

Sociology of Popular Culture and Inequality

Instructor: Dr. Carlos Torres

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Lecture: Wed 11:30 – 1:20

Tutorials: T.B.A

Appointments via zoom

Course Description:

This course approaches the field of popular culture using various sociological frameworks. As will be seen, there is much debate over what constitutes “popular” and “culture”. Questions about inequality and representation will be explored among many other topics. Here, the objective is to obtain perspective on how race, class and gender hierarchies are configured, maintained and challenged. The course poses the following questions: What is culture? Who does the popular represent? How is inequality measured from a cultural standpoint?

Learning Outcomes: The learning outcomes of this course are consistent with McMaster’s undergraduate Degree Level Expectations: <http://ccl.mcmaster.ca/COU/pdf/Undergraduate%20Degree%20Level%20Expectations.pdf>). In this course, students will learn about contemporary issues with popular culture and inequality. The content of the course connects to several of the undergraduate degree level expectations including developing a depth and breadth of knowledge and development of critical thinking and communication skills.

Delivery of course: This course will be delivered remotely, in particular, lectures will be prerecorded and uploaded to Avenue to Learn weekly. Lecture notes will also be uploaded to Avenue to Learn on a weekly basis.

Reading Material: Storey, John *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture A Reader* Routledge, (2018)

The book is available at the McMaster University bookstore

Evaluation breakdown:

2 Tests 20% each (Take Home) The test is comprised of short and long answer type questions. All questions are based on course material. Both tests will be uploaded to Avenue to Learn. The tests are take home and students will have one week to complete the test.

2 Summaries (40%) to be submitted to your T.A.

This course has no formal research essay assignment. Instead, your reading and writing skills will be evaluated on the basis of summarizing selected readings from the textbook. It is up to you to select which two readings you wish to summarize, however, students must keep in mind that there are restrictions as to when and what topics can be written on for both summaries. The first summary must be submitted before test 1 and the second summary must be submitted before test 2. Students cannot hand in both summaries at once at the end of the term. Only under particular circumstances will such concessions be made. Summaries (both 1 and 2) are due in tutorial the week that we cover the topic/reading you have chosen. For example, if you select to summarize the reading scheduled for week of September 18, then you are to submit your reading summary to your tutorial leader at the start of your tutorial for that week when that topic is being covered in the lecture. Do not summarize documentaries and/or videos. You cannot submit a reading summary for a topic after the week which it has been covered, that topic has already passed and therefore cannot be accepted. If you miss a topic, just select another one as there are weeks whereby students can submit both summaries. All summaries are to be submitted electronically.

One of the objectives of this assignment is to ensure that students are engaging with the readings in a timely fashion. These summaries are not essays. They are written summaries of the main points of the readings where you are to identify the main concepts, ideas and issues discussed in the textbook. It is not your task to criticize the authors ideas and/or arguments.

Guideline on how to write a summary for this course: The first goal is to articulate the ideas in the readings back to the reader by explaining them in your own words and by citing the author(s) directly. In addition, students are asked to add their own thoughts by discussing why you feel the ideas are interesting and/or important and how you feel the issues relate to our society. Please ensure that sentences are well structured and that there is a coherent flow of ideas.

The text should be 12 point font single space with standard margins. The summary is to be 3 pages in length. Cite articles properly, do not plagiarize. Students should aim to begin the summary by stating in a sentence or two what the article is about. Try to formulate in your own words what the main ideas are. You can paraphrase and quote but, be sure to cite accordingly. Here is an example on how to cite (Gramsci, 2019: 25).

In order to start thinking about how to write your summary, here are some questions to consider: What does the title indicate about the reading? What are the main social problems being discussed? Try to organize the author(s) thoughts and ideas into your own words as best as you can and cite their work directly when you want to engage and/or highlight a perspective. Use a direct quote if the author gives a definition of an idea and/or concept. It is a good idea to connect themes and/or issues in your summary to ensure that there is fluidity. One of the main exercises that the summaries pose to students is to approach it as if you were explaining the article to someone else.

One way to filter out what to include and/or exclude in your summary is to ask yourself the following: Does this perspective seem central to what the chapter is about and does it make

sense to me? Is it interesting enough for me to tell someone else about it? If you find a section of the chapter confusing and/or challenging, explain why. In preparing to write a summary, be sure to take notes as you read the chapter. This will give you a guide as to points to highlight. No formal introduction and/or conclusion is needed for this assignment. As mentioned above, the point of this exercise is to demonstrate comprehension of course material and not to critique it. This exercise is also important because it requires the development of critical academic skills in terms of stimulating identification of main ideas and active reading.

How are the summaries graded? Clarity and precision of your writing and accuracy of how ideas are represented and how well you are able to explain the main concepts, themes and ideas and connect them to course content – other related themes and issues. The quality of your writing, grammar, citation style for quotes, proper organization of ideas into subsections, title page which includes your name, course code, tutorial leader and name of the instructor. Feedback on your summaries will indicate areas that need improvement for future submissions. The summaries are individual work projects, not group projects. If you have any questions about the summary assignment, please email the instructor and/or respective tutorial leader.

Tutorial 20% 20% is allotted to tutorial engagement. The aim of the participation tasks is to critically engage with weekly topics. This may be realized orally or in written format. Students will select which format they prefer to communicate their thinking. In the event that students opt to account for their tutorial mark via writing, a brief email should be sent to your T.A. before the end of the day of when tutorial is scheduled and should demonstrate engagement with salient ideas from the reading (scheduled for the week in question) and lecture content. Students are highly encouraged to raise questions that show thoughtful engagement with the readings, articulate a synthesis of the main claims for assigned readings.

Reading Schedule

September 9, 2020 Introduction to course

September 14, 2020 Tutorial meet and greet.

September 16, 2020 Chapter 1 in the Reader: What is Popular Culture pp. 1-16

September 21, 2020 Discuss content of popular culture

September 23, 2020 Chapter 2 in the Reader: “The Culture” and “Civilization Tradition” pp. 18-35

September 28, 2020 Discuss topic of culture and civilization

September 30, 2020 Chapter 3 in the Reader: “Culturalism” pp. 38-57

October 5, 2020 Discuss selected topics on culturalism

October 7, 2020 Chapter 4 in the Reader: "Marxism" pp. 61-92

October 12, 2020 **No class, academic recess**

October 14, 2020 **No class, academic recess**

October 19, 2020 Question and answer session held in tutorials

October 21, 2020 **Test 1 will be uploaded to Avenue to Learn** Chapter 7 in the Reader: Class and Class Struggle pp. 140-150

October 26, 2020 Discuss selected topics on class and class struggle

October 28, 2020 Chapter Chapter 5 in the Reader: Psychoanalysis pp. 95-112

November 2, 2020 Discuss selected themes in psychoanalysis

November 4, 2020 Chapter 8 in the reader: Gender and Sexuality pp. 152-183

November 9, 2020 Discuss selected themes in gender and sexuality

November 11, 2020 Chapter 9 Race, Racism and Representation pp. 187-200

November 16, 2020 Discuss topics in relation to race, racism and representation

November 18, 2020 **Test 2 will be uploaded to Avenue to Learn; documentary Status Anxiety will be uploaded to Avenue to Learn**

November 23, 2020 Discuss content of documentary Status anxiety

November 25, 2020 Chapter 10 Post-Modernism pp. 204-233

November 30, 2020 discuss selected topics in post-modernism

December 2, 2020 **Documentary: Generation of the 1960s** will be uploaded to avenue to learn

December 7, 2020 selected topics of the documentary will be discussed

December 9, 2020 Question and Answer session will be held via zoom

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero

on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty

- Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- Improper collaboration in group work.
- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a [RISO](#) accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work". Please talk to the course director.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-89	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+

MARK	GRADE
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F