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# INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL THEORY

Core course of "Culture and Theory"

Thursday 1:30-4:30pm

Spring 2003

BA (Hons) in Design

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School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Subject Co-ordinator	Yau Ching
Level	1/2
Semester	2
Credit	3
Prerequisites	Nil

## Brief Description and Objectives

This course can also be called "Mixed Bag". It introduces major cultural theories as points of reference for designers to position ourselves historically and socially as cultural producers. In order to make cultural products with an original and realistic approach, we need to understand the society we live in and the world around us. This course seeks to chart and examine the social and political role of the discipline, as well as to grasp what it means to work in a society that is dominated by the relations of production and cultural exchange of a capitalist and imperialist economy. Students are expected to consider and question how their own cultural practices fit into this larger picture of various and sometimes contradictory discourses, and also how these ways of looking at, finding out, and thinking about our society and culture might open up, strengthen, frame and/or challenge their practices. Students are encouraged to draw from their daily experiences, lived and felt realities locally and globally as research material and case study. Through a rigorous training in reading, discussing, researching, writing, and of course making, students learn to assimilate major paradigms of knowledge in order to arrive at a more critical understanding of the production and consumption of culture in our contemporary society.

Students learn in this course introductions to (1) cultural production as signifying practices; (2) interpretation of culture through Frankfurt School and Feminism; and (3) problems of cultural identity and differences related to Nationalism, Imperialism and Orientalism.

## Course Requirements

This course encourages the integration of theory and practice. Students are encouraged to apply their theoretical learnings in everyday practice and formulate their own research and analytical fields. A paper related to the topics covered is expected from each student at the end of each section.

Students are expected to be able to read at least an article per week. The readings will be copied and handed out in class every week. All of the books from which the readings come from are available from the PolyU or other local University libraries.

Students are expected to be open-minded in receiving new and/or sometimes controversial ideas. While students are encouraged to think and speak their minds freely and honestly, mindless and careless dismissal of reading materials is not supported. Students are expected to constantly challenge their own and each others' preconceptions and/or biases. Please be active and verbal within classroom.

### **Assessment for each section\***

1. Completion of course readings, assignments and active participation in class discussion and presentation. Attendance in lectures and tutorials. (30%);
2. One paper (70%).

\* Each section (2801/2802/2803) is graded separately.

### **Topics Covered**

#### **Topic 1: CULTURE AS SIGNIFYING PRACTICES**

##### **Week One (23 Jan): Introduction: Politics of Representation**

Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation", *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, 15-64.

##### **Week Two (30 Jan): Saussure and the Concept of Sign**

Ferdinand de Saussure, "The Linguistic Sign", *Semiotics: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Robert E. Innis, 24-46.

##### **Week Three (6 Feb): Roland Barthes and Everyday Life Politics**

Selections from Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. UK: Cape, 1972. Trans. Annette Lavers.

##### **Week Four (13 Feb): Communication as Culture**

James Carey, "Mass Communication and Cultural Studies", "Reconceiving Mass and Media", *Communication as culture: essays on media and society*. Unwin Hyman, 1988.

##### **Week Five (20 Feb): Technological Culture**

James Carey and John Quirk, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution", *Communication as culture: essays on media and society*. Unwin Hyman, 1988.  
Raymond Williams, "Television: Technology and Cultural Form".

#### **Topic 2: FEMINISM AND VISUAL PRODUCTION**

##### **Week Six (27 Feb): Berger's Male Gaze**

John Berger, "Chapter 2 and 3", *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin and BBC, 1972.  
Students' Presentations.

##### **Week Seven (6 March): Mulvey and Visual Pleasure**

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana, 1989, 14-26.

##### **Week Eight (13 March): Various Feminist Positions**

Griselda Pollock, "Differencing: Feminism's encounter with the Canon", *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, 23-38.

Selections from Guerrilla Girls, *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*, New York: Penguin, 1998.

### **Week Nine (20 March): Feminism and Cultural Marginalization**

Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "What's Home Got To Do With It?", *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, Teresa de Lauretis ed., Indiana University Press, 1986.

## **Topic Three: "CRITICAL THEORY" AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL**

### **Week Ten (27 March): Walter Benjamin 1**

Walter Benjamin: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations*, 217-252.

### **Week Eleven (3 April): Walter Benjamin 2**

Walter Benjamin: "The Author as Producer", Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt eds. *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 254-269.

### **Week Twelve (10 April): Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer**

Adorno & Horkheimer: "The Cultural Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120-167.

### **Week Thirteen (17 April): Jurgen Habermas**

Jurgen Habermas: "Social Structures of Public Sphere", *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, 27-56.  
Students' Presentations.

## **Topic Four: IDENTITY, DIFFERENCES AND AUTHORSHIP**

### **Week Fifteen: Identity and Differences 1**

Hall, S. et al (eds.) "National Cultures as Imagined Communities". *Modernity and its Futures*. London: Polity Press and Open University. 1992: 291-316.

### **Week Sixteen: Identity and Differences 2**

Woodward, K. "Concepts of Identity and Differences". *Identity and Difference*. London: Sage. 1997: 8-19.

### **Week Seventeen: History and Cultural Authorship 1**

Turner, M. "Dissolving the People" in Turner, M. & Ngan I. (eds.), *Hong Kong Sixties: Designing Identity*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1995: 13-34.

Selected writings by Eric Ma Kit Wai on Hong Kong Television Programs.

Screening: Commercials from HK Bank in the 80s to present.

Documentaries from the '60s and '70s, Hong Kong Government Information Services

### **Week Eighteen: History and Cultural Authorship 2**

Selections from Edward Said, "Introduction", *Orientalism*.

Rey Chow, "Introduction", *Writing Diaspora*, Indiana University Press, 1993.

Paper due.

### Indicative Reading List

- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, UK: Cape, 1972. Trans. Annette Lavers.
- Walter Benjamin, "Author as Producer", *Illuminations*, BJA, 1977. Trans. Edmund Jephcott.
- John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin and BBC, 1968.
- Gui Bonsiepe, "Some Virtues of Design", *design Beyond Design: International Design Conference Papers*, 1999.
- Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, New York: International General and Bagnolet, France: International Mass Media Research Center, 1975.
- EcoDesign 1 Conference, *Sustainability Through Design*, Centre for Design at RMIT, 1992.
- Guerrilla Girls, *The Guerrilla Girls Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*, Penguin, 1998.
- Paul du Guy, Stuart Hall et al, *Doing Cultural Studies: the Story of the Sony Walkman*, London: Open University and Sage, 1997.
- Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Open University and Sage, 1997.
- Stuart Hall, "National Cultures as Imagined Communities", *Modernity and its Futures*, London: Polity Press and Open University, 1992.
- Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London: Verso, 1990.
- Victor Margolin, ed., *Design Discourse*, University of Chicago, 1989.
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *Visual Culture Reader*, Routledge, 1998.
- Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Jeremy Myerson ed., *Design Renaissance: Selected Papers from the International Design Congress*, UK: Open Eye, 1993.
- Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois, 1988.
- Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge, 1986.
- Jonathan Rutherford ed., *Identity/Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.
- Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage, 1979.
- Paivi Tahkokallio and Susann Vihma, eds. *Design -- Pleasure or Responsibility?*, University of Art and Design Helsinki UIAH, 1995.
- John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*, John Hopkins, 1991.
- Turner, M. & Ngan I., eds., *Hong Kong Sixties: Designing Identity*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1995.
- Jan van Toorn, "Communication design: a social practice", *design Beyond Design: International Design Conference Papers*, 1999.