

Understanding Pop Culture: European-American Encounters

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Live Sessions:	Tuesday, 9 – 11 a.m. CET (Berlin time)
Duration:	Aug. 31 – Nov. 30, 2021
Language of Instruction:	English
Contact Hours:	30
ECTS Credits:	6

Course Description

With the divide between mass culture and high art disappearing, popular culture has become a prolific field of study. In this online course, we will consider the many facets and dimensions of pop culture, including its cultural history and the possibilities hidden within what is often assumed to be nothing more than entertainment.

Some of the topics we will address are popular culture's reflection of discourse, its capability of criticizing or affirming the status quo, and the various modes of ideology within. We will cover many relevant pop culture representations: film, television, comic books, music, paintings etc. and will discuss their significance within the historical frame of reference as well as their international social impact.

Secondary texts will introduce a range of theoretical perspectives through which pop culture may be explored, analyzed, questioned, and understood. We will discuss the function of pop culture in the public sphere, its representations in texts, images, and music.

Learning Objectives

In this course students are expected to learn about the history of popular culture and the mutual influences between its US-American and European representations. Another skill practiced in this course is the application of theoretical concepts from both sides of the Atlantic to cultural practices of a given time-period. The course allows for the establishment of cross-disciplinary connections between featured representations and the tracing of national and international tendencies. It encourages students to think outside a single discipline and to see links between movements, trends, and ideologies.

Student Prerequisites

Students should have completed at least three semesters of higher education when the course starts and need to possess English language abilities in speaking and writing on the Upper Intermediate Level (at least B2, preferably above).

General Requirements

Attendance of the weekly live sessions is mandatory (for the specific time slot, see above). These live sessions will be combined with recorded video lessons and intensive work through the online course platform, both individually and in groups. Altogether, this course awards credits for 30 contact hours and 90 hours of additional workload as well as completion of the [Portfolio Intercultural Awareness \(PIA\)](#). Please see course requirements for the various formats and weight of the course assignments as well as forms of assessment.

This course features a certain amount of independent coursework and thus expects you to be able to set up a self-disciplined study routine. We recommend that you make sure to have a quiet and appropriate working space. To ensure a comfortable learning environment for all, please adhere to our [Code of Online Conduct](#).

Technical Requirements

Stable internet connection.

Fully functional device, such as computer, laptop or tablet (use of smart phones is not recommended) with camera and microphone, headset recommended.

Recommended operating systems: Windows 7 or higher or MacOS 10.13 or higher. Avoid using a VPN.

Software: Webex Meetings.

Course Requirements

Final Exam: 300 Points (30%)

Midterm Exam: 250 Points (25%)

Term Paper: 250 Points (25%)

Live Online Attendance (min. 75% required) &

Participation (includes group work and a presentation): 200 Points (20%)

Grading

FU Grade	Points of 500	Points of 1,000
1.0	490-500	980-1,000
1.3	475-489	950-979
1.7	450-474	900-949
2.0	425-449	850-899
2.3	400-424	800-849
2.7	375-399	750-799
3.0	350-374	700-749
3.3	325-349	650-699
3.7	300-324	600-649
4.0	250-299	500-599
5.0	< 250	< 500

Literature

Provided online.

Course Schedule

Calendar	Topics, Reading, etc.
<p>Week 1</p>	<p>The Americanization of Popular Culture: Introduction to a Global Phenomenon in Cultural History</p> <p>What makes culture popular? How to define popular culture and where to set its beginnings? Why is US popular culture so prominent globally?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluck, Winfried. "The Americanization of Modern Culture: A Cultural History of the Popular Media." <i>Romance with America? Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies</i>. Ed. Laura Bieger and Johannes Voelz. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009. 239-267.
<p>Week 2</p>	<p>The Power of Visuals: Comic Books and Graphic Novels</p> <p>How does visual culture work? What impact do visuals have on their consumers and audiences? What are the unique means of comic books and graphic novels that other genres do not have?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> McCloud, Scott "The Vocabulary of Comics." <i>Understanding Comics. The Invisible Art</i>. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993. 24-59. Spiegelman, Art. <i>Maus, A Survivor's Tale</i>. New York: Pantheon Books. 1986. Excerpts.
<p>Week 3</p>	<p>The City as Canvas: Street Art Practices</p> <p>What role does street art play in urban place making practices? How do we consume street art? What happens to street art when put into a museum?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visconti, Luca M. et al., "Street Art, Sweet Art?" Reclaiming the "Public" in Public Place," <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> 37.3, 2010. 511-529.
<p>Week 4</p>	<p>Appropriation Practices # 1 Hip Hop</p> <p>From local to global: how has Hip Hop changed its scope and character from its beginnings in the 1970s in NYC? How did the process of "cultural translation" of Hip Hop in Germany start and develop?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rose, Tricia. "A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Postindustrial City in Hip Hop." <i>Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture</i>. Ed. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose. New York: Routledge, 1994. 401-415. Strick, Simon. "Competent Krauts – Following the Cultural Translations of HipHop to Germany." <i>Traveling Sounds. Music, Migration, and Identity in the U.S. and beyond</i>. Ed. Wilfried Raussert. Berlin: LIT, 2008. 265-247.

<p>Week 5</p>	<p>Appropriation Practices # 2 Fine Arts What is appropriation and why as a practice it is of such an importance for popular culture? How has appropriation been used in fine arts?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Painting Death in America. Andy Warhol, Death and Disaster.” The Menil Collection and Houston Fine Art Press; essays by Neil Printz and Remo Guidieri. 1963. 11-22 <p>Screening (fragments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manifesto directed by Julian Rosefeldt, shot in Berlin (Teufelsberg) and exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Hamburger Bahnhof in 2016
<p>Week 6</p>	<p>Midterm exam</p>
<p>Week 7</p>	<p>Appropriation Practices # 3 Literature and Conceptual Writing What is conceptual art and how does it use appropriation? How does conceptual writing work?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goldsmith, Kenneth. Seven American Deaths and Disasters. New York: powerHouse Books 2013. Excerpts (“John F. Kennedy” 9-41)
<p>Week 8</p>	<p>Guest Lecture with Q&A: Sampling Culture and Copyright Law What are the dangers of sampling as a form of appropriation from legal perspective? What are the main differences in terms of copyrights applied to sampling between Germany and the US?</p>
<p>Week 9</p>	<p>The Role and Importance of Gender in Popular Culture How does popular culture promote and question gender roles? Why does gender at all matters in cultural practices? What is androgyny and which androgynous figures in the history of pop culture are you familiar with?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walser, Robert. “Forging Masculinity: Heavy Metal Sounds and Images of Gender.” Popular Music. London: Routledge, 2004. 343-371. • Butler, Judith. “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions.” Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge, 1990. 175-193

<p>Week 10</p>	<p>Concepts of National Identity in Films from Both Sides of the Atlantic How can the film industry contribute to shaping national identity? What is the standing of and access to European films in the US? What about access to and popularity of US productions in Europe?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elsässer, Thomas. “ImpersoNations: National Cinema, Historical Imaginaries.” <i>European Cinema – Face to Face with Hollywood</i>. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2005. 82-107.
<p>Week 11</p>	<p>Serialized Storytelling Practices Why are series so successful? How does serialized narratives work?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O’Sullivan, Sean. “The Inevitable, the Surprise, and Serial Television.” <i>Media of serial narrative</i>. Ed. Frank Kelleter. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press. 2017. 204-225. • Bandirali, Luca and Enrico Terrone. “Super Size Stories. Narrative Strategies in Contemporary TV Series.” <i>Cinergie – Il Cinema e le altre Arti</i> 2017. Web. <p>Screening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Babylon Berlin” (dir. Tom Tykwer, 2017), episode 1.
<p>Week 12</p>	<p>Imagining the End – Apocalyptic Fantasies and the Fear of Disasters Imaginary catastrophes and appearances of imaginary monsters have been a part of popular culture ever since. What makes them so appealing to audiences around the world? What makes us enjoy fear in a particular pop cultural setting?</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sontag, Susan. “The Imagination of Disaster.” <i>Against Interpretation</i>, New York: Farrar, 1966. 209-225. • Page, Max. “The Future of the City’s End.” <i>The City’s End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears and Premonitions of New York’s Destruction</i>. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008. 199-232. and “Utopian and Dystopian Fantasies of the Stone Colossus in the 1920s and 1930s.” 61-69.
<p>Week 13</p>	<p>Final exam</p>