Many see a course with “popular culture” in the title and immediately think, “That's an easy course. I can sit around and BS about TV and music the whole time.” While we will be talking about music and television throughout this course, it's important to note that the class is titled “Reading Popular Culture.” Reading is a cultural practice that takes focus and training. In this course we will deliberately seek to think about popular culture in a way that doesn't come easily. In other words, be prepared to think critically, question your natural assumptions about pop culture, encounter racial, class, political, and cultural perspectives different from your own, and work harder than you ever thought you would in a class with Josie and the Pussycats on the syllabus. Seriously.

As intellectually disciplined and curious learners, we will attempt to wrestle with fundamental questions about popular culture. These questions will include: What counts as “culture”? What kinds of meaning does pop culture produce? How does pop culture reflect our world? How does pop culture shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us? How do disparate groups (corporate executives, target audiences, national governments, oppressed populations...) use popular culture to control, or resist, the conditions of their existence? Are consumers mindless drones, sopping up the messages placed before them? Can audiences re-invent popular culture texts for their own purposes in new and complex ways? This course asks these questions to attempt to understand the way products of popular culture—films, TV shows, music, web sites, fashion, advertisements, journalism, etc—interact with “the people” they address.

In pursuit of these questions (and more), we will consider a wide array of popular culture texts, as well as multiple theoretical approaches to the study of popular culture. We will expose ourselves to writings from traditions of mass culture theory, feminist film criticism, Marxian ideology critique, and new considerations of convergence culture, and many others. This will be difficult, but it will also open up interpretations that you might never have thought of before. And isn't that one of the reasons that you came to college in the first place?

Let's not forget—we'll also have a lot of fun. Learning to see movies, comix, music, advertising and the Internet in a new light is exciting and intellectually rewarding. We'll develop the skills to relate to popular culture not only as a passive recipient of its messages, but also as critically and intellectually engaged respondents. Beyond having intelligent things to say about Mos Def, you will leave this course with the ability to critically engage with popular culture, understand how we create it, and consider how it creates (and re-creates) the world around us. That's worth something.
**Work of the Course:**

You will devote time, thought, and energy to a variety of informal and formal reading and writing practices. During the course you may annotate readings, keep a record of ideas and responses, jot down observations, take notes on class discussions, experiment with different styles and organizational choices, and **engage** in a variety of drafting and revision activities. All these activities are important and will have an impact on your development and success as academic writers (and yeah, your final grade too).

What does this mean, practically? The assignments in this course will include weekly posts to our Blackboard site, 2 short (3 pages) critical papers and a final presentation of a paper 7-9 pages in length. Reading quizzes will also be given periodically.

The **Blackboard posts** will be 250 word critical reflections on our weekly screening & reading, and a preparation for class discussions. You may drop your two lowest Blackboard scores.

The **short papers** will be expanded and developed reflections on our course material and Blackboard discussions. These should not be “book reports”, full of plot summary (“Josie and the Pussycats is a movie about the music industry”) or personal reactions (“Ghost World is a beautiful and funny graphic novel”), but rather a close examination about specific elements of some material we’ve covered in class. I expect a reflection on the text's relationship to a question or issue that is larger than the text itself. I will also permit you to submit one extra paper, and will drop your lowest short paper grade.

The **final project** will build upon your short response papers, in developing an extended analysis of the operation of particular popular culture texts within a given context (historical, social, political, etc). More directed instruction on the final project will follow in an assignment sheet.

**Course Texts and Materials:**

(books are available in the University Bookstore, Follett's, and online)

Clowes, Daniel. *Ghost World*

Strinati, Dominic. *Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*

Selection of PDF documents, downloadable from Blackboard.

**Grading:**

Attendance: 5%

Reading Quizzes: 10%

Class Participation: 10%

Midterm Exam: 15%

Blackboard Posts: 10%

Short Papers: 20%

Final Project (Proposal, Draft, & Final): 30%

Grades are not negotiable. If you believe there has been a mathematical error, you may schedule an appointment to discuss it. I am of course willing to meet with you at any time to explain grading decisions and discuss how improvements can be made on future assignments. Late work on Quizzes, Exams and Homework is not accepted. Late work on Blackboard or Essays can be accepted with a 5% deduction for each day late, unless there is an extension granted prior to the due date.
ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

The work you do in class, the work you do to prepare for each class, is as important as any polished assignment you turn in for a grade. In addition, our syllabus is only a projection and may be subject to occasional changes and revisions as it seems appropriate, necessary, or just interesting. That is another reason why your attendance is vital.

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned or missed. Please realize, however, that class time cannot be reconstructed or made up, and that your performance, your work, and by extension your final course grade can be affected by absences.

Please read that paragraph again. It’s your responsibility to know these things.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu

STUDENT NEEDS & ACCOMMODATIONS

Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498 and present an updated accommodation letter to their instructor. Accommodations and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance.

For more information about services and policies, see the Office of Disability Services:

Syracuse University
Office of Disability Services
804 University Avenue Room 309
Syracuse, New York 13244-2330

Phone: Voice: (315) 443-4498
TDD: (315) 443-1371
E-Mail: odssched@syr.edu

FORMATTING & COMPUTER USE

Most of the work you do for this class will be handed in word processed. Use Times New Roman, size 10 or 12. Include one-inch margins and follow the page layout used by the MLA format.

We will also be using email for contact outside class. Use e-mail to contact me about your coursework, to set up an appointment to meet with me outside class, or to ask a question. You can also contact me via AIM (sn: fouronetrue) or Twitter (@popthought). Reading material and weekly assignments will be posted to the course Blackboard site at http://blackboard.syr.edu

Finally, it's 2009. Any computer failure, real or imaginary, is not an excuse for incomplete or late work, missed appointments or lack of communication. If you submit work electronically, that work will only be considered “turned in” when you receive a confirmation notice from me. You are responsible for the work of this course irrespective of technological hiccups.
INTRO & WHAT IS CULTURE?

WEEK 1:

Tuesday September 1
Discuss: Course policies, introductions. Watching film primer.
Screening: Be Kind, Rewind (2008)

Reading Assignment for 9/3: Williams, “Culture is Ordinary” (PDF)

Thursday September 3
Discuss: Williams, Cultural Studies, and the approach to the course.

Reading Assignment for 9/8: Strinati, 1-19

MASS CULTURE & THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

WEEK 2:

Tuesday September 8
Discuss: The Pleasures and Perils of Pop
Screening: Pleasantville (1998)

Reading Assignment for 9/10: Strinati; pp 20-44

Thursday September 10
Discuss: Pleasantville and the function of culture.

Reading Assignment for 9/15: MacDonald, “Mass Cult & MidCult” (PDF)

WEEK 3:

Tuesday September 15
Discuss: “Dumbing Down”
Screening: Josie and the Pussycats (2001)

Reading: Strinati, pp 45-75

Thursday September 17
Discuss: Adorno & “The Culture Industry” - “Hurts” listening primer.

Reading assignment for 9/22: Paul Graham, “The Age of the Essay” (PDF)

WEEK 4:

Tuesday September 22
Discuss: Josie, reviews, and watch Josie Trailer

Reading assignment for 9/24: Klosterman, “The Lady or the Tiger”

Thursday September 24:
Discuss: Merchants

Reading assignment for 10/1: Quart, “Cinema of the In-Crowd” and “More than a Video Game” (PDF),
***PAPER #1 DUE FRIDAY 9/25 @ 12:00PM***