

**Faculty of Arts, Science & Education.**  
Department of Arts and Education  
Grande Prairie Regional College  
***English 3830: Introduction to Popular Culture***  
***Monday 6:00-8:50***  
**Winter 2006**

Instructor: H. Davidson

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Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:30

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Thursday 11:30-12:30

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*or by appointment*

**Required Texts & Resources:**

Coursepack. Available in bookstore.

**Calendar Description:** An historic survey of representative works in the literature, written and spoken, of popular culture in English. This course examines aspects of popular culture not only as a set of written texts, but also as sets of places, media personalities, and events, which create culture(s). Discussion topics will include examinations of Disney, Hollywood, the evening news, soap operas, shopping malls, video games, hockey, the Internet, 'trash' fiction, among other cultural texts.

**Prerequisites:** EN 1000 or EN 1010, or equivalent

**Content Description:** Popular Culture is an emerging and 'hip' field of literature. It is a discipline that is based in literary theory, and in using the tools of literary analysis to read and decipher cultural codes, productions, and nuances. Our investigation will look at the influences of Marxism, Feminism, Queer Studies, Linguistics, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Semiotics, Psychoanalysis, and Globalisation on how North American culture can be examined as a set of political texts. Our approach will be to mix all of these theories throughout the course, examining how they work and don't work with one another, and inquiring what other modes of questioning and investigation are necessary. Readings will include theoretical articles, practical application of theory on specific cultural expressions, and some short fiction. There are also four films for study in the course. During class we will use the background readings to look at commercials, public spaces, television shows, magazines, and any other interesting cultural text/ moment we find throughout the course. I encourage you to bring in and collect examples of popular culture texts that you are interested in investigating with the class. This course will aim to force us all to inquire, challenge, and re-vision the spaces, performances, desires, terrors, subjectivities, realities, bodies, signs, dis-eases, resistances and hierarchies in the world around us.

### ***Course Schedule***

January 9~Introduction. What is Popular Culture?

January 16~Subjectivity

***Grounding Theory:***

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

Gramsci, Antonio. "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State."

MacIntosh, Peggy. "Unpacking the White Knapsack"

**Investigations:**

Bannerji, Himani. "The Paradox of Diversity: The Construction of a Multicultural Canada and "Women of Color".

Cuthand, Beth. "Zen Indian."

Cisneros, Sandra. "Barbie-Q."

January 23~Desire and *Pleasure*

***Grounding Theory:***

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas."

Said, Edward. "Orientalism."

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor. "The Culture Industry as Mass Deception."

**Investigations:**

Cisneros, Sandra. "My Friend Lucy Who Smells Like Corn."

Fiske, John. "Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance."

Bruciaga, Jose Antonio. "The Great Taco War."

Sontag, Susan. "America Seen Through a Lens Darkly."

January 30~The Body

***Grounding Theory:***

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

De Lauretis, Teresa. "The Technology of Gender."

**Investigations:**

Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess."

Bednar, Robert. "Caught Looking: Problems with Taking Pictures of People Taking Pictures at An Exhibition."

hooks, bell. "Facing Difference: The Black Female Body."

Romell, Karen. "Making Peace with the Pierced."

Film:

February 6~Signing and Querying

***Grounding Theory:***

Silverman, Jonathan and Rader, Dean. "Semiotics: the Study of Signs (And Texts)".

George, Diana and Trimbur, John. "Analyzing Visual and Verbal Codes."

*Handout (provided in previous class)*

**Investigations:**

Sperling Cockroft, Eva and Barnet-Sanchez, Holly. "Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals."

Wilson, Clint C. and Guitierrez, Felix. "Advertising and People of Color."

McLoud, Scott. "Sequential Art: 'Closure' and 'Art.'"

Cave, Damien. "On Sale at Old Navy: Cool Clothes for Identical Zombies!"

February 13~ "Reality"

***Grounding Theory:***

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra."

**Investigations:**

Showalter, Elaine. "Window on Reality: *American Idol* and the Search for Identity."

*Additional Reading to be announced.*

Film:

February 20 No Class

February 27~Space

***Grounding Theory:***

Rich, Adrienne. "Notes Toward a Politics of Location."  
Salvadurai, Shyam. "Introducing Myself in the Diaspora."

### **Investigations:**

Bannerji, Himani. "Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation."  
Nakamura, Lisa. "Where Do You Want to Go Today? Cybernetic Tourism, The Internet, and Transnationality."  
Davis, Mike. "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space."

Possible Class 'Field Trip'. Details to be agreed upon by class. No presentations this day.

### March 6~Performance

#### ***Grounding Theory:***

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Carnival and the Carnavalesque."  
Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination."  
Gates, Henry Louis. "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey."

### **Investigations:**

King, Thomas. "Let Me Entertain You."  
Karayanni, Stavros Stavros. "Introducing Colonial and Postcolonial Dialectics on the Subject of Dance."

### March 13~Terror

#### ***Grounding Theory:***

Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny."  
Freud, Sigmund. "On Narcissism."

### **Investigations:**

Warshow, Robert. "The Gangster as Tragic Hero."  
King, Stephen. "Why We Crave Horror Movies."  
Klien, Naomi. "Buying a Gladiatorial Myth."  
Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Excerpt.

Film:

### March 20~Disease/ Dis-Ease

#### ***Grounding Theory:***

Foucault, Michel. "Method."

### **Investigations:**

Bignell, Jonathan. "Sex, Confession and Witness." *Reading Sex and the City*.  
Sapphire. "American Dreams." *American Dreams*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.  
Illouz, Eva. "Everyday Life as the Uncanny: The *Oprah Winfrey Show* As a New Cultural Genre."  
Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Excerpt.

Film:

### March 27~Coolness and Resistance

#### ***Grounding Theory:***

***Additional reading may be announced.***

### **Investigations:**

Bordo, Susan. "'Material Girl': The Effacements of Postmodern Culture."  
Hess, Elizabeth. "Guerilla Girl Power: Why the Art World Needs a Conscience."  
Heblidge, Dick. "Style in Revolt: Revolting Style."  
Lorde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."  
Hine, Thomas. "Goths in Tomorrowland."  
Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan."

### April 3~Possibilities for decolonizing (?): Decoding and Destabilizing Cultural Hierarchies

***Grounding Theory:***

Trinh, Minh-Ha T. "No Master Territories."  
Bourdieu, Pierre. "Distinction & The Aristocracy of Culture."  
hooks, bell. "Talking Back."

**Investigations:**

Gomez-Pena, Guillermo. "Mexican Beasts and Living Santos."  
Kincaid, Jamaica. "A Small Place."  
McClure, Joanna. "Hollywood."  
Landesman, Fran. "It's Only a Movie."

\*Up to one hour of class time will be dedicated to peer editing of final projects on this day.

April 10~Review

\*Attendance is not optional. Although you have no assigned reading for this class, we will be doing analytical work that will be useful for your final exam.

**Statement on Plagiarism:**

*Calendar Policy Statement, see calendar pages 46-50*

The College expects intellectual honesty from its students. Intellectual honesty demands that the contribution of others be acknowledged. To do less is to cheat. Intellectual dishonesty undermines the quality of academic activity and accordingly, the College has adopted appropriate penalties for student misconduct with respect to plagiarism and cheating. Penalties are levied according to the degree of the infraction. Students who are unsure whether a particular course of action might constitute plagiarism are advised to consult with the instructor. The Instructor reserves the right to use electronic plagiarism detection services.

***Assignments and Evaluation:***

First Writing Assignment (2 pages) 10% **Jan 30**

Second Writing Assignment (2 pages) 10% **Feb 27**

Third Writing Assignment (2-3 pages) 15% **March 13**

Final Project 30% (12-15 pages)

~Annotated Proposal **March 20**

~Rough Draft **April 3**

~Final Draft and Presentation of Ideas **Scheduled Exam Time. Attendance is mandatory for grading of the project. This is a final exam and your project will not be marked if you do not attend this session.**

Presentation 25% (scheduled by students)

Participation (including attendance and contribution to class) 10%

All assignments will be marked according to the ALPHA Grading System

Alpha Grade	4-Point Equivalence	Percentage	Descriptor
A+	4.0	90-100	Excellent
A	4.0	85-89	Excellent
A-	3.7	80-84	Very Good (first class standing)
B+	3.3	76-79	Very Good (first class standing)
B	3.0	73-75	Good
B-	2.7	70-72	Good
C+	2.3	67-69	Satisfactory
C	2.0	64-66	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	60-63	Satisfactory
D+	1.3	55-59	Poor

D	1.0	50-54	Minimal Pass
F	0.0	0-49	Failure

## **Description of Assignments:**

### *Short Writing Assignments*

These assignments will ask you to engage in critical thinking and questioning, and will also ask you to engage with complex ideas you are introduced to in the course. Writing skills and clarity will be very important, but equal if not more importance will be placed on your ability to challenge yourself and to both engage with and question the modes of thinking we are discussing in the course. The first two short writing assignments will be exercises asking you to discuss one theory or concept in the course, and apply those concepts to any pop culture text we have discussed. Outside popular culture texts may be used but you must check with me first. Detailed instructions will be given near the due date. For the third short writing assignment, you will be required to attend one event (any kind of event you choose such as a speaker at the college, a Fine Arts performance, a sporting event, or something outside the college such as a movie, an art gallery opening, a concert, a public forum). The assignment will be to analyze the specific pop culture text i.e. the film or concert itself, but also the effect of the space, the engagement/disengagement of the audience...). Your analysis will have to incorporate the theories and terms of the course. Detailed instructions will be given near the due date.

### *Presentations*

Every student will be required to do a class presentation either alone or in a group. These presentations will be given time limits according to the number of people in the group and you **MUST NOT** exceed that time limit. A maximum of four people may be in the group. I will provide you with detailed requirements and expectations. You will also be expected to be creative and original in your approach. You will be asked to discuss one of the 'grounding' theories scheduled on that day of class, and relate it to the week's theme, while performing an analysis of a popular culture text of your choice. These presentations are not designed to intimidate students in any way, but rather to give you an opportunity to contribute your own interests and perspectives, and to allow us all to learn from one another.

### *Final Exam*

This is an in depth investigation of a cultural text of your choosing. I will provide very specific guidelines and requirements but you will be expected to devise your own topic and areas of investigation. You will be required to use theoretical and critical texts we have covered during the course, and will also be expected to do outside research. I will also look for evidence of the ongoing critical discussion and self-critical approaches we have engaged in throughout the course. You will be required to submit a detailed proposal presenting your self-devised topic and annotated references. There will also be a peer editing component to this project which will count towards the project's final grade. Because this is a final exam, you will be required to hand in your exam, in person during the final exam period. At this time you will be asked to give a five minute presentation of what you have done and what lingering questions/ideas came out of the process. This presentation is part of the final exam mark and is mandatory. If you are unable to make this session, you will have to go through the registrar's office to document your reasons and make alternate arrangements.

### *Participation:*

A significant proportion of your grade in the course will be from participation. Because this is a small seminar, attendance and contribution to discussion are absolutely essential to the success of the class. I am aware however, that some students find speaking in public very difficult. If you attend class, do your best with all the readings, and hand in all your assignments, your participation mark should boost your overall grade rather than hinder it. You are expected to attend regularly (I will keep track of your attendance and

that will be taken into consideration in your grades) and are responsible for obtaining all information and handouts missed.

### **Readings:**

Cultural Studies is essentially a theoretical field and so the readings for this course are heavily theoretical. They may be difficult at first but extensive class time will be devoted to discussion and synthesis of ideas. The readings under each class are organized according to 'themes' and though the articles may be difficult to bring together upon first reading, the class time will be devoted to discussion and bringing these concepts together. We will also be 'reading' several texts in class that work alongside the topics for that day: looking at film clips, advertisements, objects, spaces etc. A lot of work and synthesis will happen in class time and therefore attendance is essential to successful completion and understanding of the course.

### **Discussions and Course Material:**

Class discussion is an excellent way to share ideas, raise questions, and learn from fellow students. I expect all students to make active contributions. This requires that you keep up with your reading and come to class prepared with questions and ideas. I also expect students to be respectful of one another and to recognize that language is very powerful and sometimes potentially volatile so each of us must be aware of one another's sensitivities. The main aspects I want all of you to take away from this class are greater openness to ideas, greater capacity for critical thought, and expanded ability for questioning. Some of the course material or discussions may at points challenge your own ideas or comfort levels. I want the classroom to be a safe and engaging space so if at any point you feel challenged in a way that threatens that 'safety' please let me know. In addition though, remember that to be challenged and have to question why we think the way we do or why we make certain assumptions can provide incredible learning opportunities. You may talk to me at any point if you are concerned, but I also ask you to expand your own boundaries of thought and see where that might take you. Learning must be an ongoing process, wherever each of us might be coming from.

### **Film Texts:**

You will note that there are four films in the course that we will cover as cultural texts to study. You may view these on your own time, but for your convenience, I will hold a public viewing of each film. You may choose when and where you view the film, but must have it viewed before the class in which the film's discussion is scheduled.

### **Blackboard:**

Throughout the course you may check your grades on blackboard. I will also use blackboard to post useful materials, course assignments and announcements. Please check the course blackboard site regularly.

### **Policy Regarding Submission of Assignments & Late Penalties:**

All assignments are due at the beginning of the designated lecture (i.e. work submitted later the same day will be considered one day late). Assignments handed in later than 6:00 (i.e. 6:15..7:00...will be automatically docked 5%). Except in cases where there are appropriately documented medical or compassionate reasons, work submitted late will be penalized 10% per day (including weekends), and will not be accepted more than 10 days after the due date. If you hand your assignment in more than three days late, you may not get extensive comments on your project. If you miss an assignment without appropriately documented medical or compassionate reasons, you will receive a grade of zero for that assignment. In the case of late submission, it is your responsibility to arrange to get the assignment to me in person.

**Policy Regarding Lateness to Class:**

It is extremely distracting to other students and to the flow of the lecture/discussion to have people continually arriving late to class. Certain circumstances such as weather, arriving from an exam, or the occasional lateness will be excused but do not make lateness a habit. You are expected to be on time and ready to go at the beginning of the class. Please be respectful to your fellow students.

**Preparedness for Class:**

Because the readings and assignments are laid out on this outline, you are responsible for informing yourself of the readings and work we are doing in class. You are also responsible for doing the readings ahead of time and keeping informed of deadlines. Continual attendance will be essential should there be any changes or adjustments in the schedule. Remember that you are now at a college level and with that there are expectations that you hold responsibility for your own learning and success.

**When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement:**

When you are unable to meet a course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise me in writing, with your name, id# and e-mail contact. Where possible, this should be done in advance of the missed work. Extensions will not be granted less than twenty-four hours before the due date of an assignment, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

**Policy Regarding Marking and Return of Assignments:**

I will do my best to return your work to you in a timely fashion. I ask that you give me two weeks from the due date to have your work returned to you. If there are exceptional circumstances and I need more time, I will let you know, and will adjust future due dates accordingly. Please do not ask me when you will get your assignments back unless that two weeks has passed. When you do receive your assignments, I am more than willing to discuss them with you and in some cases will consider remarking or allowing a rewrite, but I require that you wait 24 hours after getting an assignment back before you come to speak with me.

***\*Please feel free to come see me in my office or contact me by email whenever you have questions, concerns, or would like extra help. Because I am very busy with courses and committees it is in your best interest to come to my office hours or make an appointment. Then you will ensure that you reach me and have my full energy. Don't be afraid to let me know of any particular learning needs you might have, and any suggestions on how I can make the course work for you. My role is to give you the best possible learning experience, and to do whatever I can to create a positive and productive learning environment. Welcome, and I look forward to the year ahead!***

