
COMM 206: Communication and Culture
Summer 2017

Sarah Myers West

Tues./Thurs. 9:30 am – 1:40 pm

Office Hours: Tuesday, 1:40 – 2:40 pm, ANN Café (and by appointment)

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Course Description:

The field of cultural studies is centrally concerned with how cultural institutions, ideologies and systems of production work together to construct and shape the ways we make meaning in our lives, as individuals and as a community. This course is designed as an introduction to cultural studies and how to critically think about the role of communication and culture in contemporary life. Drawing on literature past and present, it seeks to provide us with the tools to critically examine, productively critique and design effective cultural interventions into the world around us. Through our readings, lectures, and discussions, together we will explore how to draw on the work of cultural theorists to look beneath the surface of our culture in order to affect the kind of change we want to see in the world.

Learning Objectives:

This course is primarily oriented around cultural theory, and thus will engage with abstract concepts and questions about power. However, we won't leave theory in the classroom: throughout the semester, we will work to build bridges that allow us to take cultural and critical theory out of the abstract and apply it to the world around us. A primary takeaway from the course, then, is to learn how to engage in critical analysis of culture: to identify ideology at work, to parse discursive texts and understand how and what they communicate to us, and to analyze visual representations and systems of signs. The ultimate objective of this course is for its participants to learn how to understand and apply critical thinking in ways that enable us to engage with and produce culture in meaningful ways.

Readings:

All course readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Instructor Bio:

I am a doctoral candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, where my research centers on international policymaking and activism around privacy, security, and freedom of expression. My dissertation examines the politics of encryption and history of the cypherpunk movement in the 1990s and 2000s. I also study the politics of technology companies and how they intervene in spaces for public discourse. I am an affiliate researcher at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society, a Cybersecurity Fellow at the New America Foundation, the managing editor for Global Voices Advocacy's Netizen Report, and worked as a Google Policy Fellow for the Electronic Frontier Foundation in the summer of 2015 – feel free to ask me about any and all of these things!

Class Expectations and Technology Use:

Our time will be precious this semester, as this is a short but intensive course. In order to make our time together as rewarding and productive as possible, I'd like you to consider these expectations:

1. Attendance and participation are crucial, and will count more than they usually would in a fall/spring course:
 - Attendance - Attendance is mandatory and I expect you to arrive on time (even if this means bringing your breakfast/lunch to class – I'd rather you be here than hungry and/or late). Missing more than one class without prior approval or being chronically late will result in a deduction to your grade.
 - Participation - Your grade will also take into account how 'present' you are. If you show up, expect to contribute to discussion. Your physical presence is not enough to earn you an A for participation. And if I notice you texting, shopping, on Twitter/Facebook/Snapchat, etc., I reserve the right to ask you to put away your devices.
2. Don't be afraid to ask questions. The best way to learn the material is to engage with it, especially if you're not sure you understand it. I welcome interaction, questions, examples, and discussion throughout the class (and in between!) – feel free to chime in, respectfully, at any time.
3. Questions/concerns regarding grades: If you have a question or concern regarding a grade that you've received, you have one week from when you initially received your grade to bring it to me. After one week, no changes to grades will be considered.
4. Ethics/Integrity: Any form of plagiarism/cheating is totally unacceptable and will be immediately reported (see Academic Conduct, below).
5. Field trips: I've tentatively planned at least one site visit mid-way through the semester, which will take place during our class time but could potentially extend longer depending on class interest – we can agree upon the timing of this mutually beforehand. The class will use public transportation to travel between USC and the designated site.
6. Respecting your colleagues: From time to time, we're going to be discussing some difficult issues - particularly the weeks when we're focused on discussing identity, race, gender, sexuality, etc. We don't have to always agree with one another, but we do have to make every effort to respect the identities, experiences and opinions of our colleagues. Remember: We each approach and respond to cultural materials from a unique perspective and our perspectives are always-already shaped by our particular class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and so on. If we keep this in mind, we can learn a lot from our readings, and perhaps even more from each other. We'll take a hint from Stuart Hall (who we'll read in class) who said it best: "Identity is an unfinished conversation".

Here's what you can expect of me:

1. I will show up, on time, ready to discuss the readings each class. I will also make time available during office hours each week to answer any individual questions or issues you'd like to raise.

2. I will endeavor to respond to your questions as quickly as we can. E-mail is preferable, but sometimes things get lost. If you've tried reaching out and don't get a response within 48 hours, please try me again.
3. I will be respectful of your views and perspectives, and make sure that everyone gets fair treatment in class. This doesn't mean that I'll always get this perfect - but I want the classroom to be a safe space to speak freely and honestly about difficult subjects.

Course Requirements:

Weekly responses (25%):

Each week, you will be asked to write a two-paragraph reading response, which should be posted to Blackboard by 12:00 pm on the Monday before class. The first paragraph of your response should summarize what you think are the key themes from the week's readings. In the second paragraph, try to connect the ideas of the readings to something you've observed in culture out in the real world: where do you see the ideas from class at work? What questions does this raise for you? The weekly responses should be an opportunity for you to collect and synthesize your thoughts, and raise questions you'd like to discuss in class. In each class, one student will be asked to draw on these responses to act as discussion leader. We'll decide who will be discussion leader for each class during the first session.

Papers (15% each):

You will be given two standalone papers to complete over the course of the semester. These papers should be approximately 4-6 pages long, and will ask you to engage critically with the concepts we discuss in class, utilizing and applying the course readings. Papers should be turned in by email before class on the day that they are due, outlined below.

Class Project (20%):

A running theme throughout the semester will consider whether culture is a tool for repression or a means for expression and liberation. In a semester-long project, you will be asked to examine this theme in the context of a particular cultural artifact, considering how power works on and through culture in the example you've chosen.

You'll do this in a variety of ways: each session, I'll give you a set of questions to research and apply to your artifact, and you'll have the last hour of class to work on your project with your classmates. For your final, synthesize your research into a 4-6 page cultural critique of the artifact that engages with the question of whether culture acts as a tool for repression or a means of expression and liberation – or both. We'll present these projects and turn in papers in the final class session.

Late Policy:

Unless there is a valid and documented medical/family reason that we have discussed beforehand, no late papers will be accepted. If there is an emergency that will impact your ability to turn in the assignment on time, you will need to contact me ahead of time. If an assignment is submitted late, you will lose a partial letter grade for every 24 hours the assignment is late. No assignments will be accepted more than 72 hours past the due date, unless we have already made other arrangements.

Grading:

Your final course grade will be based on the following:

Two papers (15% each): 30%

Final project and paper: 20%

Weekly reading responses: 25%

Discussion leadership: 10%

Attendance and participation: 15%

Grading Scale:

Assignments will be graded using the following scale:

93-100% A

90-92.9% A-

87-89.9% B+

83-86.9% B

80-82.9% B-

77-79.9% C+

73-76.9% C

70-72.9% C-

67-69.9% D+

63-66.9% D

60-62.9% D-

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the Department of Public Safety <http://dps.usc.edu>. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support Systems:

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://ali.usc.edu>, which sponsors courses and workshops

specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs <http://dsp.usc.edu> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Course Readings (subject to revision)

Week 1: What is Culture?

Thursday, June 29: Introduction

- Raymond Williams (1961). "The Analysis of Culture", in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, Storey, J., Ed., Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Raymond Williams (1958). "Culture is Ordinary", in *The Everyday Life Reader*, Highmore, B., Ed., London: Routledge.
- Matthew Arnold (1867). "Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism", in *Culture and Anarchy: Landmarks in the History of Education*, Wilson, J.D. and Cavenagh, F.A., Eds. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Stuart Hall (1998). "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular", in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, Storey, J., Ed., New York: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

Week 2: Marx and Marxism

Tuesday, July 4: NO CLASS; HOLIDAY

Thursday, July 6th:

- Friedrich Engels (1845). "The Condition of the Working Class in England"
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1845). "The German Ideology"
- Antonio Gramsci (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers.
- Louis Althusser (1971). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)", in Durham, M.G. and Kellner, D.M., Eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Week 3: The Culture Industry, Taste and Consumption

Tuesday, July 11th: In-class screening: selections from *Mad Men*

- Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer (1944). "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Walter Benjamin (1969). "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Raymond Williams (1961). "Advertising: The Magic System", in During, S., Ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.

Thursday, July 13th: Paper 1 Due; Class visit to the Broad Museum

- Pierre Bourdieu (1979). "The Aesthetic Sense as a Sense of Distinction," in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, London: Routledge.
- Georg Simmel (1957). "Fashion", *The American Journal of Sociology*, 6: 541-558.

- Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012). “Introduction: Branding the Authentic”, in *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, New York: NYU Press.

Week 4: Subcultures and Resistance

Tuesday, July 18th: In-class screening: *Master of None*, “Indians on TV”

- Edward Said (1978). *Orientalism*, London: Routledge.
- bell hooks (1992). “Eating the other: Desire and Resistance”, in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Michel Foucault (1972). “Truth and Power”, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Gordon, C, Ed., New York: Pantheon Books.

Thursday, July 20th:

- Dick Hebdige (1979). “(i) From Culture to Hegemony; (ii) Subculture: The Unnatural Break”, in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sarah Thornton (1995). “The Distinctions of Cultures without Distinction”, in *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Stuart Cosgrove (1984). “The Zoot-suit and Style Warfare”, *History Workshop*, 18:77-91.
- James C. Scott (1992). Chapter 1 of *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Week 5: Intersectionality, Race, Gender and Sexuality

Tuesday, July 25th: In-class screening: *Confirmation*

- Stuart Hall (1981). “The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media”, in Dines, G. and Humez, J.M., Eds., *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Richard Dyer (1988). “White”, in Evans, J. and Hall, S., Eds., *Visual culture: the reader*, London: SAGE Publications.
- Kimberlé Crenshaw (1992). “Whose Story Is It, Anyway?”, in Morrison, T., Ed., *Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Black Lives Matter (2017) “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement” and “Guiding Principles, *BlackLivesMatter.com*.
- Herman Gray (2013). “Subject(ed) to Recognition”, *American Quarterly*, 65(4): 771-798.

Thursday, July 27th: Paper 2 due; In-class screening: *Paris is Burning*

- Sarah Banet-Weiser (2011). “Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls’ Video Production and YouTube”, in Kearney, M.C., Ed., *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls’ Media Culture*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 277-294.
- Michael A. Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca (2005). “The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Media Events”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3).
- Susan Bordo (1993) Introduction to *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, UC Press.
- Judith Butler (2011). “Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion”, in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York: Routledge.
- bell hooks (1992) “Is Paris Burning?”, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press.

Week 6: Culture Goes Global (and Digital)

Tuesday, August 1st: In-class screening: Global culture in music videos

- Benedict Anderson (1983). "Creole Pioneers", in *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso Books.
- Jamaica Kincaid (2000). *A Small Place*, New York: Farrar Straus, and Giroux.
- Joseph Henrich et al. (2010). "The weirdest people in the world?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2-3): 61-83.
- Mike Featherstone (2006). "Genealogies of the Global", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23(2-3).

Thursday, August 3rd:

- John Perry Barlow (1992). "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace".
<https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>
- Larry Lessig. (2006). "Code is Law", in *Code 2.0*, New York: Basic Books.
- Malcolm Gladwell (2010). "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted", *New Yorker*.
- Rebecca MacKinnon (2012). "Introduction – After the Revolution", in *Consent of the Networked*, New York: Basic Books.

Week 7: Where Do We Go From Here?

Tuesday, August 8th: Class presentations; Final paper due

- Andrew Boyd (2012). *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for the Revolution*, OR Books.
- Grace Lee Boggs (2012). Ch. 1 from *The Next American Revolution*, UC Press.
- Gabriella Coleman (2012). Our Weirdness is Free, *Triple Canopy*. Access at https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/our_weirdness_is_free.
- bell hooks (1994). "A Revolution of Values: The promise of multicultural change", in *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*, New York: Routledge.