Hu 3860
Popular Culture: Popular Music
Summer 2005

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. We will then turn our attention to popular music and video games, which will be the central sites of analysis this semester. The course will use music and video games as lenses through which we can view a number of contemporary cultural issues (e.g., consumerism and exchange, communal life, technological changes and laws, racism and sexism, and do-it-yourself production). A theme throughout will be tensions between “authentic” participation in popular cultural practices and the co-optation of those practices.

Required Texts

All 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 books to facilitate your understanding of the material:


Course Assignments

Class Participation (including 1 cultural sighting) 10%
Zine Contribution and Presentation 15%
Test 1 25%
Test 2 25%
Test 3 25%

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

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/zineassignmentSU05.html
Tests
We will take three multiple-choice tests this semester. Test 1 will cover materials from 6/28-7/6. Test 2 will cover materials from 7/11-7/21. Test 3 will cover materials from 7/26-8/4.

Pop Quizzes
We will have short answer extra credit quizzes. These quizzes will count as extra credit points toward your Tests. Quiz points accumulated before Test 1 will be applied to Test 1, quiz points accumulated between Test 1 and Test 2 will be applied to Test 2, and quiz points accumulated between Test 2 and Test 3 will be applied to Test 3. Quizzes will be short answer and will allow me to gauge how well you understand the arguments made in the readings.

(A general note about quizzes and tests: it is highly unlikely that you will pass this class if you wait to read—or skim—before the tests because the questions will be geared toward your ability to understand intricacies within the arguments. You will need to read each day. Extra credit points from quizzes will help a lot but you will not be able to accumulate those points if you haven’t read.)

Cultural Sighting
The goal of this assignment is to offer material examples of popular cultural practices and artifacts, allowing us to make connections between the realm of theory and our everyday lives. As a class we will explore debates about historical and contemporary possibilities and problems of popular culture. This assignment will hopefully allow each member in the class to share a popular culture artifact with the class that connects this broader cultural context with our everyday lives. Each class member will be responsible for one cultural sighting this semester. Examples of cultural sightings include, but are certainly not limited to, comic strips that are particularly insightful regarding public communication; television commercials that display intriguing blends of intercultural relationships; or old books that highlight problematic conceptions of what it means to be a woman, how to be a rebel, or how to build media technologies. 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 or the book to show the class during your presentation. Your presentation of the sighting shouldn’t take more than 2-3 minutes, although class discussion about your sighting will most likely last much longer. Please note that your sighting can cover some aspect of popular music or gaming, per the theme of the class, but you are free to bring in artifacts that speak to or reflect other types of popular culture. Also note that 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.
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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Tentative Course Schedule

**DATE** | **READING ASSIGNMENTS**
---|---
6/27 | Course Introduction  
**Defining (High, Mass, and Popular) Culture**
6/28 | Dwight MacDonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture”
6/29 | Mark Edmundson, “Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students”
6/30 | Henry Jenkins, “Congressional Testimony on Media Violence” (pp. 1-16)
7/4 | No Class--4th of July Recess

**Sites of Popular Culture**

7/5 | David Hickey, “Romancing the Looky-Loos”
7/6 | Malcolm Gladwell, “The Cool Hunt”
7/7 | **TEST #1**
7/11 | Rob Drew, “Karaoke and the Utility of the Already Sung”
7/12 | Mark Neumann & Tim Simpson, “Smuggled Sound: Bootleg Recording and the Pursuit of Popular Memory”
7/13 | Alec Hanley Bemis, “A Small New Future”  
Alec Hanley Bemis, “3 Myths About the Recording Industry Debunked”
7/14 | Film Screening in Class

**DIY Popular Culture**

7/18 | Stephen Duncombe, “Zines”
7/19 | Stephen Duncombe, “Community”
Gender and Race in Popular Culture

7/20 Pamela Wilson, “Star Image of Dolly Parton”
7/21 “Killing Like a Girl: Gendered Gaming and Girl Gamers’ Visibility”
7/25 TEST #2
7/27 Gil Rodman, “Race and Other Four Letter Words”
7/28 “Pro vs. Pro Vietnam” & “Racist Imagery in Video Games”
8/1 Henry Jenkins, “Voices From the Combat Zone: Game Grrlz Talk Back”
8/2 In-class screening of Dogtown and the Z-Boys
8/3 Dogtown and the Z-Boys (cont.)
8/4 TBA
8/8 TEST #3
8/9 Zine Presentations

Grade Sheet

Zine Contribution/Presentation 15%  ____(pts.) X .15 = ______
Test #1 25%  ____ (pts.) X .25 = ______
Test #2 25%  ____ (pts.) X .25 = ______
Test #3 25%  ____ (pts.) X .25 = ______
Attendance/Participation 10%  ____ (pts.) X .10 = ______

Final Grade= ____________