Geographies of Popular Culture – GEOG 425
Department of Geography & Environment
Focus Designations: WI/O
Spring 2022

Instructor: Mary Mostafanezhad
Email: mostafan@hawaii.edu
WhatsApp: +1-808-342-8946
Office hour: TBA

Course Description

In 1985, British scholar, Raymond Williams, wrote that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”. In this course we explore how British cultural geographers engage with the often elusive “culture” concept in the context of popular culture. As Don Mitchell observes, contemporary cultural geography is now “all over the place” and like cultural studies, the discipline has taken numerous new directions, now “…focusing new theoretical energy on traditional concerns like foodways, folk cultures and the cultural landscape, and developing new research foci on everything from psychotherapy, to critical race studies, to the cultural politics and cultural geography of sexuality and gender” (Mitchell 2000: xiv). In this class, we will attend to how cultural geographers engage with a cultural studies inspired geographies of popular culture. Positioned around materialist, Marxist and post-structural perspectives of popular culture, we examine political-economic and post-structural theories of popular culture. We use these theoretical perspectives to analyze a range of everyday social practices: shopping, selfies, and music, for example. Thus, we consider how “culture” is never a “thing” per se, but rather a set of social relations that are struggled over and mediated by structures of power, subordination, and dominance. Key questions addressed in this course include: 1) How is popular culture discursively constituted? 2) How does popular culture contribute to social change and difference and how is it mediated by global and local political economies? 3) What is the spatiality of popular culture? 4) How can cultural landscapes be read as texts?; and 5) How can space be racialized, gendered and classed, and with what implications for individual and collective identity formations?

Learning Objectives

At the end of the course students should have developed 1) a critical understanding of geographies of popular culture; 2) an awareness of a number of different theoretical approaches to geographies of popular culture; 3) an understanding of the cultural politics of representation; 4) and understanding of the political economies of race and ethnicity, class and gender and sexuality; 5) advanced media literacy; and 6) skills to envisage practical and creative solutions to social problems through mediums of popular culture.
Course Materials

- All course readings will be available in the resources folder in Laulima. [https://laulima.hawaii.edu/portal](https://laulima.hawaii.edu/portal). Course readings in Laulima are organized by week.

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<tr>
<th>Course Structure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Cultural Landscapes Fieldtrips + Place-Writing Journals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biweekly Commentaries + Oral Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Proposal + Project + Oral Presentation</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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*The maximum points possible for the class is 1000. If you do the extra credit assignment and earn more than 1,000 points you will only receive 1000 points.*

(A= 900-1000; B=800-899; C=700-799; D=600-699; F= < 600; pluses & minuses will be assigned)

Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Assignment &amp; Due Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All weekly readings, websites and video links are available in the resources folder in Laulima. All assignments should be submitted to the assignments folders in Laulima.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td><em>Geographies of Popular Culture</em></td>
<td>• Readings (in Laulima)</td>
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| **Week 2** | *Film Geographies* | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Due: Commentary + Oral Presentation  
• Fieldtrip: London walking film tour (e.g. Harry Potter, James Bond, Sherlock Holmes) |
| **Week 3** | *Race, Ethnicity, and Place* | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Fieldtrip: Chinatown + Brixton |
| **Week 4** | *Gender and the Gaze* | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Due: Commentary + Oral Presentation |
<p>| <strong>Week 5</strong> | <em>Class and Consumption</em> | • Readings (in Laulima) |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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| 6     | Music and Social Movements    | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Due: Commentary + Oral Presentation  
• Fieldtrip: London Beatles Walk |
| 7     | Popular Culture Foodways      | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Fieldtrip: Banksy Street Art Walking Tour |
| 8     | Art and Resistance            | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Due: Commentary + Oral Presentation  
• Due: Final Project Proposal |
| 9     | Mass Culture and the Media    | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Fieldtrip: Museum of London |
| 10    | Fashion and Empire            | • Readings (in Laulima)  
• Due: Commentary + Oral Presentation  
• Fieldtrip: Museum of London |
| 11    | Digital Media and Popular Culture | • Readings (in Laulima)  |
| 12    | Final Research Projects       | • Due: Final Research Project Presentations  
• Due: Final Research Projects |

**Popular Cultural Landscapes Fieldtrips + Place-Writing Journal (500 points)**

You will realize several of the SLOs below through a series of five popular cultural landscape fieldtrips and place-writing journal assignments which will include field notes, geotagging and a photo journaling on a topic of your choice as it relates to culture and place-making (more information on geotagging will be provided in class). You will share your place-writing journals online through our class Adobe Spark webpage (more information on how to post to the class webpage to be distributed in class) and through in-class presentations.

As we visit some of London’s popular cultural landscapes, you may consider some of the following prompts and questions as they relate to the site:

- a. What is the history of this site of popular culture?
- b. How is cultural identity made visible in the popular culture landscape?
- c. What voices are represented at this site? What voices are marginalized? Why? How?
- d. What are the range of ways the site may be interpreted by different residents and/or tourists?
- e. Write fieldnotes describing the scene. Is it festive? Frenetic? What is the weather like? What do you feel? What incidents, sights, sounds trigger that feeling?
- f. Take pictures to illustrate your written descriptions.

You will be graded based on fieldtrip attendance and the quality of your place-writing journal content (see below for rubric).
Through the place-writing journal, you should demonstrate: 1) your ability to reflect on your own positionality including cultural values and biases; 2) your understanding of diverse cultural perspectives and viewpoints of others; and 3) your ability to conduct participant observations and fieldnotes.

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<tr>
<th>Place-Writing Journal Student Learning Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td>Learning outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop awareness of own cultural values and biases and how these impact your ability to work with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate knowledge of diversity with a focus on popular culture and place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse individuals and groups</td>
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<td>Demonstrate an increased capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints</td>
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**Biweekly Commentaries + Oral Presentation (250 points)**

Every other week you will write a 700-800 word short essay response to the discussion contribution questions posted on Forum in Laulima. Please cite, quote and/or refer to relevant course materials (e.g. readings, videos, websites, fieldtrips) in your answers to demonstrate your understanding. You will present your weekly commentaries in class in a 5 min oral presentation. The oral presentation grading rubric will be distributed in class.

- **Post to the Forum by each Thursday by 11:55pm**

You will be graded on the following aspects of your discussion contributions:

1. Thoroughly answered all questions
2. Demonstrated familiarity and understanding of the week’s materials
3. Demonstrated ability to articulate core themes from the week’s materials
4. Demonstrated ability to apply course materials to popular culture texts
5. Citations and/or quotations from each of the week’s materials
6. Overall quality of writing (e.g. organization, grammar, style, etc)

**Final Research Project + Oral Presentation: Reading Popular Culture (250 points)**

Your Final Project is to analyze a London-based popular culture site, text, or experience in a 4,000 word essay that is visually represented on an Adobe Spark website, as well as through an oral presentation. To create your website, you will use Adobe Spark design apps and tools (a free app
Your essay should be theoretically informed and include references to at least five course concepts and/or themes and five of the readings or videos from the course. You can choose any London-based popular culture site, text or experience (e.g. performance, commodities, graffiti, museum installation, fashion, neighborhoods, etc) for your analysis. Your website should include relevant images, texts, videos, and/or other visual components that help you to highlight your thesis statement*. Please use this opportunity to be creative in your representation of your analysis.

Your oral presentation of your project should be 10 minutes in length and demonstrate your ability to communicate your analysis of a popular culture site, text, or experience using concepts and theories from the course in the written portion of your Final Project as well as the quality of the content on your webpage. Additional Final Project and Oral Presentation guidelines including how to use Adobe Spark will be distributed separately.

On Thursday of Week 8 your Final Research Project Proposal is due by 11:55pm in the assignments folder in Laulima. Your proposal should be a 300-500-word description of what you plan to do for your final project. It should include your working thesis statement*, key themes, concepts and texts that you will use in your project as well as any design plans you have for your Adobe Spark webpage.

Laulima
Using Laulima: This course uses the UH Laulima program. Laulima can be accessed at http://laulima.hawaii.edu. You will need your UH username and password to log in. If you are unfamiliar with Laulima, please take some time to familiarize yourself with the program at: https://www.hawaii.edu/talent/laulima_students.htm

Course Resources: All course materials such as readings, websites, and videos are in the resources section of Laulima.

Class Communication

☐ In email communications, please start the subject line with “Geog 425” so your email does not get lost in my inbox.

☐ Please check the Laulima website and your UH email regularly for class news/information.

☐ Please contact me via email if you have questions.

Note: Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability is invited to contact me privately. I would be happy to work with you, and the KOKUA Program (Office for Students with Disabilities) to ensure reasonable accommodations in my course. KOKUA can be reached at (808) 956-7511 or (808) 956-7612 (voice/text) in room 013 of the Queen Lili'uokalani Center for Student Services. KOKUA can be reached at (808) 956-7511 or (808) 956-7612 (voice/text) in room 013 of the Queen Lili'uokalani Center for Student Services.
Final Note

Your learning is my principal concern. I may modify the schedule if it will facilitate your learning. For example, we may discover that we want to spend more time on certain topics and less on others. I'll consider changing the schedule if such changes would benefit most students’ learning in this course.