

## **Introduction to Cultural Studies**

Anthro 310 Spring 2005

Wagoner 101

### **Professors:**

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### **Teaching assistants:**

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This course surveys the dynamic terrains of contemporary cultural studies. We examine the emergence of public space and the nuanced forms of cultural activity that thrive in diverse sites, such as malls, highways, theme parks, neighborhoods, restaurants, bars, coffee houses, clubs

Central questions stem from a basic query concerning how seemingly “private” things such as feelings and identities are invented or shaped by popular culture, the culture industry, and institutions. We ask, as well, how culture generates varied sensibilities, dreams, styles, discourses, and forms of power within the United States. In grappling with these and other wide ranging questions, we will discuss how theories of difference, articulation, conjuncture, performativity and relationality, help us think about how culture works. From these theoretical reflections, students will develop an overview of the range of interdisciplinary approaches to studying cultural dynamics today.

The course asks such questions as:

\*How are seemingly “private” things such as feelings and identities invented or shaped by popular culture, the culture industry, and institutions?

\*How does culture circulate as sensibilities, dreams, styles, discourses, and forms of power?

\*How is it practiced in everyday life?

\*How is it shaped by institutions, laws, forms of publicity, social movements, physical and social spaces, and expressive forms such as music, films, magazines, clothes, and ideologies?

\*How is it made material in objects and on bodies?

\*How do media such as the internet and cell phones impact social and cultural life?

\*What kinds of public spaces are important to social and political life in the United States (e.g. neighborhoods, malls, highways, theme parks, restaurants, bars, coffee houses, clubs, sports teams, universities)?

\*How do Americans imagine and build community (or fail to)?

- \*How do the new master planned communities, common interest developments, and gated communities reinvent “community”?
- \*What is the “American dream” and what do people do with it?
- \*What is the impact of the proliferation of different “lifestyles” and identities on public life and politics?
- \*What makes culture vital and volatile?
- \*How do we understand the complex intersections of class, race, gender and sexuality?
- \*How do theories of difference, articulation, conjuncture, performativity and relationality rather than essence or identity, help us think about how culture works?

### **Textbook**

Joseph Harris, et. al. *Media Journal*

### **Course Pack**

Abel’s Copies. University Towers. 715D West 23<sup>rd</sup> 472-5353 info@abelscopies.com

### **Requirements:**

1. Attend lectures and Friday discussion sections. Attendance will be taken at Friday sections and will be worth **10% of your grade.**
2. 5 media journal writing assignments to be turned in to Friday discussion sections in each of the first 5 weeks of the course. **10% of the grade.**  
Please note: the introduction to the textbook includes a fairly complex structure of how to use the book in a class. We are NOT following the structure laid out in the book. You **ARE** required to complete the Media Journal exercises and writing assignments on pages 13-38) and you are also required to bring 2 written notes on each reading to your Friday discussion section the week that each reading is assigned
2. Two exams, a mid term and a non-cumulative final. These will be short answer, short essay and multiple choice exams testing you on the readings and the lectures. **Each exam will be worth 25% of the grade for a total of 50%.**
3. ‘Annotate’ a popular artifact/item. This project involves analytically detailing the component aspects of an object from popular culture. You will list the elements of the object in order to explain how it culturally signifies. These objects may be songs, ad images, movie clips, etc.  
What do you need to know to understand this object’s significance? **30% of the grade.**

### **Lecture and Reading Schedule**

**All readings are taken from the textbook unless designated as course pack articles with parentheses (course pack).**

#### **January 19<sup>th</sup>: Introductions**

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**January 24<sup>th</sup>: What is Culture?**

**Readings:** Varenne, “‘Drop in Anytime’: Community and Authenticity in American Everyday Life.” (distributed in class); Miner, “Body ritual among the Nacirema,” (distributed in class).

**January 26<sup>th</sup>:** Units of Cultural Analysis

**Readings:** “Introduction” to *Media Journal*; Canaan, “Why is a Slut a Slut: Cautionary Tales of Middle Class Teenage Girls’ Morality?” (course pack)

**Media Journal writing assignments:** “A day in the life,” “Keeping in touch,” and “Escaping.” Each section gives you many questions. You do not have to answer them all. Choose the ones that interest you most. And do the exercises if there are any. For instance, in “A Day in the Life,” do the exercise of noting every time you engage with media). **These first 3 assignments are due to be turned in at your discussion section Friday, January 28<sup>th</sup>.**

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**January 31<sup>st</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Media Saturation

**Readings:** Postman, “The Peek-a-Boo World”; Rothstein, “Trend-Spotting”; Nehamas, “Serious Watching”; Meyrowitz, “The 19-inch Neighborhood”;

**Media Journal writing assignments:** “Identifying with Music,” “Connecting with celebrities.” **Due to be turned in at your discussion section Friday, Feb 4<sup>th</sup>.**

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[Super Bowl Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>]

**February 7<sup>th</sup>:** Cultural Studies: Genealogy of a Critical Perspective.

**Readings:** Radway, “Reading the Romance;” Foley, “The Great American Football Ritual” (course pack)

**February 9<sup>th</sup>:** Technology: Cultural Meanings, Fears and Desires

**Readings:** Marc, “Understanding Television;” Turkle, “Spinning” Technology: What we are not thinking about when we are thinking about computers (course pack); Sturken, “Mobilities of Time and Space: Technologies of the Modern and the Postmodern.” (course pack).

**Media Journal writing assignments:** “Reading Places,” “Interpreting Technologies” and “Forming a Style.” **Due to be turned in at your discussion section Friday, Feb 11.**

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**February 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>:** Advertising

**Readings:** Charbeneau, “Is Anything for Real?;” Steinem, “Sex, Lies, and Advertising;” Berger, “The Marketing Society”; Walker, “Poultry Geist” (course pack); Twitchell, “Plop, Plop. Fizz, Fizz.” (course pack)

**Media Journal writing assignments:** “Seeing Gender: and “Discovering Politics.” **Due to be turned in at your discussion section Friday, Feb 18<sup>th</sup>.**

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**February 21<sup>st</sup>:** Cities and the Emergence of Public Space

**Readings:** Clark, “A Bar at the Folies-Bergere” (course pack); Zukin, “Whose Culture, Whose City,” (course pack).

**February 23<sup>rd</sup> :** Bars: Class Culture in Urban Space

**Readings:** Powers, “Drinking Folkways,” (course pack); Fox, “Bring me up in a beer joint,” (course pack).

**Media Journal writing assignments:** “Feeling Hyped” and “Watching TV Watching.”  
**Due to be turned in at your discussion section Friday, Feb 25<sup>th</sup>.**

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**February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Media and the construction of the self

**Readings:** Marsh, “Fortunate Son”; Van Der Leun, Gerard. “This is a Naked Lady”; Williamson, “Urban Spaceman”.

**March 7<sup>th</sup>:** Why and How Does Race Matter?

**Readings:** DeMott, “Visions of Black-White Friendship;” Gates, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man;” Moffatt, “Discourse of the Dorms: Race, Friendship and Culture Among College Youth.” (course pack)

**March 9<sup>th</sup>:** Class Analysis

**Readings:** Kadi, “Stupidity Deconstructed;” (Course pack); Sedaris essays and miscellaneous newspaper articles (to be distributed in class).

**Mid-Term Exam.** Friday, March 11<sup>th</sup> in discussion sections. The exam will cover all readings and lectures up to this point.

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**March 14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>: Spring Break**

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**March 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>:** American Dream Spaces: private and public, real and imaginary

**Readings:** Kowinski, “The Malling of America;” Coward, “Ideal Homes;” Thorne, “The Machine in the Kitchen;” Norman, “The Home Magazine Kitchen;” Felton, “Wrestling with Myself.”

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**March 28<sup>th</sup>:** Post Industrial Economy and the Era of Flexible Accumulation

**Readings:** Harvey, “Time-Space compression and the postmodern condition” (course pack); Cassidy, “The productivity mirage” (course pack).

**March 30<sup>th</sup>:** Who and What are Poor People

**Readings:** Wray and Newitz, “White Trash” (course pack); Kipnis and Reeder, “White Trash Girl: The Interview” (course pack); Ehrenreich, “Introduction: Getting Ready,” and “Selling in Minnesota” (course pack).

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**April 4<sup>th</sup>:** Wal-Mart: the case of a corporation

**Readings:** on Wal-Mart, find ten web pages on Wal-Mart, read them, and print a few pages to discuss in Friday discussion section; Seagal, “Tales from the Cutting Room Floor;” Hirshey, “Happy ( ) Day to You;” Harris, “The Conformity of Office Zaniness;” Weiser, “Denim Downsize.”

**April 6<sup>th</sup>:** Themed Environments: Times Square and Gated Communities

**Readings:** Caldeira, “Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation,” (course pack);  
Davis, “Beyond Blade Runner” (course pack).

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**April 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>:** Publics

**Readings:** Caughey, “Imaginary Social Relationships;” Seabrook, “Why is the Force Still With Us?” Gabler, “Grieving for the Camera;” Miller, “Barbara Walter’s Theater of Revenge;” Fischhoff, “Confessions of a TV Talk Show Shrink”;

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**April 18<sup>th</sup>:** Fanzines. Guest lecture by Shaka McGlotten.

**April 20<sup>th</sup>:** Gender

**Readings:** Tilsdale, “A Weight that Women Carry;” Ehrenreich, “*Playboy* Joins the Battle of the Sexes;” Harrison, “The Importance of Being Oprah.”

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**Annotated Object of Popular Culture due Monday, April 25<sup>th</sup>.**

**April 25<sup>th</sup>:** Public Health: popular epidemiology, contesting experts

**Readings:** Steingraber, “Time” (course pack), Lawson, “Notes from a human canary” (course pack), Brown, “Popular Epidemiology and Toxic Waste” (course pack).

**April 27<sup>th</sup>:** New reproductive technologies and identity construction

**Readings:** Rapp, “Extra chromosomes and blue tulips: Medico-familial interpretations,” (course pack); Finkler, “The Ideology of Genetic Inheritance in Contemporary Life: The Medicalization of Kinship” (course pack).

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**May 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Cyberculture and Race

**Readings:** Shapiro, “Street Corners in Cyberspace;” McPherson, “I’ll take my stand in Dixie-Net: White guys, the South, and Cyberspace” (course pack); Crane, “In Medias Races: Filmic Representation, Networked Communication, and Racial Intermediation” (course pack)

**May 4<sup>th</sup>.** Conclusions

**May 6<sup>th</sup>:** Final exam in discussion sections

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