COURSE DESCRIPTION

Studying popular culture is a way of understanding how power circulates within culture. In this course, we start by interrogating the concept of culture as it has been traditionally defined, with a capital “C,” to signify a certain set of meanings and expressions largely determined by elites to suit elite interests. This categorization of culture as “high Culture,” disseminated from the “top down,” has come under attack by scholars of communication and media studies who are interested in forwarding a more democratic notion of culture in which multiple taste cultures exists and in which power can be understood to flow from the bottom up as well. To get at this broad transformation, this course situates cultural production in historical and contemporary contexts in order to examine its economic, social, political, and technological implications. In addition, we consider how the reception of popular culture by audiences impacts the formation of identities, value systems, attitudes and opinions, as individuals and as members of communities (e.g., consumers, fans, youth, citizens, etc.). In part, this involves following an historical trajectory of how the fields of media studies, communication, and cultural studies have intersected with respect to popular culture as an object of study.

We have three objectives before us: 1) to become familiar with a number of influential and important theoretical approaches to media criticism (including key terms and related concepts); 2) to develop an understanding of how these theoretical frameworks have been used to analyze and make sense of popular culture; 3) to consider these frameworks and their central concepts in your own thinking about popular culture and why it matters in your everyday lives.

REQUIRED READING:

Additional reading posted on Blackboard under “Course Content”

EVALUATION:
10% Attendance: More than two absences will lower this portion of your course evaluation. If you have eight absences or more you will NOT receive a passing grade. You are expected to find out what you missed from a classmate in the event that you are absent. If you have a special problem with attendance, please bring it to the TA’s attention as soon as possible.
25% Exam 1: in class exam, Thursday, Feb. 16.
25% Exam 2: in class exam, Thursday, March 29.
20% Exam 3: in class exam, Thursday, April 26 (final's week: 10:15-11:30 a.m.)

20% Writing Assignments: there will be four short writing assignments (500-600 words, 5% each). Details for each one will be provided.

***NOTE: to pass this class, students MUST turn in four writing assignments. Failure to submit any of these papers will result in a grade of F for the course.

For all written assignments, students are to compose their essays on Blackboard under Discussion (you may write your essay in word, then cut and paste, but please do not attach a document). Make sure you edit/proofread your written assignment before submitting it. Your grade will partly be based on your ability to follow the norms and conventions of writing using Standard English style and conventions.

**LATE written assignments will result in a drop of one letter grade.

**PLAGIARISM is not tolerated and will result in failing the assignment and possibly the course.

Here is how the University defines plagiarism:

Plagiarism: Knowingly copying another's work or ideas and calling them one's own or not giving proper credit or citation. This includes but is not limited to reading or hearing another's work or ideas and using them as one's own; quoting, paraphrasing, or condensing another's work without giving proper credit; purchasing or receiving another's work and using, handling, or submitting it as one's own work.

**CLASSROOM COOPERATION:

Class preparation: Students are expected to attend the lectures and to arrive on time. It is highly recommended that you read the assigned reading in advance of class in order to follow the lectures. The lectures will be structured with the assumption that you have read. (Undoubtedly, it will be harder to follow if you do not read first!)

Disruptions: I consider chronic lateness to be a significant disruption to class. Please be on time to class. I also ask that you plan your schedule so that you can be present during the entire class (with the exception of emergencies, of course). There will be a lot of audio-visual materials shown in this class. This is not a signal that you don’t need to pay attention and that you should take a facebook break! Cell phones, blackberries, ipods and other electronic devices are not to be used in class. Laptops can be used to take notes and to refer to your readings. However, if you wish to spend your time surfing or emailing during class, you do not need to come to class for that. The professor and TA will monitor usage of computers. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Email: Email is convenient but it does not provide a substitute for attendance or office hours. Please do not use email to:

1) ask routine information that is already on the syllabus.
2) ask what you missed in class when you are absent. (You should check with a classmate first. If you need further clarification, then make an appointment with the TA or professor.)
3) discuss in-depth a major problem. Please come to office hours or make an appointment to set up a time to talk. We are happy to meet with you by appointment if your schedule conflicts with our office hours.
**Evaluation Standards:**
90-100 = Excellent. Work is outstanding work in all respects. This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Writing demonstrates impressive understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Includes skillful and precise use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, and fluent expression, which is well organized and grammatically polished.

80-89 = Good. This work demonstrates a thorough and accurate understanding of course material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Written work reflects competence, but is somewhat general or a bit vague, or otherwise lacking in precision, and stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Although analytical, writing presents more description than analysis. Arguments are solid but not thoroughly original or polished. Source materials, examples, illustrations are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Papers have been carefully proofread.

70-79 = Adequate/fair. This work demonstrates somewhat fragmented understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Shows acquaintance with reading and ideas, but not intellectual engagement. Written work is choppy and arguments somewhat difficult to follow, examples are vague or irrelevant, and ideas are imprecise. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations, are incomplete or expressing some significant errors or weaknesses. Writing/articulation veers toward underdeveloped ideas, off-topic sources or examples, personal anecdotes, creative writing etc., or may be loaded with typos and other technical errors.

60-69 = Unsatisfactory. This work demonstrates a serious lack or error in understanding, and fails to express acquaintance with readings, discussions, themes, and ideas, in short, the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Written work is choppy, fractured and unclear. Arguments follow little logical development, or work presents little discernable argument whatsoever. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient.

59 and below = Failed/Unacceptable. This work does not demonstrate understanding of topics, ideas, and readings. This also includes the grade for work not submitted or attempted, or work that has been plagiarized.

**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 these policies, 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/aaq/
Disability Services:
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability
Equal Opportunity Statement:

READING SCHEDULE:
All readings are due for the date indicated; NOTE: BB indicates readings to be found on Blackboard.

Wk 1: 1/10
Intro and course overview

1/12 Mass culture critique
Storey, chpt 2, “The ‘Culture and Civilization’ Tradition”
MacDonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture” BB

Wk 2: 1/17 Cultural democracy
Gans, “New Introduction” to Popular Culture and High Culture BB
Storey, chpt 1, “What is Popular Culture?”

1/19 Introducing structuralism and semiotics
Storey, chpt 6, “Structuralism and Post-structuralism” (pp 111-125)

Wk 3: 1/24 Reading ads and blue jeans
Streeter, “Semiotics and Media”
http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/introduction.html (up to
Ideology); also see definition of terms:
http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html#anchor42966
Fiske, “The Jeaning of America” BB **

1/26 Marxist approach to cultural analysis
Storey, “Marxisms,” (pp. 59-82)
Rius: selections from Marx for Beginners BB

Wk 4: 1/31 Ideology and the political economy of media
Althusser: “Ideology” BB
Giroux: “Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?” BB
Recommended: Chandler, “Marxist Media Theory”
http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/marxism/marxism.html

2/2 Hegemonic routines
Storey, chpt 1 (revisit pp. 10-11)
Entertainment” BB
Lull, “Hegemony” BB

Wk 5: 2/7 Media culture and the triumph of the spectacle
Kellner, “Spectacle, Ideology, Catastrophe” BB

2/9 No Class: **************WINTER CARNIVAL**************

Wk 6: 2/14 Celebrity production
Gamson, "The Unwatched Life is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of the Ordinary in Celebrity Culture" BB

2/16

Exam 1

Wk 7: 2/21

Intersections: class, race, gender, sexual orientation on TV
Screening: Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class

2/23

Psychoanalytic criticism
Storey, chpt 5, “Psychoanalysis” (pp. 91-104)
Kluge, “Psychoanalysis and Film”
www.dspp.com/papers/kluge.htm

Wk 8: 2/28

Power, pleasure, the gaze: feminist criticism
Storey, chpt 5, “Psychoanalysis” (104-107)

3/1

Gender studies
Storey, “chpt 7, “Gender and Sexuality” (pp. 134-140)
During, “Feminism’s Aftermath: Gender Today” BB
Press, “Gender and Family in Television’s Golden Age and Beyond” BB

3/5 — 3/9

No class: *********** SPRING BREAK ***********

Wk 9: 3/13

Hegemony and popular music: subverting or selling out?
Storey, “Popular Music” BB
Grossberg, “Is There a Fan in the House?” BB

3/15

Articulating cultural studies
Storey, chpt 4, “Marxisms” (pp. 82-88)
Storey, chpt 6, “Structuralism and post-structuralism” (pp. 128-133)

Wk 10: 3/20

The politics of representation and signifying practices
Screening: Representation and the Media
Hall, selections from “The Work of Representation”; “The Spectacle of the Other” BB

3/22

Critical race analysis
Storey, chpt 8, “‘Race’, Racism and Representation” (pp. 167-171)
Rose, “There are Bitches and Hoes” BB
Azikwe, “More Than Baby Mamas: Black Mother and Hip Hop Feminism” BB

Wk 11: 3/27

The politics of racial humor
Haggins, “In the Wake of ‘The Nigger Pixie’: Dave Chappelle and the Politics of Crossover Comedy” BB
Jenkins, “Award Conversations About Uncomfortable Laughter”
http://flowtv.org/2008/03/awkward-conversations-about-uncomfortable-laughter/
Exam 2

Wk 12: 4/3

There's something queer here
Screening: Celluloid Closet
Storey, Chpt 7, “Queer Theory” (pp. 160-164)
Padva, “Educating the Simpsons: Teaching Queer Representations in Contemporary Visual Media” BB

4/5

Conflating boundaries: reality TV
Muñoz, “Pedro Zamora’s Real World of Counterpublicity: Performing an Ethics of the Self” BB

Wk 13: 4/10

Conflating boundaries: daytime talk
Moorti, “Cathartic Confessions or Emancipatory Texts?: Rape Narratives on The Oprah Winfrey Show” BB

4/12

Conflating boundaries: Lady Gaga
Cho, “Lady Gaga, Balls-Out: Recuperating Queer”
In Media Res, “Lady Gaga’s Gender/Queerness” (4 short essays):
  Keller: “I’m not a feminist...I love men’: Rethinking Lady Gaga’s Postfeminist Rhetoric and its Potential for Social Change”
  Fairclough: ‘Mainstreaming the Avant-Garde: Gender and Spectacle at GAGAKOH”
  Moore, “Lady Gaga and the High Heels of New Feminism”
  Nasilowski, “Answering the Feminist Call: Lady Gaga’s ‘Telephone’ as Pop Art”

Wk 14: 4/17

Postmodernism: “logic” of late capitalism
Storey, chpt 9, “Postmodernism” (pp. 181-203)
Gray, “Watching the Simpsons: Domestic Parody, Genre, Genre and Critical Intertextuality” BB

4/19

Satire TV and participatory democracy
Baym, “Networked News: Stewart, Colbert, and the New Public Sphere” BB

Wk 15: 4/26

(10:15 - 11:30)

Exam 3 *****PLEASE NOTE: This is during final exam week*****