Course Objectives

Our aim is to explore a variety of conversations about contemporary culture in the United States, with the hope of critically engaging these discussions. We will begin with an exploration of high, mass, and popular culture debates as a means to better understand contemporary culture. Next we will explore specific sites of popular culture. Finally, to facilitate an understanding of participation in and reactions to current cultural struggles, we will conclude with an examination of the uses of popular culture as a tool for social and political activism (e.g., stenciled graffiti, fanzines, and hip hop). Similarly, we will analyze how these modes of communication function to work toward a more vibrant and democratic public sphere. A theme throughout will be tensions between "authentic" participation in popular cultural practices and the co-optation of those practices.

Required Texts

The following books are available at the campus bookstore:


The remainder of the course readings are accessible via a password protected web site. You are required to print each day’s reading and bring the article with you to class.

Some of the reading assignments will be quite dense. In many instances difficulties with material emerge from problems with terminology. I recommend that you consider purchasing the following book to facilitate your understanding of the material:


Course Assignments

Event Paper (2-3 Pages) 5%
Class Participation (including 1 cultural sighting) 10%
Zine Contribution and Presentation 10%
Analysis Paper #1 (3-5 Pages) 15%
Analysis Paper #2 (3-5 Pages) 15%
Pop quizzes 25%
Final Exam 20%

You are required to complete the reading assignments before you attend class. This will lead to more fruitful discussion.
Event Paper

This paper asks you to attend and assess a cultural event (e.g., a movie, concert, theatrical production, art opening, campus sports, etc.) and analyze that event. In general, you should discuss what happens at the event, the kind of people who gather there, the level of participation among the spectators, and then read the event through the lens of our first set of course readings (Macdonald, Williams, and/or Jenkins). (Note: “Assess” means more than simply describing what you see. You should discuss the larger social, cultural, political, or economic implications of the event and why/how you view a certain theoretical approach to reading this event to be more useful, ethical, enlightening, etc.) This paper is due January 27th.

A full description of this assignment is available at: http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~dmakagon/popcultevent.html

Zine Contribution and Presentation

For this assignment you are asked to contribute to a course e-zine. Your contribution can take multiple forms: brief essay or story, poem or poems, photography or other art, etc. You can address any topic you’d like; however, you must discuss your contribution with me.

A full description of this assignment is available at: http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~dmakagon/zineassignmentS04.html

Analysis Papers

Each student is required to write two papers analyzing a set of readings and make an argument that intervenes creatively in the conversation. While I want your papers to cover a specific theme (i.e., fanzines and the public sphere), your approach should reflect your own theoretical interests. Your paper must make an argument. Merely summarizing a reading or stating that a reading is “correct” because it speaks to your own personal experience is not an argument. (See the syllabus addendum at http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~dmakagon/writinghandout2.html for further information about writing for this course.) Paper #1 should explore issues related to sites of popular culture. This paper is due by March 9th. Paper #2 should cover an issue relevant to popular culture as a source of activism. This paper is due by April 15th. Papers must be turned in no later than seven days after we cover the reading (e.g. If you’re writing about Mark Edmundson, “On Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students” then your paper would be due February 24.)

Pop Quizzes

Quizzes will be short answer and will allow me to gauge how well you understand the arguments made in the readings. Unlike your papers and class discussion, where I am interested in your opinions about the issues and the strength of the writer’s argument(s), the quizzes are designed for you to state the author’s argument only. In other words, I am not striving to understand what you think about the issues; rather, I am interested in how well you understand the construction of the author’s argument. If we do not understand what s/he’s saying then our critique of her/his work will not be properly grounded.

Final Exam

I will provide a list of essay questions for the Final Exam. You will answer one question (3-5 pages). Exams are due May 4th by Noon. (Note: The information in this syllabus and the syllabus addendum about writing assignments applies to the Final Exam as well.)
Cultural Sighting

You will be responsible for one Cultural Sighting this semester. Your sighting should offer a material example of a cultural practice and allow the class to make connections between the realm of theory and our everyday lives. For example, you might find a comic strip that you think is particularly insightful regarding public communication or the construction of culture, you might see a commercial that makes you angry and tape it, or you might find an old book that offers advice on how to be a rebel. If the sighting is something you can tape to a piece of paper then write your name on the paper and attach the sighting. If the sighting is a video or a book then type up a few sentences explaining the sighting so I can give you credit. Of course you want to bring the video, book, etc. to show the class. Your presentation of the sighting shouldn’t take more than 2-3 minutes although class discussion about your sighting might last much longer. We will select dates for sighting presentations during our third meeting. (Note: The sighting is part of your class participation grade. If you do not present a cultural sighting to the class then you cannot earn an “A” for your participation grade.)

Course Policies

Attendance and Active Participation are expected and required. Excessive absences will result in a lower final grade.

Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class your grade will be negatively affected.

All assignments are due on assigned days. There will be NO MAKE-UPS. Documented illness or documented emergencies are the only exception to this policy. Changes in work schedules, personal celebrations (e.g., birthdays), transportation problems, etc. are NOT considered to be legitimate reasons for missing assignment deadlines or class meetings. If you miss a quiz and have documentation for your absence then you will take the quiz on the next date you attend class. (Note: If you will be missing a class because of a religious holiday, let me know in writing at least two weeks before the holiday so we can make arrangements to make up missed work.)

If you have a cellular phone, turn it off. If you have a pager, set it to vibrate or turn it off.

Written Assignment Requirements

All papers should be typed, double-spaced throughout the entire essay, and use a consistent style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.). Use one-inch margins and 12-point font. Further details on written assignments can be found on a separate handout at http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~dmakagon/writinghandout2.html

Plagiarism

I have often found that plagiarism becomes tempting if students are feeling pressured. Remember, when in doubt quote. If you are quoting somebody directly then you need to list the information within quotation marks and cite a page number. If you are paraphrasing then you need to cite the person and a page number. Never copy and paste entire documents into your paper and do not quote others to the point where your ideas become indistinguishable from your source’s ideas. There is no reason to plagiarize. If you do, the Dean of Student Affairs will be contacted.

Grade Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>88-89</td>
<td>AB</td>
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<td>60-67</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>59-58</td>
<td>E</td>
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Internet Account

You pay fees that cover an Internet account for e-mail and research. Having an e-mail account can greatly simplify your research tasks, make contact with other class members, and allows me to send written feedback to you if you have any questions about assignments. My e-mail address is: dmakagon@mtu.edu.
# Tentative Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>READING ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/13</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Defining (High, Mass, and Popular) Culture</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/15</td>
<td>Dwight MacDonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture” (pp. 1-top 3, mid 5-17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>Raymond Williams, “Culture is Ordinary”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/22</td>
<td>Henry Jenkins, “Congressional Testimony on Media Violence” (pp. 1-22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sites of Popular Culture</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1/27   | Bruce Springsteen, *Nebraska* (Listen in CCLI)  
          Event Paper Due |
| 1/29   | Malcolm Gladwell “The Cool Hunt” |
| 2/3    | Douglas Coupland *Generation X*, pp. 1-64 |
| 2/5    | Winter Carnival |
| 2/10   | Douglas Coupland *Generation X*, pp. 67-147 |
| 2/12   | Douglas Coupland *Generation X*, pp. 149-179 |
| 2/17   | Mark Edmundson, “On Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students” |
| 2/19   | Scott McCloud, “Chapter One” from *Understanding Comics*  
          Tom Kuntz, “Did Somebody Say, ‘Give Me a Sign Lord?’” |
| 2/24   | Liz Bird excerpts from *For Enquiring Minds* |
| 2/26   | Debra Seagal, “Tales from the Cutting-Room Floor”  
          Alessandra Stanley, “The Name of the Game is Class” |
| 3/2-3/4 | Spring Break |
| 3/9    | Film Screening in Class  
          Paper #1 Due By This Date |
|        | **Activism in Popular Culture** |
| 3/16   | Richard Schechner, “The Street is the Stage”  
          (pp. 45-top 51, 63-top 67, 74-90) |
          Hoss Jooten “Taking it to the Streets” |

4/1 Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From Underground*, pp. 117-140

4/6 Mark Neumann & Tim Simpson, “Smuggled Sound: Bootleg Recording and the Pursuit of Popular Memory”


4/13 Reverend Al Cacophony “Moving Violations”


**Paper #2 Due By This Date**

4/20 **Zine Presentations**

4/22 **Zine Presentations**

4/27 TBA

4/29 Review and Final Exam questions delivered to students

5/4 **Final Papers Due by Noon**

Event Paper 5% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.05 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

Zine Contribution/Presentation 10% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.10 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

Analysis Paper #1 15% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.15 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

Analysis Paper #2 15% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.15 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

Quizzes 25% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.25 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

Final Exam 20% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.20 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

Class Participation 10% \( \_ \_ \_ \text{(pts.) \times 0.10 = } \_ \_ \_ \)  

\[ \text{Final Grade=} \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \]