PROSEMINAR – CORE GG2018 – Spring, 2014

POPULAR OBJECTS / POPULAR SUBJECTS

Wednesdays, 6:20 – 9:00
One Washington Place, Room 501

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Hours: Mondays, 2 – 6 and by appointment
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**Course Description:** Historical and technological developments have changed the way we think about cultural consumption. Is the mass audience itself a product of the goods and entertainment it consumes (as midcentury ideology theorists believed) or is it an outmoded concept lost in the wake of globalization, the sharp focusing techniques of digital marketing, crowd sourcing, and participatory culture? What are the implications of these developments for aesthetic appreciation, the formation of pleasure and desire, the relationship between culture and politics? Where do we ourselves stand as critics, scholars, and artists in relation to such questions? This proseminar attempts to reach students with interests, practical or theoretical, in one or more of the following fields: media studies, literary and art criticism, history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and philosophy (particularly aesthetics). Among the topics to be discussed are: the history of asserted differences between high and low art; the mass reproduction and commodification of art; critical judgement and the differences between fans and experts.

This is a class in individualized, interdisciplinary cultural analysis—but it should also appeal to the needs and interests of cultural makers. Most of our readings in this seminar are samplings from traditional and contemporary debates within the humanities and social sciences that deal, sometimes closely and sometimes tangentially (at first glance, anyway) with the way in which the word “culture” is used today to describe and explain a wide range of activities ranging from aesthetic judgment to political affiliation. The key word in the previous sentence was “samplings”—my goal in constructing this course was to provide a broad platform that will accommodate the wide range of interests and concentrations I expect to find among the students in this class. Thus, the syllabus includes: selections from grand philosophers such as Kant and Hume); full-length books published in recent decades that have been canonical, touchstones for almost everyone working with scholarly seriousness in the study of culture; primary materials including short stories, films, and television shows. The readings may sometimes be only of general interest and perhaps exclude arguments and modes that matter a lot to you as an individual, so your individual assignments and final project in particular are designed to encourage you to bring those issues to our table.

**Required Texts:**

All excerpts, chapters, and essays will be provide as pdf's or weblinks via our NYUClasses page. The following books are required; all of them are easily obtained online or at local bookstores. Always remember to check if digital copies are accessible through NYU Bobst.

Carl Wilson, *Let’s Talk about Love*
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*
Assignments:

Three essays, including:

- One short response paper due by email to me on February 28. (3 – 4 pages or 1,000 words)
- A critical essay on class readings due the Friday before spring break. (8 – 10 pages)
- A final essay applying class discussions and readings to the cultural object, phenomenon, or problem of your choice. By mid-term you will decide if your project will (1) analyze a text, object, or phenomenon (cf. Linda Williams’s work), or (2) delve into processes or reception and/or transmission (specifically, take some measure of the current utility of Jenkins’s concept of “convergence culture”) I encourage you to develop a topic for this paper that will bring you within the domain of the MA Thesis you will one day write. (10 – 15 pages).

Two oral reports, including:

- A brief introduction to one of the night’s readings that includes 2 – 3 questions for group discussion
- A 10-12 minute “Ted” style talk about your final paper

Grading: A good grade will result from steady attendance, promptness in submitting assignments, and active participation in class discussions and group activities.

Academic Integrity:

NYU Plagiarism Policy: “As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website for a full description of the academic integrity policy.”

[www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html]
## SYLLABUS

1) **January 29**
   Introductions; excerpt from Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*

2) **February 5**
   - John Fiske, “Popular Culture”
   - Dave Hickey, “The Kids are All Right: After the Prom”
   - Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”

3) **February 12**
   - Carl Wilson, *Let’s Talk about Love*
   - Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment” and excerpts from “The Analytics of Beauty”
   - Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”

4) **February 19**
   - Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modernity”
   - Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case” and “Youth and the Bright Medusa”

5) **February 26**
   - Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
   - F. R. Leavis, from *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*
   - Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”

6) **March 5**
   - Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
   - Theodor Adorno, “How to Look at Television” and “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception”

7) **March 12**
   - Henry Jenkins, from *Convergence Culture*
   - Linda Williams, from *Playing the Race Card*

8) **March 19**
   - Spring Break

9) **March 26**
   - Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature
   - Stuart Hall, selected short writings

10) **April 2**
    - Roland Barthes, “Myth Today” and “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”

11) **April 9**
    - Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

12) **April 16**
    - Possible topics:
      - James Thompson, *Performance Affects*
      - Public/Community art for social change

13) **April 23**
    - Possible topics:
      - Susie Linfield, from *The Cruel Radiance*
      - Selections from censorship and curriculum debates
      - Culture for children and youth

14 – 15) **April 30 – May 7**
    - Student Reports