: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38675835>

Pop Culture Nostalgia:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/retromania-why-is-pop-culture-addicted-to-its-own-past/242868/>

Thursday, July 27 - Celebrity and Self-Branding (Rosie)

Boorstin, Daniel. 1962. "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo Event" from *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. pp. 45-76.

Marwick, Alice and boyd, danah. 2011. "To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter." *Convergence*, 17 (2) pp. 139-158.

Duffy, Brooke Erin & Hund, Emily. (2015, September 25). "The invisible labor of fashion blogging." *The Atlantic*.

WEEK ELEVEN

Tuesday, August 1 - Globalization and Sustainability (Samantha and Rosie)

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Chapter 9 "The Global Postmodernism" section pp. 203-209.

Pieterse, Jan N. 2015. "Chapter 3: Globalization and Culture: Three Paradigms" in *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 45-66.

Enloe, Cynthia (2006). *The Globetrotting Sneaker*. In E. Disch (Ed.), *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology* (4th edition). pp. 462-469. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Burrington, Ingrid. (2015, December 16). *The Environmental Toll of a Netflix Binge*. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/12/there-are-no-clean-clouds/420744/>

In class viewing: *The Story of Stuff*

Thursday, August 3 - In-Class Final Exam