

## HL4009 POPULAR LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Module lecturer: Professor C. J. W.-L. Wee

Semester II, 2020-2021 – January 2021

Tuesdays, 0930-1230 hours, On Campus: LT17

Map:<https://www.google.com/maps/place/1%C2%B020'42.6%22N+103%C2%B040'50.6%22E/@1.3449583,103.6800442,18.5z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0x0!8m2!3d1.3451712!4d103.6807086?hl=en-US>

This module introduces thinking on the relationship between ‘serious culture’ (inc. literature) to the (less-literary) study of ‘popular culture’. The following are examined: (i) *high* culture vs. *low* culture; (ii) *pop* or *mass* culture vs. (truly) *popular* culture; (iii) popular culture as *resistance* vs. pop or mass culture as *consumption*; and (iv) *class* and popular culture. (Note: *Class is an inevitably difficult matter for Singapore students to understand as it is hidden in the local socio-political landscape.*)

Since the 1970s, some literary scholars have expanded the type of cultural texts that can be studied, apart from established, high-cultural literary texts. We begin by examining the differences between the terms high culture (literature and serious art), mass or pop culture (commercially produced pop music or film) and ‘popular culture’ (sub-cultures or counter-cultures that resist the established mainstream, middle-class values) and assess the debates about the value of cultural texts that are not of high cultural origins. We then proceed to look at the question of mainstream pop culture and the issue of consumption. Questions such as the following will arise:

- ✓ What is the impact and significance of commercially produced cultural products?
- ✓ How do sub- and counter-cultural practices attempt to form ‘alternative’ values systems?
- ✓ What happens when alternative cultural formations become transformed into the mainstream?

The module is in 2 sections. The first introduces critical discussions of the major terms. The second is an *applied* section with 2 components:

- The first component looks at the emergence of youth sub-cultural and counter-cultural cultures from the 1960s, the major decade from which ‘pop culture’ as we experience it now emerges.
- The second examines pop culture as *consumption* rather than as *resistance*; we will take the emergence of J-pop (& the Japanese wave in the 1990s and present pop phenomena – mainly AKB48 and Arashi) and then K-pop (from the late 1990s) as examples to engage with this question. Both phenomena had/have a presence within the region unimaginable in the 1960s-80s.

### Method of instruction:

3-hour seminar with one break

### Mode of Assessment:

One group presentation, one essay assignment and one final examination

### Breakdown:

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| - Essay assignment (2,500-word essay)**  | 35%*   |
| - In-class, group presentation at start of class   | 15%*** |
| - End of semester written examination (2.5 hour paper: 3 questions to be answered from a larger selection – <b>To be confirmed</b> ) | 50%    |

### Key:

\* Inclusive of notes and references.

\*\* Ensure that when you cite material from the readings, the *full bibliographic* information is given. **A minor penalty of 2 marks will incur:** you are *responsible*, as you will be in the professional world that you enter, for accuracy in documentation.

*Must adhere to word limit. Penalties will incur otherwise.*

\*\*\* Presentation format: a *maximum* of *twenty-five* (25) minutes if in groups of 3; *twenty* (20) minutes if groups of 2. **Penalties will incur thereafter.** Offer a pared-down overview of the material: (1) *central* ideas/themes, to help focus the discussion; and (2) your critical responses to the film/readings.

Notes:

- **Groups must meet lecturer for a short meeting (20 minutes) in advance to discuss their proposed outline of presentation material.**
- Hard copy of presentation material must be given to lecturer at the start of seminar meeting.

### **Academic Integrity:**

All members of the NTU community are responsible for upholding the values of academic integrity in all academic undertakings. At the beginning of the semester, you are required to submit a signed declaration guaranteeing that all graded and non-graded work throughout the semester is original and is created without assistance from others except where explicitly allowed by the module lecturer.

- A guide to academic integrity can be found here:  
<http://www.ntu.edu.sg/ai/ForEveryone/pages/aguidetoacademicintegrity.aspx>
- The full academic integrity policy can be found here:  
<http://www.ntu.edu.sg/ai/ForEveryone/Pages/NTUAcademicIntegrityPolicy.aspx>

You are expected to understand current academic policies regarding academic honesty before signing the declaration. A declaration form will be in NTULearn in 'Content' and you should sign and submit a copy to me in class during the first or second class meeting. No marks/grades will be awarded until the signed declaration is received.

### **Consultations:**

- Make appointments in advance: [cjwlwee@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:cjwlwee@ntu.edu.sg). Note each meeting will last about 20 mins – request more time in advance if you think that necessary.
- Come with a *specific question or questions* in mind. Do *not* expect a individual tutorial or summary of a previous seminar meeting during consultation meetings: that would be manifestly unfair to the rest of the class.
- All meetings will be on Zoom.

### **Readings and films:**

- The texts will be in the form of PDFs made available in NTULearn and 3 films/DVDs. You are *expected* to investigate the emergence of youth and popular cultures from the 1960s yourselves in more detail, as the Internet is full of recordings and images: the class cannot tell you (say) what the 1969 Woodstock concert was 'about' in detail. Ditto for Japanese and Korean pop music examples.
- Students are responsible for purchasing film DVDs or otherwise obtaining the film recordings.
- F. R. Leavis, 'Valuation in Criticism'. In *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, ed. G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). NIE Library: PR99 Lea.

- F. R. Leavis, 'Hard Times [the Charles Dickens' novel]: An Analytic Note'. In Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1946; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962). NIE Library: PR873 Lea.
- Raymond Williams, *selection*. In Williams, *Communications*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). P92.G7W726.\*\*
- Theodor W. Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered'. In Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) 2001 edition available: CB427.A241 2001
- Paul Willis, 'Symbolic Creativity'. In Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (eds.), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993). NIE Library: CB430 Stu.
- John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, *selection* from a chapter, 'Subcultures, cultures and class'. In *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1975; London: Routledge, 1993). HQ799.G7R433.\*\*
- *The Korean Wave: A New Pop Cultural Phenomenon* (Seoul: Korean Culture and Information Service, 2011), *selection*: pp. 17-46; 68-69.
- Carolyn S. Stevens, chapter 3, 'The Particulars of History'. In Stevens, *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, Authenticity, and Power* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 37-67 (focus on pp. 37, 49-67) ML2917.J3 S844.
- Patrick Galbraith and Jason Karlin, 'Introduction: The mirror of idols and celebrity'. In *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, edited by Patrick Galbraith and Jason Karlin (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). P92.J3 I21
- Michael Fuhr, chapter 4, 'Producing the Global Imaginary: A K-Pop Tropology'. In Fuhr, *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-Pop* (London: Routledge, 2016) ML3502.K6 F959.
- *Quadrophenia* (1979), dir. Franc Roddam. See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079766/>. It is up to students whether they wish to buy their own copy: **One copy on reserve at the Library Outpost**. PN1995.9.Y6Q1q.
- *Easy Rider* (1969), dir. Dennis Hopper: **One copy on reserve at the Library Outpost**. PN1995.9.U64E13 DISCS 1-2.
- *15: The Movie* (2003), dir. Royston Tan. This is the feature-length version and *not* the 2002 short-film version. **No copy in the library available because of its 'R' rating**. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/15-Melvin-Chen/dp/B000B5IOM0> or <https://www.ebay.co.uk/p/45651862?iid=362849408629>

**Note:**

\*\* Look at the weekly schedule for exact page selection for the reading.

## **Weekly Schedule, Readings and Topics to be Considered:**

### **MEETING ONE: 12 Jan**

Introduction:

**Key issues and keywords for the module:** ‘high’/‘low’, ‘mass’ or ‘pop’ (used interchangeably) and ‘popular’ cultures; class and culture; *popular* culture and resistance to the mainstream *versus* consumption and *pop/mass* culture.

### **MEETING TWO: 19 Jan**

F. R. Leavis, ‘Valuation in Criticism’ (essay).

**Issues:** What is ‘high culture’ in relation to literature – Leavis’ view; high-quality literary-linguistic expression and critical thinking; the ability of good literature to represent society in a comprehensive way, including ‘ordinary’ people.

Leavis, ‘*Hard Times: An Analytic Note*’.

**Issues:** What does an application of Leavis’s principles of criticism look like in practice? High culture and the ability to represent the genuinely popular.

### **MEETING THREE: 26 Jan**

Leavis, cont’d and completed.

Raymond Williams, selection from *Communications*.

**Issues:** High culture and the ability to represent the popular (continued from Leavis) – but in forms *not always considered as ‘high culture’*; literature and other forms of the ‘expression’ of culture; mass culture and mass media; culture as ‘communication’; communication practices and its relation to the market.

### **MEETING FOUR: 2 Feb**

Williams, cont’d and completed.

### **MEETING FIVE: 9 Feb**

Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’.

**Issues:** Mass culture as a problem – mass culture is *not* genuinely popular culture. Rationality and the economic instrumentalisation of culture: mass culture as mass deception – emphasis on film; the homogenisation of culture and the restraint on its ability to genuinely express; the critical and Enlightenment capacity of high culture vs. the debased values of the culture industry

### **MEETING SIX: 16 Feb**

Paul Willis, ‘Symbolic Creativity’.

**Issues:** Mass/pop culture and its ability to express the popular – in *contrast* to Adorno; class identity and social values in the daily life of less-privileged youths; youth rituals, pop/mass culture, consumption and resistance against the ‘mainstream’.

Introduction to working-class youth: film examples from the 1960s & 1990s.

## **APPLIED SECTION:**

### **So, how is all this work out in cultural production? I:**

#### **The 1960s, the emergence of youth culture and the resistance to dominant values**

### **MEETING SEVEN: 23 Feb**

*Quadrophenia* (1979), director Franc Roddam, a film about Mods & also Rockers set in 1964, the year of the famous between the two sub-cultural youth groups in Brighton, in

southern England. (Based on a musical written by The Who, a famous English group who were Mods in the mid-1960s – they became more of a rock band by the late 1960s.)

**Issues:** *Working-class subculture* as resistance to dominant, middle-class values; subculture as the ‘artistic’ expression of less-privileged working-class social identity; youth rituals and the cultural-symbolic resistance to the mainstream – application especially of Willis.

#### UNI RECESS: 1-5 Mar 2021

#### MEETING EIGHT: 9 Mar

John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, ‘Subcultures, cultures and class’ (selection from book chapter: **pp. 3-9; 26-59 only, pls note. The missing pages from the main PDF are pp. 6-8.**)

**Issues:** (Take as extension of discussion in the Willis reading.) Post-Second World War emergence of ‘youth culture’ as a category; the emergence of consumption culture targeted at youths; youth subcultures in both the working class and the middle class; resistance against dominant values among both working-class youth [‘subculture’] and middle-class youth [‘counter-culture’]; similarities and differences between the two youth resistances to dominant values.

#### MEETING NINE: 16 Mar

*Easy Rider* (1969), director Dennis Hopper. A cult film depicting two men from Los Angeles who are part of the counter-culture ride bikes and travel to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, and encounter small-town America who react strongly against the ‘foreign’ culture in their midst.

**Issues:** *Counter-culture* and the reaction of US small-town, conservative ‘rednecks’ to it; dominant values and the violent reaction to the alternative.

#### MEETING TEN: 23 Mar

*15: The Movie* (2003), director Royston Tan. A now-cult film, depicting two sets of 15-year-old youths of lower-middle or working-class backgrounds, & their inability to function within Singapore’s unforgiving meritocratic confines. Their (non-)academic abilities further make them seem lower class & unprivileged.

**Issues:** Underprivileged, sub-cultural youth formation in Singapore; the problem of class and education; alternative youth culture.

#### **So, how is all this work out in cultural production? II:**

#### **Contemporary pop culture in East Asia – and no more resistance to dominant values?**

#### MEETING ELEVEN: 30 Mar

Patrick Galbraith & Jason Karlin, ‘Introduction: The mirror of idols and celebrity’ (*central reading* for Japanese material)

Supporting reading: **Necessary** short history of J-pop: Carolyn Stevens, chap. 3, ‘The Particulars of History’, pp. 37-67 (**focus on pp. 37, 49-67**).

**Issues:** Consumption by the more-established middle class youth in Asia: no more resistance? Unlike, the cultural productions of the previous section, the capitulation to ‘dominant’ and hegemonic values of capitalism? Idol culture and *imposed & standardised* content & celebrities from ‘above’? As a reworking of what we have seen in Adorno’s understanding of the culture industry?

Introduction to J- and K-Pop in video form. Application of Adorno’s critical position.

#### MEETING TWELVE: 5 April

Michael Fuhr, 'Producing the Global Imaginary, A K-Pop Tropology' (*primary reading*; **pp. 90-112; 118-124; exclude 'Space in Music Videos'. Pay particular attention to the way Fuhr frames his approach, pp. 59-62**). The reading is technical at times: absorb what you can.

Supporting reading: **Necessary** short history of the K-wave, focus on K-pop: *The Korean Wave: A New Pop Culture Phenomenon*, focus on pp. 17-46; 68-69.

**Issues**: What is 'Korean' (the 'K' of K-pop) that is produced in the content of a Korean pop culture? Is it all a reworked manufacture (and bad copy) of standardised Western commercial pop music? Consumption by the newer emerging middle-class youth in Asia.

**MEETING THIRTEEN: 12 April**

*Review of module.*