

Sociology 135 Popular Culture
fast food for the soul

T/Th 4-5:15, Fall 2009
1003 Mendocino

Kevin Wehr
453d Amador 278.4277
Open hours 1-3 M/W
kwehr@csus.edu
www.csus.edu/soc/kwehr

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.

Karl Marx, 1846

The triumph of advertising is that consumers feel compelled to buy its products even though they see through them.

Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944

The medium is the message.

Marshall McLuhan, 1966

This country is without hope.

Jean Baudrillard, 1986

This course is about popular culture: where it comes from, who makes it, what it's about, what it means, how we consume it, and why all this matters. We will focus on broad theories about the production and consumption of cultural artifacts, on the interrelations between production and consumption, mediums and messages, and on the empirical reality (or hyper-reality) of our current cultural system. The course will ask students to examine the world with a critical eye from both a theoretical and empirical point of view: questioning assumptions and thinking creatively about analysis and explanation. Students will be evaluated based on several paper assignments, written lecture responses, and weekly quizzes.

There are four required texts, available at the Hornet Bookstore, and one required reader, available online on webCT. A copy of the reader and the text will also be on reserve at University Library. **Students are expected to keep up on the readings and come to lecture**, where we will discuss the readings and other material. Students will be given the opportunity to explore ideas and issues in a series of papers, quizzes, and exams. Grading aside, the emphasis of the course is on ideas.

I am available outside of the office hours above—email me to set up an appointment. ***Please use my office hours!*** The more that people come to raise issues and to ask clarifying questions, the better I can improve the quality of the course. ***Your best bet for a quick response is to email me.*** I check this regularly (usually several times a day).

FURLOUGH DISCLAIMER:

Due to the massive budget cuts in the State of California faculty have been furloughed for 2 days per month. Some of these days may be instructional days, and as the CSU administration and the faculty labor union said, “cuts of this magnitude will naturally have consequences for the quality of education.” Some of these furlough days, listed below, will be taken when class would normally have met. Alternative assignments may be given to make up for the lost classes.

Required Texts:

- *Course reader (online).*
- Mat Callahan: *The Trouble with Music*
- Kevin Wehr: *Hermes on Two Wheels*
- Eric Schlosser: *Fast Food Nation*

I. introduction

1. introducing pop culture
online: Kellner “the triumph of the spectacle”

II. the culture industry

2. what is the culture industry?
online: Kellner “Frankfurt School”

3. what is to be done?
online: Adorno2
READING RESPONSE 1 DUE

III. consuming culture1: music

4. music then
Callahan xiii-114
online: “performing music,” “capturing sound”

5. music now
Callahan 117-238

IV. consuming culture2: TV

6. sit coms, soaps, and serials
online: Kellner on OJ, Bourdieu on TV
7. reality TV
online: “coolseekers” and “tales from the cutting room floor”
READING RESPONSE 3 DUE

(what is reality?)

8. music, ads, tv, and poseurs
Wehr Ch. 4, 5, 6.
MIDTERM EXAM 10/21

9. news and politics
online: “the culture of fear” “the problem of the media”

READING RESPONSE 4 DUE

V. consuming culture3: film

10. the blockbuster and politics
online: Kellner on Presidential politics

11. gendered film
online: holtzman “media messages”

VI. what about books?

12. is reading dead?
online: “reading at risk,” “twilight”

VII. fast food nation, fast food culture

13. consuming meat, consuming culture
Schlosser 1-131
online: “the sexual politics of meat”

11/24 furlough day, class cancelled
11/26 Thanksgiving holiday

14. fast vs. slow food, fullness vs. nourishment
Schlosser 133-288
READING RESPONSE 6 DUE

15. Toward a “conclusion” no further readings
FINAL EXAM ON LAST CLASS MEETING 12/10

THIS IS A GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE IN THE AREA C4.

Learning Objectives: Comprehend aspects of producing culture on a mass scale; Learning differences and similarities between cultures such as “folk,” “pop,” and “high”; Understand various theoretical perspectives for examining popular phenomena; Have an understanding of production aspects that shape music, news, etc.; Have a broader scope of where students fit in producing, consuming, and appreciating popular culture.

COURSEWORK COMPONENTS AND FINAL GRADES

14 QUIZZES (one per week)

6 READING RESPONSE PAPERS (one every other week)

2 EXAMS

CLASS PARTICIPATION

These coursework components are designed to give you credit for attending lecture, reading, thinking critically about the content of lectures and readings, and writing down your ideas on the content of lectures and readings. The point is to engage with the ideas in the class. Final grades will be assessed based on the standard grade scale.

READING RESPONSE PAPERS (one every other week)

The reading response papers are designed for you to respond to the readings and lectures in a concise format of two pages. You are to include relevant material from BOTH the readings and the lectures—papers that focus on only one or the other will not pass. Papers will be graded based on the critical insight offered, on mastery of the material, and on creativity of presentation. Journals will be turned in via webCT.

QUIZZES (one per week)

Each student is required to take a quiz on webCT before class on Tuesday. The quiz will always be short (5 to 10 minutes will be ample to complete the questions), and will always focus only on the readings. Students who do not complete the quiz before class will fail that quiz. The quiz will be locked out at midnight on Monday.

EXAMS

The midterm and final exam will be given in class. They will cover readings, lectures, and class discussions.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Though difficult to measure, class participation in discussion is required. Participation entails a) showing up, b) active listening, and c) occasionally offering a comment. Students will be graded up for more participation, but will also be graded down for reading in class, doing homework in class, emailing or text messaging, or otherwise being “non-present.”

PLEASE NOTE:

- **THERE IS NO NEED TO EXPLAIN YOUR ABSENCE FROM LECTURE.**
- **PAPERS MAY BE TURNED IN DURING LECTURE ONLE: NO LATE PAPERS, EMAILED PAPERS, PAPERS PUT IN MY MAILBOX, NOR UNDER MY OFFICE DOOR.**
- **PLAGIARISM IS A VERY SERIOUS ISSUE AND WILL BE DEALT WITH FIRMLY.**

It is expected that you will turn in your own work. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, quoting or paraphrasing without citation, using another student’s work from this semester or the past, using your own work from another class (either this semester or from the past), or using quotes or full papers from the internet. If you don’t know what plagiarism is, please go to <http://www.csus.edu/admbus/umannual/UMP14150.htm> to educate yourself. Above all, please act with integrity—do not risk your academic career, it’s not worth it.

I strive to make this course accessible to all students. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any special needs that you might have, including, but not limited to accommodation in regards to ability or impairment.