CULTURAL INDUSTRIES, POPULAR CULTURE & CELEBRITY

HU6010: Special Topics in Communication
Michigan Technological University; Spring 2011
T: 7:05-9:35; HDMZ dining lounge!

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course provides students with conceptual understanding and methodology in studying the interplay of popular culture and cultural history using celebrity as its case study. The course investigates celebrity as a cultural form across a variety of cultural contexts and theoretical perspectives. It is interested in explicating the manufacture and explosive distribution of celebrity as a cultural commodity and critical strategy of the cultural industries’ expansion in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It will also explore theories of celebrity in relation to capitalist and democratic ideologies, as well as the pleasures of celebrity culture and fandom. The course will familiarize students with a variety of methods for studying popular culture and the cultural industries, including historical analysis, political economy, organizational sociology, textual criticism, and audience reception.

REQUIRED READING:

Selection of readings posted on Blackboard

EVALUATION:
20% -- Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to arrive on time, having thoroughly read the week’s assigned readings, and prepared to participate in discussions. This includes bringing the texts to class, as well as your insight, relevant observations, questions, and pertinent examples to illustrate your points; in other words, you should provide evidence of the fruits of your labor in carefully reading and thinking about the texts under examination. As this is a graduate seminar and not a lecture course, your participation is critical. You will be required to co-facilitate (with me) the class discussion regarding the week’s reading once during the semester (5%). More than two absences will adversely affect your grade. If you have five or more absences you will NOT receive a passing grade. Please check with a classmate to find out what you missed if you are absent from class. If you then need further clarification, please make an appointment with me.

20% -- Blackboard: You are required to post a response (approx. 300-400 words) on Blackboard in advance of class meetings (by 3:00 p.m. on the day of class) ten times of your choosing during the semester.

20% -- Review of Literature: Students will prepare a review of literature using the course’s readings as well as outside sources appropriate to their research interests.

10% -- Research Proposal: Your research proposal will involve a number of possible steps (e.g., asking a sound question, providing a rationale for study, designing a method, researching source materials, etc.). Thus, we will work on the proposal in stages.
30% - Research paper: Students will produce a 15-25 page paper due at the end of the semester. Students will also briefly present their work as they would for a professional conference. For PhD students, your paper should be of publishable or near-publishable quality.

**EVALUATION STANDARDS AND POLICIES:**

A = Excellent. This work is outstanding work in all respects. This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of and engagement with course materials, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary, engagement and analysis of the course’s themes, theories, methods and reading materials. Includes skillful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and no grammatical/careless errors.

B = Good. This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course materials, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials, examples, illustrations are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Papers have been carefully proofread.

C = Adequate/Fair. This work demonstrates understanding that hits in the ballpark but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expressing some significant errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing/articulation may appear vague, hard to follow, or loaded with typos and other technical errors.

D = Unsatisfactory. This work demonstrates a serious lack of error in understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient.

F = Failed. Work not submitted or attempted.

**For all written assignments, please follow this format:** in the upper left corner, include your name, course name, date, and assignment heading or paper title (no title pages). Type all work, 12 point font, double space, number all pages using a header in the upper right hand corner, and STAPLE multiple pages (no paper clips, please). Follow a formal style manual for guidelines on citations, quotations, bibliography, etc. Make sure you edit/proofread your paper before submitting. Your grade will partly be based on your ability to follow the norms and conventions of writing using Standard English styles and conventions.

**LATE PAPERS will result in a drop in a letter grade.** Please remember that email is always a way to turn in papers on time in the event of an emergency.

**Plagiarism is not tolerated and will result in failing the course.** Consult the University rules and guidelines regarding this serious breach of ethics. However, please note that all materials used in the construction of your written work (notes, outlines, rough drafts, etc.) should be saved until you have received a passing grade from me.

**University Policies:**

Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University’s policies. For more information on this serious breach of conduct, see:

http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html
If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following.

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310.

For more information on these policies, see:
Affirmative Action:
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aao/
Disability Services:
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability
Equal Opportunity Statement:

**SCHEDULE:**  
**Historicizing Celebrity:** This set of readings will examine celebrity origins as a function of journalism and the "Graphic Revolution," the rise of the film industry and film star system, and the Frankfurt critique of the "cultural industry." Students will be introduced to the history of celebrity production, sociological, psychoanalytical, and political economic approaches to the early film star system, including the Marxist critique of cultural production.

**Wk 1: 1/11**  
**Introduction and course overview**

**Wk 2: 1/18**  
**Democratizing fame, social theory, cultural critique**
Weber: "The Nature of Charismatic Domination"
Boorstin: "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event"
Sussman: "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture"
Alberoni: "The Powerless 'Elite'"
Ponce de Leon: "Becoming Visible: Fame and Celebrity in the Modern Age, "The Rise of Celebrity Journalism"

**Wk 3: 1/25**  
**Stardom as an industry strategy**
Kindem: "Hollywood's Movie Star System: A Historical Overview"
deCordova: "The Emergence of the Star System in America"
Dyer: "A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity," "Stars as Images"
King: "The Star and the Commodity: Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Stardom"
Klapot: "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light"

**Wk 4: 2/1**  
**Frankfurt critique, political economy**
Adorno & Horkheimer: "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"
Lowenthal: "Triumph of Mass Idols"
Gammond: "Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass-Communication"
Golding & Murdock: "Culture, Communications, and Political Economy"
Early audiences and film star reception
Stamp: "Long Way to Filmland"
Fuller: "The Rise of the Movie Fan," "Motion Picture Story Magazine and the Gendered Construction of the Movie Fan"
Stacey: "With Stars in their Eyes: Female Spectators and the Paradoxes of Consumption"
Weiss: "A Queer Feeling When I Look at You: Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s"
Hansen: "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship"

Theorizing Celebrity and Media: These readings offer comparative analyses of celebrity production and reception in relation to radio, television, film and popular music. Students engage theories the production of celebrity as it tries to position audiences to identify with celebrities across different media, and how audiences use celebrity in the construction of their identities.

Wk 6: 2/15 – The industry of early television stardom
Murray: Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom

Wk 7: 2/22 – Problematizing celebrity power:
Marshall: Chpts 1 – 4, Celebrity and Power

Wk 8: 3/1 – Media friends
Thompson: "The Rise of Mediated Interaction," "Self and Experience in a Mediated World"
Meyrowitz: "Media ‘Friends’"
Marshall: chpts 4 – 7, Celebrity and Power

Wk 9: 3/15 – Sociology of media organizations approach to celebrity:
Gamson: Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America, chpts 1-5

Wk 10: 3/22 – Contemporary celebrity:
Gamson: Claims to Fame (finish)
Turner: "Manufacturing Celebrity," "Celebrity, the Tabloid and the Democratic Public Sphere"
Lemby: "Doing it for Themselves? Teenage Girls, Sexuality and Fame"
Marshall: "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media"
McLeod: "The Private Ownership of People"

Celebrity Politics: The last set of readings considers the ideological and counter-hegemonic functions of celebrity as a cultural commodity in the political sphere. With respect to contemporary socio political issues and movements, we will consider the political efficacy of "celebrity capital" and the notion of celebrity as governmentality. We will also examine the appropriation of the celebrity frame by politicians and the relation of celebrity to entertaining political punditry.

Wk 11: 3/29 – Celebrity activism:
Prinling: "Political Ideology"
Meyer & Gamson, "The Challenge of Cultural Elites: Celebrities and Social Movements"
Collins: "Traversing Authenticities: The West Wing President and the Activist Sheen"
Collins: "Celebrity Activism and 9/11: ‘A Simple Show of Unity’"
Wk 12: 4/5 - **Celebrity, politicians, and entertaining politics:**
Marshall: Chpt 8, *Celebrity and power*
Street: “The Celebrity Politician: Political Style and Popular Culture”
Redmond: “Avatar Obama in the Age of Liquid Celebrity”
Jones: “Viewer Engagement Beyond Information Acquisition: Celebrity, Talk, and Play”

Wk 13: 4/12 — **Student presentations**

Wk 14: 4/19 — **Student Presentations**