Gallatin M.A. Program – Spring 2011

Proseminar:
Popular Objects/
Popular Subjects

K70.2018

Thursdays, 6:20 – 8:20
One Washington Place, Room 527

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Popular Objects/ Popular Subjects
Historical and technological developments in media have changed the way we think about popular audiences – are they products or producers of culture? Is an audience a mass of subjects, or is it comprised of individuals who freely express personal tastes? 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). Our gaze will most often fall upon objects and events generated for transmission via mass media, but we will also consider other phenomena (as studied and documented, for example, in legal studies, ethnography, or star studies). We will survey foundational texts in the study of popular culture and will raise questions concerning such themes as: the difference between high and low art; the intersection of culture and politics; the globalization of culture, art as commodity and mass object; the value of fan studies and Henry Jenkins’s concept of “participatory culture”; and the place of desire, pleasure, and the perception of beauty in mass-produced or popular culture.

Assignments
Five two-page (1,000 word) response papers. Please email these to me by 10 a.m. on Thursdays. You may choose which texts you want to write about but you must submit five over the course of the semester. A good response will offer a
concise summary of the overall argument of the reading and then raise one or
two critical questions about it. It might also included discussion of the reading’s
conceptual connections to other readings.

One Project Report (1,000 words). You will describe your basic questions about
the object, phenomenon, or idea that is the focus of your final paper. Please
email this to me by 10 a.m. on the day you are scheduled to present your report
to the class.

Two oral presentations. The first presentation will consist of you reading one of
your response papers. This event will simulate the kind of situation you will
encounter at academic and professional conferences and it will be used to
generate the class conversation about that week’s assigned reading. The
second presentation is a report on class project and will serve as a prospectus
for your final paper. The reports will be scheduled at our first class meeting.

One final paper (20-25 pages). You will choose your own topic but develop it in
conversation with the class. This is a formal academic paper with notes and
bibliography. Rough drafts are not required, but I strongly encourage you to
share your writing with me as you draft and revise.

N.B. When emailing a paper to me, please include your last name in the file
name (i.e., “smithresponseone.doc”) and include the word “Proseminar” in
the subject line.

Class Projects / Affinity Groups
The “class project” is your opportunity to apply our class readings and
discussions to an activity that expresses your particular concentration and,possibly, generates ideas for your M.A. concentration and final thesis. The class
as a whole will discuss the best way to divide into groups around common
themes and interests that may lead to collaborative projects and activities.

Readings
Essays will be distributed via Blackboard or photocopy. All books are on reserve
but also easy to get online or at local bookstores):

Theodor Adorno, The Culture Industry
Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture
Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture
John Berger, Ways of Seeing
Robert Venturi, Learning from Las Vegas
Roland Barthes, Mythologies
Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities

Recommended: Durham and Kellner, Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks
Reading Schedule

January 26  Snow Day(!)

February 3

John Fiske, “Popular Culture”

February 10

Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modernity”
Georg Simmel, “Fashion”
Matthew Arnold, from Culture and Anarchy
F. R. Leavis, Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture

February 17

Russell Lynes, “Highbrow Middlebrow Lowbrow”
Clement Greenberg – “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”
Dwight Macdonald – “A Theory of Mass Culture”

February 24

Jay Baird, "The Death and Transfiguration of Hitler Youth Herbert Norkus"
Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1920)
Karl Mannheim, from Ideology and Utopia
Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament” and selections from From Caligari to Hitler

March 3  Group meetings (KH at a conference)

March 10

Theodor Adorno, The Culture Industry
Theodor Adorno, from Aesthetic Theory
Jay Bernstein, “‘The Dead Speaking of Stones and Stars’: Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory”

March 17  Spring Break
March 24

George Orwell, “Boys’ Weeklies”
Roland Barthes, Mythologies
Roland Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Study of Narrative”

March 31

Stuart Hall, from The Popular Arts
Stuart Hall, “The Television Discourse: Encoding/Decoding”
Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves”
Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular”
Raymond Williams, from The Long Revolution
Janice Radway, “Reading Reading the Romance”

April 7

Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities
Constance Rourke, from American Humor

April 14

John Berger, Ways of Seeing
Robert Venturi, Learning from Las Vegas
Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”

April 21

Andrew Ross, No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture

April 28

Henry Jenkins, Cultural Convergence

May 5

Readings by contemporary writers to be determined by class interest – perhaps on themes of fandom, celebrity culture, identity and representation, consumerism