

Media as Popular Culture

CM 3700.01

Fall 2011

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or by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog Description: Examines the phenomenon of media as a powerful form of popular culture in a variety of substantive domains.

Fall 2011 Overview: This term, we will explore how popular culture is expressed, constructed, and analyzed in a variety of media forms. First, we will examine how culture and popular culture have been defined and theorized over the last century, and we will pay particular attention to the idea of "taste" in regard to cultural objects, specifically the music of Celine Dion. We will then explore the effects of

technology on culture by analyzing Jenkins's idea of "convergence culture". To put a spin on the idea of convergence, we will look at one media franchise, that of the *Predator* movies, books, and comics. Finally, we will bring together ideas of influence, homage, fan activity, gender, race, class, taste, kitsch, history, and reality through a study of melodrama, with close attention to the effect of Douglas Sirk's 1950s melodramas on later filmmakers.

REQUIRED BOOKS

- *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, Third Edition, edited by Gail Dinez & Jean M. Humez (Sage Publications, ISBN 978-1412974417)
- *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* by Carl Wilson (Continuum, ISBN 978-0826427885)
- *Convergence Culture* by Henry Jenkins, revised paperback edition (NYU Press, ISBN 978-0814742952)
- *Predator: South China Sea* by Jeff VanderMeer (Dark Horse, ISBN 978-1595821409)

REQUIRED FILMS

You are required to watch these films before the date on the syllabus. All films are on reserve at Lamson, and many are available via Netflix streaming.

- **10/20:** *Gamer* (dirs. Mark Neveldine & Brian Taylor, 2009)
- **10/27:** *Predator* (dir. John McTiernan, 1987)
- **11/15:** *All That Heaven Allows* (dir. Douglas Sirk, 1955)
- **11/22:** *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)* (dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974)
- **11/29:** *Far From Heaven* (dir. Todd Haynes, 2002)

Recommended films

These movies are not available at Lamson, but are readily available otherwise (as of this summer, the first two were both on Netflix Instant). We will probably look at excerpts from them in class, and they may be useful material for your own work.

- *The Last Emperor* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987)
This film swept the Academy Awards the year *Predator* was released. Since the Academy Awards are essentially a poll of what Hollywood insiders consider the industry's best work to be, it is useful to consider this film when discussing questions of taste regarding *Predator*.
- *Playing Columbine* (dir. Danny Ledonne, 2008)
This is a fascinating documentary about one of the most controversial

computer games of all time, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, and, more broadly, the purpose and meaning of games in American society.

- *The Greatest Movie Ever Sold* (dir. Morgan Spurlock, 2011)

A fun documentary about advertising and product placement in movies. All of the funding for the film was raised by product placement (technically, the full title of the movie is really *POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*), and though in some ways it's a superficial presentation of the material, it's nonetheless amusing and sometimes thought-provoking.

Other Recommended Items

You will have more freedom for how and when to watch films for class if you have a subscription to [Netflix](#). All of the required films are on reserve at Lamson, but there's only one copy of each, and in my experience, many students wait until the night before class to watch the required film, and most of the time they are therefore unable to get it from the library because someone else got there first. Planning ahead will help you avoid this, but if planning ahead is a challenge for you, get Netflix.

GRADING

Quizzes	10%
Moodle Forum Posts	15%
Paper 1	20%
Annotated Bibliography	15%
Paper 2	30%
Participation self-evaluation	10%

See the **Assignments** section at the end of this syllabus for more details.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Accommodations

Plymouth State University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you should

immediately contact the PASS Office in Lamson Library (535-2270) to determine whether you are eligible for such accommodations. Academic accommodations will only be considered for students who have registered with the PASS Office. If you have a Letter of Accommodation for this course from the PASS Office, please provide the instructor with that information privately so that you and the instructor can review those accommodations.

Attendance

Attendance is taken with a sheet of paper at the beginning of each class. If you do not sign your name on that piece of paper, you will be considered absent.

You will be allowed two free absences in this course. If you are absent a THIRD (or more) time(s) without an excuse, your course grade will be lowered by 1/3 (e.g. an A- will become a B+) for every unexcused absence.

What is an excused absence? It is an absence for which you have either obtained official documentation or for which you have received written confirmation from me (your instructor) that it is excused. Official documentation may not be provided by a family member. Excused absences due to illness or injury require a note from a medical provider (not a secretary) indicating that you were too ill or too injured to attend class. Other reasons that will excuse an absence if proper documentation is provided: military service, jury duty, death in family. Read more about the PSU policy at <http://www.plymouth.edu/undergrad/pdfs/Class%20Attendance%20Policy%20May%202008.pdf>.

Your two free absences are not in addition to excused absences -- each excused absence eats up a free absence. Thus, you don't even need to tell me about your first three excused absences. When I really need to know about them is when you have more than 3.

Please note, too, that the official policy states that "Instructors also reserve the right to determine when the number of excused absences exceeds a reasonable limit to the extent that it significantly interferes with a student's satisfactory mastery of course content/skills. Excused absences do not exempt a student from course requirements, and therefore in circumstances

that entail excessive excused absences the instructor may reasonably recommend that a student consider withdrawal from a course."

Illness

Keeping the above policy in mind, please do not come to class if you are sick! If you are contagious, you risk getting the rest of us sick, too. If you are sick, it is important that you contact Health Services or a doctor.

If you are exhibiting flu-like symptoms: Health Services would prefer that you call them before visiting with flu-like symptoms. The Health Services phone number is (603) 535-2350.

If I (your teacher) am out sick, be sure to check Moodle for an assignment. Unless I am too sick to create something, we will do whatever we can to save some learning time.

Snow Days

It is possible that at least one of our classes at the end of the term will be cancelled because of snow. Be sure to check Moodle on such days -- there will at least be a discussion activity. Our schedule is tight enough that we don't have room to completely lose any day.

Academic Integrity

You should familiarize yourself with the University's policies on academic integrity:

http://www.plymouth.edu/registrar/policies/academic_standing.html

I assume that all work you submit to this course, including Forum postings, is entirely your own unless specific citations show otherwise. If I have reason to find this assumption to be incorrect, I will submit your work to the head of the Communications Department, who will then determine whether it deserves a hearing before an Academic Integrity Panel, which will determine the punishment if a case seems to merit it. Punishment can include failing the course or, in severe cases, suspension or expulsion from the University.

Academic integrity is vitally important because the purpose of education is to advance your own knowledge as well as, ultimately, human knowledge in general. To advance knowledge, we must be open and honest about its sources and inspirations.

If you have a question about whether something might violate the academic integrity policy, please do not be afraid to ask. It's a cliché to say it's better to be safe than sorry, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

Late Work

In general, work turned in up to one week beyond the due date will receive a grade lowered by 20%. Work turned in up to two weeks beyond the due date will receive half credit. Unless specific arrangements are made beforehand, work will not be accepted that is more than two weeks beyond the due date.

Quizzes cannot be made up for any reason other than an emergency or, for in-class quizzes, an excused absence. (Remember, though, that some of your lowest quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the term, depending on how many total quizzes we have.)

Forum posts can be turned in late until the last day of class for half credit. No Forum posts turned in after the last day of class will count.

Cell phone policy

We will all keep our cell phones off or on vibrate during class. Of course, none of us is rude enough to text during class, but if we were to be rude enough to text during class we should not be surprised when we are asked to leave class for the day and receive an absence for it.

Technology

Much of your work for this course will be turned in online via Moodle. It is assumed that you have access to Moodle and are familiar with the basics of its operation.

You are not required to use Microsoft products for this course if you do not

want to -- good, free alternatives exist such as OpenOffice and LibreOffice. Whatever program you use, you should familiarize yourself with ways of saving files in common formats such as .rtf or .doc, as these are what I require you to submit any uploaded text files as.

Files submitted in a format other than .rtf or .doc will not be read and will not be counted as turned in on time. The file format is your responsibility.

Corrupted and blank files are also your responsibility. It's always worth testing your file after it has been submitted, just to be safe. If you submit a file that reads as blank or cannot be opened, it will not count as having been turned in on time.

If you submit your file at least 24 hours early and want to know that it is readable, I am happy to respond to an email asking for this information. (If you submit your work on time but not at least 24 hours early, I will try to respond to requests for this information as well, but I may prioritize grading over responding.)

If you lose access to your personal computer (e.g., it blows up), that is not an excuse not to do your work -- the University has many computer clusters available for your use. Avoiding procrastination will help you avoid grades lowered because of computer problems. It is a fundamental law of the universe that computers fail primarily when you procrastinate, especially late at night a few hours before a deadline.

If you have trouble with a specific area of our Moodle page, but seem to have good access to everything else on myPlymouth, email me -- I probably got a setting wrong. If you are having problems with Moodle or myPlymouth in general, call or email the Helpdesk at (603) 535-2929 or helpdesk@plymouth.edu. Or visit them at Lamson.

SCHEDULE

Note on readings: There are a lot of readings for this course, and it is entirely possible that we will not have time to discuss them all in class. It is assumed, though, that you have read and thought about every item that is assigned, regardless of whether it is discussed in class; every assigned reading is fodder for

quizzes and Forum prompts, and your writing throughout the term is expected to show a familiarity with all of the readings assigned to that point.

9/1 (Th): Introductions; create groups for group work

9/6 (T):

- Read in *Gender, Race, & Class in Media* (GRCM): Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture" (pp.7-16).
- In class: Groups report on their findings. (See Moodle for guidelines.)

9/8 (Th): Readings on Moodle:

- Rasmussen, "Mass Wasteland"
- MacDonald, "Theory of Mass Culture" -- read from "The Problem of the Masses" (p.32/11) to end (p.35/14)
- Williams, "Conclusion" to *Culture & Society* pp. 295-312

9/13 (T): *Let's Talk About Love* Chs. 1-8 (pp. 1-104)

9/15 (Th): *Let's Talk About Love* Chs. 9-end (pp. 105-end)

9/20 (T):

- Intro to Marx III: On Capital
<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/marxism/modules/marxcapitalism.html>) and
- IV: On Commodity Fetishism
<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/marxism/modules/marxfetishism.html>
- Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>
- OPTIONAL: If you're finding Benjamin difficult, feel free to take a look at this summary of the essay:
<http://faculty.cua.edu/johnsong/hsct101/benjamin/benjamin-summary.html>
- Marche, "Consumer Products"
<http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/essays/consumer-products.php?page=all>
- GRCM: Jhally, "Image-Based Culture" (199-203)

9/22 (Th):

- Search YouTube for "[Greta Garbo](#)" and watch as many videos as you can
- Barthes, "The Face of Garbo" <http://epigrafi.fisek.com.tr/index.php?num=236>
- Gallagher, "Greta Garbo is Sad"
<http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue03/infocus/stars5.htm>
- GRCM: Fahy, "One Night in Paris (Hilton)" (301-310)

9/27 (T):

- GRMC: Boyd, "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites" (409-417);
- Jenkins, "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten" (57-65);
- Attwood, "No Money Shot?" (283-292);
- Ng, "Reading the Romance of Fan Cultural Production" (553-561)

9/29 (Th): **At least 4 Forum posts due by today**

- *Convergence Culture* (CC) Intro & Ch. 1 (pp. 1-58)

10/4 (T): CC: Chs. 2-4 (pp. 59-173)

10/6 (Th): CC: Ch. 5 (pp. 175-216) **Quiz on Moodle due before class.**

10/11 (T):

- **Library day! Meet at Lamson!**
- CC: Ch. 6-Afterword (pp.217-294) [We won't have time to discuss this in class, but you should try to make progress with it so you don't have an overwhelming pile of reading for Thursday.]

10/13 (Th): **At least 2 new Forum posts (at least 6 total) due by today; Quiz on Moodle** (huge apologies for making you do a quiz the same time that Forum posts are due, but it's vital that I know you understand at least the basic concepts in the reading)

- Hess & Waller, "Blockbusters for the YouTube Generation":
<http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2011/08/01/blockbusters-for-the-youtube-generation-a-new-product-of-convergence-culture-%E2%80%93-kristy-hess-and-lisa-waller/>

10/18 (T): **Paper 1 due on Moodle by class time; bring hardcopy to class**

10/20 (Th):

- On Moodle: "How to Watch a Movie Most Effectively for This Class"
- **Be sure to have watched *Gamer* by today.**
- *Gamer* review by Ignatiy Vishnevetsky,
<http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/now-in-theaters-gamer-neveldine-taylor-us>
[a](#)

10/25 (T):

- Steve Shaviro, "Gamer": <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=830>
- **Quiz on Moodle**

10/27 (Th): **Be sure to have watched *Predator* by today.**

- Moodle: Read Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram", and pay attention to *how* you read it. Where do you slow down? Where do you get annoyed? Why? Are there sections you read with amusement or insight? Are there sections you skip? Why? Do Wallace's arguments convince you? Why? How?

11/1 (T): *Predator: South China Sea* (PSCS) [to p.146, but we won't discuss it in class because I forgot to put the page numbers here until too late!]

11/3 (Th): PSCS to p.229

11/8 (T): Intro to melodrama

Please note the schedule change here, giving you more time to finish Predator: South China Sea. Jeff VanderMeer will be joining us via Skype either on the 10th or the 15th. Most likely the 10th, but everything depends on how well he recovers from surgery to remove his wisdom teeth at the beginning of the week...

11/10 (Th): PSCS to end

11/15 (T): DUE VIA MOODLE BY CLASS: **Annotated bibliography for final paper**

- Be sure to have watched *All That Heaven Allows* by today

11/17 (Th):

- GRMC: Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory" (25-32);
- Radway, "Women Read the Romance" (45-55);
- Gerhard, "Sex and the City" (75-79)
- **Quiz on Moodle**

11/22 (T):

- Be sure to have watched *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* by today;
- Fujiwara essay on *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*
<http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1067-ali-fear-eats-the-soul-one-love-two-oppressions>
- GRMC: Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes" (81-84)
- **Quiz on Moodle**

11/24: THANKSGIVING

11/29 (T): **At least 6 new Forum posts due by today (at least 12 total)**

- Be sure to have watched *Far From Heaven* by today;
- Wisniewski *Far from Heaven* essay at Reverse Shot
(http://www.reverseshot.com/article/far_heaven);

- GRMC: Clarkson, "The Limitations of the Discourse of Norms" (335-340)

12/1 (Th):

- Moodle: Skvirsky, "The Price of Heaven: Remaking Politics in *All That Heaven Allows*, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, and *Far from Heaven*"
- **Quiz on Skvirsky**

12/6 (T):

- Explore the Museum of Bad Art website: <http://www.museumofbadart.org/>
- Roger Scruton, "Kitsch and the Modern Predicament":
http://www.city-journal.org/html/9_1_urbanities_kitsch_and_the.html
- Eric Gibson, "Why Dictators Love Kitsch" (Wall St Journal):
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204908604574336383324209824.html#mod=article-outset-box>

12/8 (Th): **All Forum posts due (15 total)**

Review and preparation for final paper presentations

Final Exam Period: Thursday, December 15, 2.30-5pm
Turn in your Term Paper to Moodle by 2.30pm and bring a
hardcopy to class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Quizzes

We will have various quizzes throughout the term. Some of them will be multiple-choice quizzes on Moodle, some will be quick responses written in class. Moodle quizzes are open-book and will be announced at least 24 hours before the class for which they are due. Responses in class will usually be a surprise. In-class quizzes will be given at the beginning of class; latecomers will not get extra time. At least one quiz grade will be dropped at the end of the term, and the number of points you receive for quizzes will equal your average rounded up (e.g., an 87.63 quiz average becomes 88 points).

Moodle Forum Posts

Each week, you will see 2 Forums in which a prompt has been posted. You need to write a response of at least 350 words to 15 prompts total during the term. Each response is worth 10 points. Detailed descriptions of grading are available in the

Forum area on Moodle. There are due dates throughout the schedule for a certain minimum number of posts. You must at least meet the minimum each time for full credit. Late posts will receive half credit.

Paper 1

Think of this paper as a case study. Choose an item of media popular culture and write a paper of at least 1,500 words analyzing it. (To come up with an idea, think of a question you have about something in popular culture, and then brainstorm ways of investigating that question.) The item you analyze should be something we have not analyzed in class or in the readings for class, and you should cite at least two of the texts we have read for class in your analysis. See Moodle for more specific guidelines.

Annotated Bibliography

This bibliography is a preliminary step for writing your term paper (Paper 2). The topic is entirely up to you -- anything having to do with media and popular culture is appropriate. The goal of the annotated bibliography is for you to discover and evaluate the research materials available to you.

Once you have chosen your topic, begin to research it. See what's available for resources. Evaluate those resources. Once you feel comfortable that you have thoroughly researched what is available to you, create an annotated bibliography.

The goals of the bibliography are to show that you have found enough research for your topic and that you have begun to evaluate that research. You may focus your paper more later, and you may discard some of this research -- the bibliography gives an overview; it is different from a final works cited page, because until you've written the paper, you don't know what you will cite.

You should have a **minimum** of 6 items in the bibliography.

1. At least two of the items in the bibliography must be books beyond our assigned textbooks.
2. At least one of the items in the bibliography must be from one of the databases subscribed to by Lamson Library (available via the left sidebar on the Library's website).
3. The citations should be in MLA format.
4. The annotations should be between 25-200 words long. They can be summary annotations or evaluative annotations -- if there are items that seem to you particularly useful or particularly flawed, that's certainly worth noting in the annotation.
5. Remember that this is to be an academic paper. If you cite Wikipedia, a blog, a personal website, etc., you should have a very good reason for doing so. It is very important that you use your judgment and that you evaluate the

credibility of your sources thoroughly.

If you have never created an annotated bibliography before, or if you want more examples, take a look at these:

- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/annotated-bibliography>
- <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill28.htm>
- http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/annotated_bibliographies.html
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>
- http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/AnnBib_content.html

Paper 2 (Term Paper)

The annotated bibliography is preliminary work for this paper, which you will bring with you during our final exam period. The paper should be a minimum of 2,500 words long, and it must cite at least 5 sources beyond our textbooks. See guidelines on Moodle for more specific information.

Participation Self-Evaluation

By the final exam period, you will take an online survey that provides a grade for your participation in the course.