

## COMM1230-920: Critical Approaches to Popular Culture

Summer Session II: July 3<sup>rd</sup> - August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023  
Monday/Wednesday, 5:15-9:05pm\*\*\*  
online with asynchronous components

### Instructor

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### Course Description

Popular culture has been alternately condemned as too trivial to warrant attention and too powerful to resist. Its consumers have been dubbed fashion victims, couch potatoes and victims of propaganda. This course considers these critiques, as well as those that suggest that popular culture can be emancipatory, allowing for the creation and renegotiation of meaning. Over the course of the semester, we consider the impacts of various forms of popular culture and discuss their effects on how we see ourselves and others. We explore the ever-shifting distinctions between high, middlebrow, and low culture and analyze how power and resistance structure the production and consumption of popular texts. Topics covered include: social media influencers, music, reality TV, memes, celebrities, fandom, TikTok, and more!

### Course Format

\*\*\* This class will convene online over zoom for lecture and discussion. It will include asynchronous components—mainly lecture recordings—which will reduce in-person meeting time to around 2.5 to 3 hours per class session.

### Course Goals

In COMM 1230, students will ...

1. become proficient in communication and cultural theory on popular culture
2. develop skills to evaluate, question, and make sense of different forms of media and their real-world implications
3. create and maintain a collaborative learning community (+ have fun!)
4. build a repertoire of critical thinking skills to navigate a media-saturated world

### Best way to contact the professor:

I'll be holding office hours via Zoom on Wednesdays, from 11:30am to 1:30pm. Please use my Calendly link to schedule an appointment. If you're unable to come to my office hours, you can also email me at [mariela.morales@asc.upenn.edu](mailto:mariela.morales@asc.upenn.edu) or text me (786) 564 7909.

### Assignments and Grades

**Class Attendance and Participation (20 points)** – As an interactive seminar, students are expected to attend and participate in class. Participation means sharing opinions and insights, asking questions, giving relevant examples and, alternatively, submitting written comments after each class. Students should come to class ready to engage in course readings, recorded lectures, and with each other. The reading load for each segment has been balanced so that students perform close-reading of shorter texts.

**In-Class Pop Culture Artifact Presentation (10 points)**– Towards the beginning of the semester, students will select one pop culture artifact and give a short presentation on the artifact using some of the theories of the class for a brief analysis. Presentation should be no longer than 8 mins, and students need to answer the following questions:

- What is the artifact?
- How is this artifact pop?
- Has this artifact always been considered pop culture? Why?

**Essay (35 points)** – Using ideas from our course readings, students will complete an essay (1,400-1,600 words), in which they critically analyze and reflect on a pop culture artifact of their choice (it can be the same artifact that was presented on, or a different one). To get feedback along the way, students will submit an outline of their paper before the due date for 5 of the total points.

**Exam (35 points)** – One cumulative exam will be given on Canvas on the last day of class.

**Extra credit** – One extra credit opportunity will be offered during the course. **(5 points)**

### **Class Policies**

- **Devices:** This is an online class, so laptops and smartphones- when used for class purposes like accessing zoom- are permitted in class. Yet, please do not use them for other purposes during class time.
- **Accessibility/Accommodations:** Students who are differently abled will be fully included in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of the information you share with me. For institutional support, contact the Weingarten Learning Resources Center at [disabilityservices@vpul.upenn.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@vpul.upenn.edu) and 215-573-9235. This service is free and confidential.
- **Discussion ground rules:** Class discussions may be uncomfortable or challenging at times, but they should never make us feel unsafe. In the event of a disruption, I will intervene in discussion and address the matter in office hours and/or at our next meeting.
- **Late assignment:** Late work and/or makeup exams will only be accepted in extraordinary and documented circumstances. In all other cases, no late work will not be accepted.
- **Cooldown period:** Students should wait at least 24-hours from when grades are returned before requesting feedback or a regrading (Note: Grades are rarely changed).
- **Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity includes cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and the use of AI technologies for essay writing. A detailed explanation of these policies can be found [here](#). Failure to comply with the policies of this course and of the university will result in disciplinary

action. Please let me or the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Litty Paxton, know if you have questions.

**Campus Resources**

The University of Pennsylvania has many resources available to students. Some worth highlighting:

- The Marks Family Writing Center: Visit <http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/wc/> to get feedback and support on your writing assignments.
- Mental Health Resources: Like physical health, mental health must be a priority. If you find yourself feeling low, experiencing distress, or struggling with mental health, please reach out to [Penn’s Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) at 215-898-7021. You may also reach out to me or the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Litty Paxton. I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of information you share with me, but please know that in cases of disclosing experiences of sexual assault, self-injury or intent to injure others, I may be required by the University to report concerns.

Student Basic Needs: It is important to me that you have the resources you need to be able to focus on learning in this course—this includes both the necessary academic materials as well as taking care of your day-to-day needs. Students experiencing difficulty affording the course materials should reach out to the Penn First Plus office ([pennfirstplus@upenn.edu](mailto:pennfirstplus@upenn.edu)). Students who are struggling to afford sufficient food to eat every day and/or lack a safe and suitable space to live should contact Student Intervention Services ([vpul-sisteam@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:vpul-sisteam@pobox.upenn.edu)). Students may also wish to contact their [Financial Aid Counselor](#) or Academic Advisor about these concerns.

**Course Syllabus**

Date	Readings
7/3	<p style="text-align: center;"><i><u>INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF POP CULTURE</u></i></p> <p>Course introductions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Storey, J. (2009). What is popular culture? <i>Cultural Theory and Popular Culture</i>, pp. 1-16.</p> <p>Hebdige, D. (2002). In poor taste: Notes on Pop. In <i>Hiding in the Light: on images and things</i> (pp. 116-136). Routledge.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Zeisler, A. (2008). Pop and circumstance: Why pop culture matters. In <i>Feminism and pop culture</i>. Seal Press. pp. 1-21.</p>

7/5	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>POP vs. THE POPULAR</i></u></p> <p>Canclini, N. G. (1995). Neither Cultured, nor Popular, nor Massified. In <i>Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity</i> (pp. 3-6). University of Minnesota Press. <b>[Recorded lecture]</b></p> <p>Canclini, N. G. (1995). The Staging of the Popular. In <i>Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity</i> (pp. 145-173). University of Minnesota Press. <b>[Recorded lecture]</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Hall, S. (2019). Notes on deconstructing “the popular.” In J. Storey (Ed.), <i>Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader</i> (5th ed., pp. 564-574). Routledge.</p> <p>Mann, L. K. (2022). Introduction. In <i>Rude citizenship: Jamaican popular music, copyright, and the Reverberations of Colonial Power</i> (pp.1-5). University of North Carolina Press.</p>
7/10	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>AXES OF POWER</i></u></p> <p>Kellner, D. (2007). <i>Cultural theory, classical and contemporary positions</i>. Sage. pp. 3-11. <b>[Recorded lecture]</b></p> <p>Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1944). <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>. pp. 1-12. <b>[Recorded lecture]</b>  <b>Warning: This is a difficult reading!</b> As you read, underline sections you understand, and bring questions to class. Kellner will provide some context, so feel free to read Kellner first.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Debord, G. (1983). The Commodity as Spectacle (35-53). In <i>Society of the Spectacle</i>. Black and Red, Detroit.  <b>Warning: This is a short but difficult reading!</b> As you read, underline sections, and make notes of quotes that stand to you so that we can discuss it in class.</p> <p>Asner, A. (2005). <i>Class dismissed: How TV frames the working class</i>. [Film]</p>
7/12	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>AUTHENTICITY AND ARTIFICIALITY</i></u></p> <p>Benjamin, W. (1936). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. <i>Visual Culture: Experiences in Visual Culture</i>. <b>[Recorded lecture]</b>  <b>YouTube video from lecture:</b> <a href="#">Then &amp; Now. (2019). Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.</a></p> <p>Sontag, S. (1964). Notes on camp. <b>[Recorded lecture]</b></p>

	<b>***IN CLASS ARTIFACT PRESENTATIONS***</b>
7/17	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><b>TRENDS (AND THEIR ACCELERATION)</b></u></p> <p>Gladwell, M. (1997). The coolhunt. <i>The New Yorker</i>. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>Powers, D. (2019). Cool hunting. In <i>On trend: The business of forecasting the future</i>. University of Illinois Press. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Fiske, J. (2010). The jeaning of America. In <i>Understanding popular culture</i>. Routledge, pp. 1-21.</p> <p>Judkiss, M., &amp; Bhattarai, A. (2021). Jean wars. <i>The Washington Post</i>.</p> <p>Nguyen, T. (2022). Trends are dead. <a href="#">Wired</a>.</p>
7/19	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><b>FELT CONNECTIONS: FANDOM AND INFLUENCING</b></u></p> <p><b>***OUTLINE DUE THIS WEEK***</b></p> <p>Jenkins III, H. (1988). Star Trek rerun, reread, rewritten: Fan writing as textual poaching. <i>Critical studies in Media communication</i>, 5(2), 85-107. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>Penny, L. (2019). How the nerds are reinventing pop culture. <i>Wired</i>. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>Kuo, L., Perez-Garcia, S., Burke, L., Yamasaki, V., &amp; Le, T. (2022). Performance, fantasy, or narrative: LGBTQ+ Asian American identity through Kpop media and fandom. <i>Journal of Homosexuality</i>, 69(1), 145-168. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Abidin, C. (2015). Communicative &lt;3 intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness. <i>A Journal of Gender, New Media, &amp; Technology</i>, 8.</p> <p>Jennings, R. (2023, March 1). How the Great Recession paved the way for the influencer industry. <i>Vox</i>. <a href="https://www.vox.com/the-goods/23618956/influencer-industry-emily-hund">https://www.vox.com/the-goods/23618956/influencer-industry-emily-hund</a></p>
7/24	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><b>THE MANUFACTURING OF "REALITY"</b></u></p> <p>Oullette, L., &amp; Murray, S. (2004). Introduction. In <i>Reality TV: Remaking television culture</i>. New York University Press, pp. 1-13. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>Oullette, L. (2008). "Take responsibility for yourself": <i>Judge Judy</i> and the neoliberal citizen. In <i>Reality TV: Remaking television culture</i> (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York University Press, pp. 223-242. [Recorded lecture]</p> <p>-----</p>

	<p>Psarras, E. (2020). "It's a mix of authenticity and complete fabrication" Emotional camping: The cross-platform labor of the <i>Real Housewives</i>. <i>New Media and Society</i>, 1–17. → <b>Focus on pp. 1-7 and "Conclusion"</b></p> <p>Butler, B., &amp; Yahr, E. (2021). What does reality TV owe Black women? <i>Washington Post</i>.</p> <p><b>Recommended:</b> Ward, J. R. (2015). The real scandal: Portrayals of Black Women in reality TV. In <i>Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV</i>. Rutgers University Press, pp. 1-15.</p>
7/26	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><b>MEMES AND (COMBATTING) HATE ONLINE</b></u></p> <p>***<b>ESSAY DUE</b>***</p> <p><b>Guest Lecturer:</b> Shane Sheehy</p> <p>Shifman, L. (2014). When memes go digital. In <i>Memes in digital culture</i>. MIT Press. [<b>Recorded lecture</b>]</p> <p>Marwick, A. &amp; Lewis, R. (2017). <i>Media manipulation and disinformation online</i>. Data &amp; Society Research Institute. Selections. [<b>Recorded lecture</b>]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Banet-Weiser, S. (2015). Popular misogyny. <i>Culture Digitally</i>.</p> <p>Brown, M. (2018). <a href="#">Beyonce's boudoir and the culture of dissemblance</a> . <i>Black feminisms</i>.</p>
7/31	<p style="text-align: center;"><u><b>OBLIQUE POWERS</b></u></p> <p>DeLaure, M. &amp; Fink, M. (2017). Introduction. In <i>Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance</i>, pp. 1-38. [<b>Recorded lecture</b>]</p> <p>Thomas, D. A. (2006). <i>Modern Blackness: Progress, "America," and the politics of popular culture in Jamaica</i>. In K. M. Clarke &amp; D. A. Thomas (Eds.), <i>Globalization and Race</i> (pp. 335–389). Duke University Press. [<b>Recorded lecture</b>]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p>Muñoz, J. E. (1999). Performing disidentity: Disidentification as a practice of freedom. In <i>Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the performance of politics</i> (pp. 161–180). University of Minnesota Press.</p> <p>Gámez Torres, N. (2012). Hearing the change: Reggaeton and emergent values in contemporary Cuba. <i>Latin American Music Review</i>, 33(2), 227–260.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.7560/lamr33203">https://doi.org/10.7560/lamr33203</a></p>
8/2	<p><b>FINAL EXAM</b></p>