

## **THEORIZING POPULAR CULTURE** **Johns Hopkins University Summer 2017**

Instructor: Dr. Meredith C. Ward  
Johns Hopkins Film and Media Studies

### **Contact Information:**

[meredith.ward.athopkins@gmail.com](mailto:meredith.ward.athopkins@gmail.com)

### **Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to the critical analysis of popular culture by surveying the major theoretical paradigms of media and cultural theory. The course is designed, then, to explore the lenses through which popular media has been considered by theorists. We will discuss both elite claims prioritizing the importance of distinction in media consumption and popular arguments asserting the artistry and political meanings of popular culture forms. Throughout the course we will interrogate the media's role in larger struggles, relating popular culture to the politics of taste, class, race, age, sexuality, and gender. We will explore film, television, popular music, and youth subcultures. The class, then, is a combination of media studies, the sociology of culture, popular culture and other related subjects. The course reader provides us with a structure for a theoretical and historical introduction to the study of popular culture. Lastly, the course is designed to encourage students to be more active critics and explore the media that they love, from film and television to popular music.

This is an online course. You may watch the lectures on your own time. This is designed to make this course compatible with students' schedules when they are interning, working, or taking other summer courses. You should keep up with the lectures and the assignments, but when in your day you view the video lectures is up to you.

### **Texts**

Readings will be available on electronic reserve.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Attendance and Participation (includes video diary entries)	20%
Student Presentation (15 min., done via video)	20%
Paper One (750-1,000 words)	20%
Paper Two (750-1,000 words)	20%
Final Exam	20%

Attendance and participation are key components of being enrolled in this class. This is done through the form of video diary entries that are posted to Blackboard each week. Each of the student presentations will engage one of the readings for the week. The two (very short) papers will show mastery of the material and the ability to think critically and apply these concepts to contemporary pop culture texts, ranging from film and television to popular music. The final exam will show mastery of all material covered in the course, and will be a take-home essay that covers many of the topics from the syllabus as you answer one broad question that covers them all.

As stated on the syllabus, all papers should be emailed to the instructor by 1:30pm on the day they are due. I am very happy to correspond with you about your papers and talk things over before this time.

## **Web site**

The course web site is located at <https://blackboard.jhu.edu>. We will use the web site constantly as the course progresses.

## **Readings**

All readings should be completed by the date under which they are listed on the syllabus.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Wednesday, May 31st**

#### **Session I: Course Introduction**

##### **What is Popular Culture?**

The Study of Popular Culture and Cultural Studies

**To be read by next session: "What is Popular Culture?" from *Cultural Theory & Popular Culture: An Introduction* (PDF)**

11p

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### **Friday, June 2nd**

#### **Session II: The "Culture and Civilization" Tradition**

##### **"What is Popular Culture?" (8p.)**

Introduction: The "Culture and Civilization" Tradition (3p.)

F.R. Leavis: "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" (8p.)

11p

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### **Monday, June 5th**

#### **Session III: On the "Culture Industry"**

Adorno: "On Popular Music" (13 p.)

13p

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### **Wednesday, June 7th**

#### **Session IV: Culturalism**

Introduction

Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel: "The Young Audience" (7 p.)

7p

**Screening: *Punk: Attitude* (dir. Don Letts, 2005)**

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### **Friday, June 9th**

#### **Session V: Media-Inspired Subcultures**

##### ***Punk, Mod & Reggae***

Selections, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*.

Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, Ed. Routledge: 1990. (On electronic reserve)

"Style," John Clarke (21p.)

21p

**Screening: *They Live* (dir. John Carpenter, 1988)**

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### **Monday, June 12th**

#### **Session VI: Marxism and media criticism**

Introduction

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas" (2p.)

Karl Marx: "Base and Superstructure" (1p.)

3p

**Screening: *Diff'rent Strokes*, pilot episode: "Movin' In" (dir. Herbert Kenwith, 1978) & *Law & Order: SVU: Season 10 Episode 14: "Transitions"* (dir. Peter Leto, 2009)**

**Paper One due. 1:30pm.**

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**Wednesday, June 14th**

**Session VIII, Part 1: Hegemony 1**

Antonio Gramsci: "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State" (7p.)

Tony Bennett: "Popular Culture and the 'Turn to Gramsci'" (8p.)

15p

**Screening: *Sex and the City: Season 1 Episode 10, "The Baby Shower"* (dir. Susan Seidelman, 1998) & *Dragnet '67***

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**Friday, June 16th**

**Session VIII, Part 2: Hegemony 2**

John Storey: "Rockin' Hegemony: West Coast Rock and Amerika's War in Vietnam" (11p.)

"Our Global Food-Service Enterprise Is Totally Down For Your Awesome Subculture." *The Onion*. <http://www.theonion.com/content/node/25518> (1p.)

12p

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**Monday, June 19th**

**Session IX: Gender and Sexuality**

Introduction

"Gender and Sexuality," *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (PDF)

32p

**Screening: *Syechdoche, New York* (dir. Charlie Kaufman, 2008)**

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**Wednesday, June 21st**

**Session X: Postmodernism**

Introduction

1. Jean Baudrillard: "The Precession of Simulacra" (8p.)

*This American Life*: "Travels in Hyperreality – Simulated Worlds"

8p

**Screening: *High Fidelity* (dir. Stephen Frears, 2000)**

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**Friday, June 23rd**

**Session XI: Taste and Consumption**

1. Introduction

2. Pierre Bourdieu: "Distinction and the Aristocracy of Culture" (11p.)

*This American Life*: "Numbers"

"The Most Unwanted Song," by Vitaly Komar, Alex Melamid and David Soldier: [http://ubu.artmob.ca/sound/komar\\_melamid/KomarMelamid\\_The-Most-UnwantedSong.mp3](http://ubu.artmob.ca/sound/komar_melamid/KomarMelamid_The-Most-UnwantedSong.mp3)

11p

**Screening: *Trekkies* (dir. Roger Nygard, 1997)**

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**Monday, June 26th**

**Session XII: The Politics of the Popular**

1. Introduction
2. Michel de Certeau: "The Practice of Everyday Life" (12p.)

**Paper two due. 1:30pm**

**Wednesday, June 28th**

**Session XIII: Catch up on any missed material. Review Session done via video chat.**

**Friday, June 30th**

**Session XIV: Final Take-Home Exam. Time and exact date will be determined by consensus in a course-wide Doodle poll that will be administered by the instructor.**

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## **CLASS POLICIES**

### Attendance:

You are expected to turn in work each week. If you have a viable reason why you cannot do so on time (such as serious illness or a family emergency), it is your responsibility to notify the instructor prior to the deadline. If you miss more than three assignments, you cannot pass the course.

### Turning in Written Work:

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the date listed on the syllabus. This work is expected to be on time. Lateness to class on one of these due dates will lower your grade. Each day that a paper is late without notice, the grade on the paper is lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade. This means that an A becomes an A-, or a B+ becomes a B.

### Contacting Me/Meeting With Me:

My office hours are from 3-5pm Tuesdays, or by appointment. You can also email me. I am always ready to offer help. My email is [meredith.ward.athopkins@gmail.com](mailto:meredith.ward.athopkins@gmail.com). Email me by 10:30pm and I will respond promptly. I do not check my email after 10:30, and any emails sent after then will receive an answer the next day.

## **JHU POLICIES**

### Students with Disabilities

In compliance with Johns Hopkins University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require for your work. Request for academic accommodations should be made during the first week of the quarter, so appropriate arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Office of Student Disability Services to determine appropriate academic accommodations. For more information, please contact Dr. Brent Mosser in Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720 or at [studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu).

### Academic Integrity at Johns Hopkins

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying

others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment—at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures followed in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the website. For more information, visit: <http://ethics.jhu.edu/>