**Film and Media Studies 192B**

Contemporary Critical and Cultural Theory

**Course Description**

The word “theory” may sound scary to some students. You may have been told that theory is boring, difficult and irrelevant to the realities of daily life. However, cultural theory, as it is taught in this class, is not only fun and exciting, but it is *directly relevant* to your life and daily experience. I believe that theory is not the opposite of practice. Instead, theory is a type of *discursive practice* designed to help you think differently about your life, and possibly change the conditions of your existence. The issue of discursive practice is particularly relevant for you, as filmmakers and film critics, because films are a form of discursive practice that shapes the way people view their culture, their lives, and themselves.

In this brief but intense 6-week course, you will be exposed to a variety of different *theoretical frameworks*, different toolkits for analyzing and understanding the world around you. You will view films and other media objects that engage with the theoretical frameworks presented, and you will be asked to develop interpretations of these objects through the theories you have read. You may also look at some of the recommended readings for each week to enhance your understanding of the subject at hand. You will then be asked to apply one of these frameworks in a final paper or creative project.

**Course Requirements**

The core requirement for this course is a single **final project**, in which you will apply a theoretical framework from this class to a cultural object of your choice.

The medium in which you work is also your choice! The final project may be an **academic paper of 8-10 pages**, or it may be a **creative work** such as a film, painting, long-form poem, photography project, performance art piece (documented via photography, video or another method), or graphic novel. If you choose to pursue this creative option, you will need to also produce a **3-5 page artist’s statement** about the project, describing your vision and process in the context of the course material. Please submit your project in an easily-accessed digital form such as JPEG, PDF, or Word document.

I will be assessing this final project based on the following criteria:

1. **Craftsmanship**: You will be assessed based on your familiarity with and fluency in the medium of your choice. If this is academic writing, you will be assessed based on your grammar, style, clarity, and organization. If you choose another medium, please be sure you are familiar enough with that medium to produce high-quality and well-crafted work. Hasty collages and penciled illustrations do not display a high degree of craftsmanship, and as such, will be treated as if you had written a paper with poor style.
2. **Coherence**: Your project must have a clear central argument or research discovery. Please clearly present to me what new information or ideas you have discovered through your engagement with the class readings and the object you have chosen, and explain why it is important.
3. **Courage**: Students who are worried about their final grade may gravitate towards projects they believe are “easy,” whether this means choosing a similar topic to other students in the class, choosing to use a familiar method, or choosing a topic they have studied in another class or a topic they think about every day. It is fine for you to pick a topic with which you are personally familiar. However, whether you pick something familiar or unfamiliar, I would like to see you demonstrate the courage to challenge your existing convictions, whatever that means to you. Please demonstrate to me that you have tackled a topic that you feel will help you grow as a thinker, and how the project has helped you towards that goal.
4. **Complexity**: It is possible to use complex theories in a fairly straightforward way, simply finding an example of a phenomenon described in the readings, for example. However, projects that attempt to take into account the full complexity of the readings and/or approach their object from multiple perspectives will be considered more valuable than projects that take a more simplistic approach.

The second requirement for this class is a **blog entry** of roughly 250 words—though of course you can always write more!—posted by submission to my teaching blog. This entry is intended to help you practice for your final project. Choose a cultural object such as an image, link, video, or quotation, and analyze it briefly using material from this course. I will also be posting to my teaching blog during the quarter; don’t hesitate to check for my and your peers’ updates. In order to distribute posts throughout the quarter, I will be asking you to sign up for a week in which to post.

You will also be asked to do impromptu **in-class writing assignments** throughout the quarter. These will be in place of a midterm and final exam. You will be applying a theory of my choice to an object of my choice in these situations. **Please bring paper and a writing implement to every class so that these assignments can be collected in class!** Students may be allowed to turn in make-up writing assignments, but only because of a justified absence.

The grading breakdown for the class is as follows:

**Section Participation and Attendance: 10%**

**Blog Entry: 10%**

**In-Class Writing Assignments (cumulative): 50%**

**Final Project: 30%**

**Texts:**

The required texts from this class can be found in the **course reader**, available at the Alternative print shop in Isla Vista, and on two-hour reserve at Davidson Library.

To help you consider the readings from this class within their intellectual history and cultural context, I recommend Peter Barry’s [*Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*](http://www.amazon.com/Beginning-Theory-Introduction-Literary-Cultural/dp/0719079276) (BT). Within the recommended readings section of each week, I have indicated which chapter(s) are relevant to the readings for that week. A copy of the book is on reserve in the library, though you may want to buy the book for your own personal reference.

**Academic Honesty:**

Because this class requires you to challenge your existing assumptions about media and society, I expect your assignments to be personal. This makes sharing answers difficult. However, the same expectations of academic honesty apply in this class as at other classes at UCSB. Plagiarism, or the use of another’s ideas without **proper academic citation** is grounds for failing the class and possible administrative intervention. Please refer to the [Office of Judicial Affairs website](http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu/AcademicIntegrity.aspx) for more information about UCSB’s academic integrity policies.

**Accommodation of Learning Differences:**

UCSB requires that professors accommodate the documented needs of students with disabilities. I am happy to provide any and all accommodations recommended by the [Disabled Students Program (DSP)](http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/). If you believe you will need accommodations, please make sure you are registered with DSP and that they are in contact with me about your situation.

If you are not registered with DSP, yet still believe that you will need accommodations to facilitate your learning in this course, please speak with me or your TA about your situation. We may not be able to make large changes on short notice, but we would like to help you succeed in this course if there are small changes we can make.

**Agenda:**

**Week 1: Language as Practice**

Henry Giroux, “The Politics of Theory, Practice, and Clarity”

Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” “Striptease,” “The Writer on Holiday,” “The Lost Continent”

Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” <http://lists.econ.utah.edu/pipermail/margins-to-centre/2006-March/000794.html>

Diana Pozo, “How to Evolve as a Theorist (and nail the final exam & final project)” <http://considerdasource.tumblr.com/post/51100343287/how-to-evolve-as-a-theorist-and-nail-the-final-exam>

**Recommended**:

**BTchapter 2: “Structuralism”**; Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*; bell hooks *Teaching to Transgress*

**Screening**: *La Chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1967)

**Week 2: Ideology/Counterideology**

Karl Marx, “Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas” section from *The German Ideology* (1845) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>

Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)” (1970)

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>

Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves”

**Recommended:**

**BT chapter 8: “Marxist Criticism”;** Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Marxism, Feminism Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

**Screening**: *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, US, 1983)

**Week 3: Taste, Class, and Boundaries**

Michel Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians,’” and “The Repressive Hypothesis”

Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Popular’”

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public”

**Recommended**:

**BT chapters 6 and 7: “Feminist criticism,” “Lesbian/gay criticism”;** Andrew Ross, “The Popularity of Pornography”; Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*

**Screening**: *Showgirls* (Paul Verhoeven, US, 1995)

**Week 4: Oppositional Reading, Oppositional Writing**

Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”

Alexander Doty, “There’s Something Queer Here”

bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators”

Mireille Miller-Young, “Interventions: The Deviant and Defiant Art of Black Women Porn Directors”

**Recommended**:

**BT chapter 9: “New historicism and cultural materialism”;** Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*; *Velvet Goldmine* (Todd Haynes, US, 1998); Audre Lorde*, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

**Screening**: *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, US, 1996)

**Week 5: Power and Identity on a Global Scale**

Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots”

Hamid Naficy, “Between Rocks and Hard Places: The Interstitial Mode of Production in Exilic Cinema”

Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics”

**Recommended:**

**BT chapter 10: “Postcolonial criticism”;** Nick Dyer-Witheford and Grieg de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*;

**Screening**: *Persepolis* (Vincent Parronaud, Marjane Satrapi, France/UK/Iran/Germany, 2007)

**Week 6: Embodiment and Reality**

Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”

Lisa Nakamura, “Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet”

<http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/syllabi/readings/nakamura.html>

Eve Shapiro, “Preview: Gendered Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age,” and “Case Study: Focus on Tattooing and Masculinity”

**Recommended:**

**BT chapter 3: “Post-structuralism and deconstruction”;** Kate Harding, “Don’t You Realize Fat is Unhealthy?” <http://kateharding.net/faq/but-dont-you-realize-fat-is-unhealthy/> ; Vivian Sobchack, “Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text, or How to Get Out of this Century Alive”;

Sandy Stone “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” <http://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back>

**Screenings**: *The Fat Body (In)visible* (Margitte Kristjansson, US, 2011), *Sexing the Transman* (non-sex version) (Buck Angel, US, 2011)