

University of Central Florida

HUM 3805

Critical Theory in the Humanities

Instructor: Bruce Janz	Term: Spring 2015
Time: Web course (0W61)	Room: n/a
Phone: 407-823-2273	Credits: 3
Course Page & Resource Page: http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/courses/	Section: 0001 Course Number: 19220
Office Hours: Online hours	Office: Department of Philosophy, Psychology Building 225
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Critical theory, broadly understood, refers to contemporary interdisciplinary cultural interpretation and critique. We will first address the question of how to understand or “read” culture. Secondly, we will consider a variety of related approaches which re-assess cultural notions of meaning, identity, power, representation, place, resistance, production and consumption. And finally, we will consider the contribution of critical theory in its more specific sense, the Frankfurt School and its legacy. The goal will be to give students a set of tools to critically understand and participate in contemporary culture.

Required Texts:

- John Storey, [Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, 6th Edition](#). Pearson, 2012. ISBN: 9781408285275
- Sean Hall, [This Means This, That Means That: A User’s Guide to Semiotics, 2nd Edition](#). Laurence King Publishing, 2012. ISBN: 9781856697354
- Papers and other assigned readings.

Recommended Readings:

- Chandler, Daniel. [Semiotics for Beginners, online version](#). You can also buy a hard copy, titled *Semiotics: The Basics*.

Requirements:

CLASS FORMAT: This course will be a seminar, modelled as much as possible on a standard graduate seminar. That means that we will focus on the readings for the week, and class members will rotate in leading the discussion on those readings. Since this is an online course, and hence asynchronous, we will use as many relevant tools as possible (discussions, video, links, etc.) so that we can have a fruitful discussion. For more on graduate seminars, see the

Front Page for this course.

Mandatory Financial Aid quiz (0% of final grade): There is a quiz in Webcourses that all students must do, by order of the university. It is to ascertain who actually begins a course. The university needs to generate this data to report to the federal government. There is no reason for us to have a quiz at this point except to meet this requirement, but I would ask all of you to complete this, by the latest, by Friday January 16 at 5 pm, even if you are not on financial aid. The "grade" will not figure in your final grade for the course.

Discussion Posts (20%): Each week there will be a question on the discussion board. You will need to respond to it, and respond to others' responses. Your response will need to go up by the end of Wednesday in the week that the module goes up, and your response to the response will need to go up by the end of the module, usually on Sunday evening at midnight. Often, the discussion will involve you going out to find some example from contemporary culture of a concept or idea that we are discussing that week. You can type your contribution, or you can post audio/video using Webcourse's tools.

There will be 14 weeks' worth of posts, and I will assign 1% to each of those weeks for an adequate posting on your part, which includes on-time posting of a response to the week's question, and at least one significant response to someone else's post (in other words, "me too!" isn't enough). The other 6% of this grade will come from other discussion prompts during the term, including the thread that will be live throughout the term that allows you to post about examples in culture that are relevant to the course material, and the discussion thread for theorists in the course.

Semiotic Analysis (25%): Using the tools of semiotics and cultural analysis developed in the first part of this course, find an example of popular or mass culture to analyze. How does meaning become encoded, and/or how is it created, promulgated, and reinforced? Which semiotic tools are most useful to clarify how meaning works in your example? I will discuss more about this assignment closer to the due date. 750 words, +/- 50 words.

Cultural Analysis (25%): Using the tools from the second part of the course (after the semiotics and cultural analysis), find an example of popular or mass culture (different from the one used in the semiotic analysis), and show how meaning is established, framed, grounded, and reinforced. I will discuss more about this assignment closer to the due date. 750 words, +/- 50 words.

Final Exam (30%): This is a comprehensive exam for the whole course, and will focus both on your understanding of the concepts and positions of thinkers and also your ability to apply these to historical and contemporary culture.

Grade Distribution: I will record the assignment grades based on the percentage of the course grade during the term. The letter grade will be calculated only at the end of the course, based on full course grade. The distribution will be as follows:

A: 93-100	B: 83-86	C: 73-76	D: 63-66
A-: 90-92	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72	D-: 60-62
B+: 87-89	C+: 77-79	D+: 67-69	F: 0-59

For more course details, please see [The Fine Print](#).

Schedule

Click on "Date" to reach the module for the week. Click on the name of the reading to reach it (apart from the readings from assigned books for the course).

Week	Module Opening Date	Topic	Readings	Due Dates
1	Jan. 12	Introduction: The How of Culture	Storey ch. 1	Mandatory Student aid quiz; discussion
2	Jan. 20	Critical and Cultural Theory Background	Storey ch. 2	Discussion
3	Jan. 26	Reading Culture: Approaches to Culture	Hall intro, ch. 1, 2	Discussion
4	Feb. 2	Reading Culture: Semiotics	Hall ch. 3, 4	Discussion
5	Feb. 9	Reading Culture	Hall, ch. 5, 6	Discussion
6	Feb. 16	Interpreting Media	Hall, ch. 7, 8	Semiotic Analysis; discussion
7	Feb. 23	Frankfurt School and Popular Culture	Storey ch. 4	Discussion
8	March 2	Sites of Cultural Critique and Identity Production: Gender Race Class Sexual Orientation	Storey ch. 7	Discussion
9	March 16	Sites of Cultural Critique and Identity Production: Gender Race Class Sexual Orientation	Storey ch. 8	Discussion
10	March 23	Technology	TBA	Discussion
11	March 30	Place & Space	TBA	Cultural Analysis; discussion
12	April 6	Tradition & Modernity	Storey ch. 9	Discussion
13	April 13	Cultural Resistance	Story ch. 10	Discussin
14	April 20	Wrap-up		Discussion
15	April 27	Final Exam Week		Final Exam

Note also: Most of the readings in the early part of the course have many different editions to choose from. You are welcome to choose another edition or translation if you wish (i.e., if you happen to have one already).