

**THE SOCIOLOGY OF MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE**  
**SOCI 137**  
**Prof. David Grazian**

**Department of Sociology**  
**University of Pennsylvania**  
**Spring 2008**

Class Meeting: B1 Meyerson Hall, MW 11am-12pm, plus recitation section (required)

Office: 125 McNeil

Phone: (215) 898-6711

E-Mail: [dgrazian@soc.upenn.edu](mailto:dgrazian@soc.upenn.edu)

Office Hours: By appointment on Mondays, 1-4pm; contact Nancy Bolinski ([bolinski@ssc.upenn.edu](mailto:bolinski@ssc.upenn.edu))

This course relies on a variety of sociological perspectives to examine the role of media and popular culture in everyday life, with a particular emphasis on the organization of the mass media industry, the relationship between cultural consumption and status, and the social significance of leisure activities from sports to shopping. Specific course topics will include the marketing of Disney, Nike and Starbucks; how consumers experience nightlife in the city; and the rise of new media technologies in the digital age.

**The following books are available for purchase at House of Our Own Bookstore (3920 Spruce Street):**

Edward Castronova. 2005. Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Malcolm Gladwell. 2002. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. Boston: Back Bay.

David Grazian. 2008. On the Make: The Hustle of Urban Nightlife. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Steven Johnson. 2006. Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter. New York: Riverhead Books.

Naomi Klein. 2002. No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs. New York: Picador.

All additional readings are available online at <https://courseweb.upenn.edu/> (under "Course Documents" on the Blackboard course site). All books and other readings are also available on reserve at Van Pelt Library; all journal articles are available on JSTOR. Lecture slides shown in class, and review questions for selected readings, will also be made available online (under "Course Information" on the Blackboard course site) on the evening prior to each class meeting.

**Recitations:** All students must be enrolled in a recitation section; the Registrar's Office will automatically cancel the enrollment of any student not registered for a recitation within a few days. Attendance is mandatory for all recitation sections, and students are required to complete all course work assigned by their individual recitation instructors.

**Course Requirements:**

(1) **EXAMINATIONS:** There will be two in-class examinations, a midterm and a final. Students will be asked to select and identify key terms, and complete short essays on a range of topics, requiring students to employ materials from the classroom lectures as well as the assigned readings. **The midterm will be held in class on Wednesday, March 5, and the final will be held on Tuesday, May 13, from 12-2pm.** (Midterm Exam, 20% of final grade; Final Exam, 50% of final grade).

(2) **RECITATION COURSEWORK AND CLASS PARTICIPATION:** All students will be expected to complete all of the readings listed on the course schedule, attend all class lectures and recitation sessions

on time, actively contribute to recitation class discussions and complete all work assigned by the recitation instructor, including an ethnographic project on urban nightlife (30% of final grade).

Please note the following:

ALL ASSIGNED GRADES ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE. THERE WILL BE NO MAKE-UP EXAMINATIONS FOR THE MIDTERM OR THE FINAL EXAM.

ALL CASES OF STUDENTS SUSPECTED OF CHEATING ON ANY ASSIGNMENT OR EXAM WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE FORWARDED TO THE UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF STUDENT CONDUCT FOR EVALUATION.

## **PART ONE: THE SOCIOLOGY OF MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE**

### **Week 1: Course Introduction: What Makes Popular Culture Popular?**

1.16

Obviously, no readings are assigned for the first class meeting.

### **Week 2: The Social Organization of Popular Culture**

1.21

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, observed. There will be no class today; please consider participating in one of Penn's many holiday-related campus events.

1.23

Raymond Williams. 1985. "Culture," "Popular," "Art," and "Media." In Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 87-93, 236-8, 40-2, 203-4.

Howard S. Becker. 1974. "Art as Collective Action." American Sociological Review 39 (6): 767-776.

Malcolm Gladwell. 1997. "The Coolhunt." The New Yorker 17 March.

Chuck Klosterman. 2003. "Appetite for Replication." Chapter 5 in Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto. New York: Scribner, pp. 56-69.

### **Week 3: The Importance of Competitive Games: A Functionalist Approach**

1.28

H.G. Bissinger. 1990. Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, Preface, Prologue, and Chapters 1-2.

1.30

Clifford Geertz. 1973. "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight." Chapter 15 in The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic, pp. 412-53.

Film: Strut! A 2001 documentary about the Philadelphia Mummers and their annual New Year's Day parade will be shown in class.

### **Week 4: The Power of Advertising: A Critical Approach**

2.4

Naomi Klein. 2002. Chapters 1 and 2 of No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs. New York: Picador, pp. 3-61.

2.6

Naomi Klein. 2002. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs. New York: Picador, pp.63-124.

## **Week 5: How Fads Become Popular: An Interaction Approach**

2.11

Malcolm Gladwell. 2002. Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 in The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. Boston: Back Bay, pp. 3-88.

2.13

Malcolm Gladwell. 2002. Chapters 3 and 5 in The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. Boston: Back Bay, pp. 89-132, 169-93.

## **PART TWO: THE PRODUCTION OF MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE**

### **Week 6: The Organization of the Culture Industries**

2.18

Paul M. Hirsch. 1972. "Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization Set Analysis of Culture Industry Systems." American Journal of Sociology 77, pp. 639-59.

Jim Frederick. 2003. "The Intern Economy and the Culture Trust." Chapter 24 in Boob Jubilee: The Cultural Politics of the New Economy, Thomas Frank and David Mulcahey, eds. New York: W.W. Norton, pp. 301-313.

2.20

Naomi Klein. 2002. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 in No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs. New York: Picador, pp. 129-91.

### **Week 7: Strategy and Decision-Making in Media Firms**

2.25

Michael A. Cusumano, et al. 1992. "Strategic Maneuvering and Mass-Market Dynamics: The Triumph of VHS over Beta." Business History Review 66, pp. 51-94.

William T. Bielby and Denise D. Bielby. 1994. "'All Hits are Flukes': Institutional Decision-Making and the Rhetoric of Network Prime-Time Program Development," American Journal of Sociology 99, pp. 1287-1313.

2.27

Paul D. Lopes. 1992. "Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry, 1969 to 1990." American Sociological Review 57, pp. 56-71.

Malcolm Gladwell. 2005. "Kenna's Dilemma: The Right—and Wrong—Way to Ask People What They Want." Chapter 5 in Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking. New York: Little, Brown, pp. 147-88.

### **Week 8: Midterm Examination**

3.3

There will be no required reading; instead, students are encouraged to prepare for the upcoming midterm examination.

Film: *The Merchants of Cool*. A 2000 PBS documentary about the marketing of teenage youth culture will be shown in class.

3.5

The midterm exam will be administered in class.

### **Week 9: Spring Break**

Of course, no classes will be held during Spring Break.

## **PART THREE: THE CONSUMPTION OF MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE**

### **Week 10: Cultural Consumption and Social Class**

3.17

Lawrence W. Levine. [1984] 1991. "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation." In Rethinking Popular Culture. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 157-97.

3.19

David Halle. 1992. "The Audience for Abstract Art: Class, Culture, and Power." In Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality. Michele Lamont and Marcel Fournier, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 131-151.

Richard A. Peterson. 1992. "Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore." Poetics 21, pp. 243-258.

### **Week 11: Shopping and the Pleasures of Consumption**

3.24

Margaret Crawford. 1992. "The World in a Shopping Mall." In Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space. Michael Sorkin, ed. New York: Hill and Wang, pp. 3-30.

Sharon Zukin. 2004. "How Brooks Brothers Came to Look Like Banana Republic." Chapter 8 in Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture. New York: Routledge, pp. 197-225.

3.26

Virginia Postrel. 2003. "The Aesthetic Imperative," and "Surface and Substance." Chapters 1 and 3 of The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness. New York: Perennial, pp. 1-33, 66-92.

### **Week 12: The Consumption of Urban Nightlife**

3.31

David Grazian. 2008. "Friday Night in Philadelphia: The Art of the Hustle," and "Winning Bar: Nightlife as a Sporting Ritual." Chapters 1 and 4 of On the Make: The Hustle of Urban Nightlife. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-28, 93-133.

4.2

David Grazian. 2008. "In the Company of Men: The Girl Hunt and the Myth of the Pickup," and "Hustling the Hustlers: Challenging the Girl Hunt." Chapters 5 and 6 of On the Make: The Hustle of Urban Nightlife. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 134-197.

## **PART FOUR: CONTEMPORARY DEBATES IN MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE**

### **Week 13: The Aesthetics of Art and Entertainment**

4.7

Howard S. Becker. 1982. "Arts and Crafts." Chapter 9 in Art Worlds. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 272-299.

Gary Alan Fine. 1992. "The Culture of Production: Aesthetic Choices and Constraints in Culinary Work." American Journal of Sociology 97, pp. 1268-94.

4.9

Shyon Baumann. 2001. "Intellectualization and Art World Development: Film in the United States." American Sociological Review 66, pp. 404-26.

Alex Ross. 2003. "Rock 101: Academia Tunes In." The New Yorker 14 and 21 July, pp. 87-93.

**Week 14: The Value of Art and Popular Culture: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

4.14

Nicola Beisel. 1993. "Morals versus Art: Censorship, the Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude," American Sociological Review 58, pp. 145-62.

Amy Binder. 1993. "Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music," American Sociological Review 58, pp. 753-67.

4.16

Steven Johnson. 2006. Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter. New York: Riverhead Books, Introduction and Part One.

**Week 15: New Media and Virtual Reality in the Digital Age**

4.21

Edward Castronova. 2005. Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Introduction and Chapters 1-3.

4.23

Edward Castronova. 2005. Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chapters 4-7, 10.

**Week 16: The Future of Media and Popular Culture**

4.28

Adam Gopnik. 1999. "The Return of the Word." The New Yorker 6 December.

Alexander Stille. 1999. "Overload: There's Just No Way to Save All the Information of the Information Age." The New Yorker 8 March.

Michael Lewis. 2000. "Boom Box." The New York Times Magazine 13 August.

Rob Walker. 2004. "The Hidden (in Plain Sight) Persuaders." The New York Times Magazine 5 December.

Mattathias Schwartz. 2006. "The Hold-'Em Holdup." The New York Times Magazine 11 June.

**The final will be held on Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, from 12-2pm.**