Now
September
2012
2011
2010
2009
2008
2007
Born

(de)CONSTRUCTING
THE POPULAR   *from MORDOR to JERSEY SHORE*

English Department

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What's on your mind?

Patriachy is in a relationship with **Disney Princesses**.
15 October ❤️

Disney Princesses
Channel 34
See Relationship

Likes   538 Likes   See All

Disney Villains likes **Rattigan, Frollo, Dr. Facilier**.
13 October

Dawson's Creek is in a relationship with **Stuart Hall** and **Paddy Whannel**
October 3 ❤️

Atholl D. (Paddy) Whannel
British Film Institute
See Relationship

LGBTQQ - The Misrepresented
8 October

The Site of Social Transformation

Unlike · Comment

👍 You, Stuart Hall like this.

Stuart Hall It is the ground in which transformations are worked
40 minutes ago .
Unlike . Hegemony likes this 👍 1

Write a comment...

Activity
Recent

The Capitol invited **Western Society** to the **75th Annual Hunger Games**
👍 Western Society likes this

Juno is now friends with **Knocked Up**

Woody is now listed as a family member of **Andy Davis**

Movies
Recent

Howl's Moving Castle | Princess Mononoke | Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind | Spirited Away | My Neighbor Totoro

Karl Heinrich Marx
10 October

I really like **The Office**

Unlike · Comment

👍 You, Karl Marx like this.

Michael Scott That's what she said
12 minutes ago .
Unlike . Dwight Scrute likes this 👍 1

Write a comment...

In Time tagged Karl Marx and the American Dream in photo
⭐ 3 hours ago

*(de)*CONSTRUCTING

from Dawson's Creek to Facebook

THE POPULAR

Colloquium: "n. A meeting or assembly for discussion; a conference, council. Specifically an academic conference or seminar." (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

2012 marks the 20th anniversary of The English Department's continuously running Senior Thesis Capstone Colloquium. The first semester of the capstone sequence comprises an intensive reading/discussion seminar in which students study a particular subject at an advanced level. The subject is chosen based on professor expertise and/or student interest. This year's topic was Cultural Studies (see below). The second semester students meet regularly with the professor as they draft a 20-25 page thesis demonstrating the analysis, close reading, research, revision and editing skills they have been practicing all four years as English majors. During the English Department Senior Thesis Colloquium students share their work with campus and community, welcoming questions and discussion.

Cultural Studies: "n. An academic field or study characterized by a multidisciplinary approach (derived from the social sciences and the humanities) to the study of contemporary (esp. mass) culture. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

Cultural Studies is the general theoretical approach shared by each of today's colloquium presentations. Its origins can be dated to the publication of Raymond William's *Culture and Society* (1958). Williams is widely considered the "father" of cultural studies; his radical claim that "all culture is culture" expanded the field of literary studies from "high culture" (i.e., canonical texts) to the "lived practices" of ordinary people. Cultural studies uses an eclectic range of literary theories to study the ideological components of all culture (from Shakespeare to television advertisements). The humble goal of this theory is nothing less than understanding the way in which meaning is generated, received, reflected and propagated within widely read "texts" to better understand the nature of culture itself.

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

9:30am   **Introduction**: Margaret Case, Ph.D. (Senior Thesis Advisor)

9:35am   **PANEL I: Anime, Toys and Politics: Translating the Popular**

Kathrine Torres, "From Apocalyptic Realism to Utopian Idealism: Illuminating Studio Ghibli's Transnational Resonance"

Michelle Lee, "Lotso Love is Missing in the *Toy Story* Series"

Mallorey Blake, "I Love *The Hunger Games*: What Does that Mean?"

10:40am   **PANEL II: Radical Media: The Evolution of Popular Culture**

Tracy Smith, "A Transformation in Popular Culture Stereotypes: Changing Representations of the LGBTQQ Community"

Abigail Sprague, "*Dawson's Creek*: Complexity vs. Didacticism in Youth Culture"

Laura Dzialo, "Redefining the American Family: A Feminist Analysis of *Juno* and *Knocked Up*"

Kate Marshall, "Facebook Phenomenon: Becoming the 'Authors' of Our Own Selective Fiction"

* * * BREAK FOR LUNCH: RESUME PROMPTLY AT 1:30 PM * * *

1:30pm   **PANEL III: Reifying the American Dream**

Sara Zatir, "Time is Money, and Money is Life: A Marxist Analysis of *In Time*"

Emily Rann, "*Forrest Gump*: Promoting 'Conservative Acceptance'"

Samantha Duncan, "Mocking the American Dream?: An Ideological Analysis of *The Office*"

2:30pm   **PANEL IV: Ideological Uses of Enchantment in Disney and Fairy Tales**

Danielle Reagan, "*Once Upon a Time*: Breaking the Binary Between Fiction and Reality"

Kayla Sweeney, "The Princess Fantasy: Does Disney Poison Consumer Culture?"

Hailey Davis, "Childhood Lessons of Evil: An Examination of Disney Villains"

5:00-6:30pm   The English Department invites panel presenters for *hors d'oeuvres* at Jackie's Galaxy.

DECONSTRUCTING THE POPULAR: From *Dawson's Creek* to Facebook

PANEL I: Anime, Toys and Politics: Translating the Popular

Kathrine Torres, "From Apocalyptic Realism to Utopian Idealism: Illuminating Studio Ghibli's Transnational Resonance" Japanese animation, known as "anime," is one of the most rapidly expanding forms of visual popular culture. Studio Ghibli, arguably Japan's most beloved anime production studio, is one of the most internationally successful producers of high quality anime films. The studio's canonical films include *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986), *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). This thesis analyzes the ways in which these works, often marginalized as children's fare, illuminate the ways in which the cultures of Japan and America coalesce. Also explored is the way in which the strong bond between Japanese and American culture may act as a motivating force for the creation of a globalized popular culture, one that is *mukokuseki* (i.e., without nationality).

Michelle Lee, "Lotso Love is Missing in the *Toy Story* Series" Hidden within the fun-filled plot of Pixar's *Toy Story* series (1995 - 2010) is a representation of family values riddled with what Karl Marx dubs "false consciousness." The first film in the series introduces the idea that children should treat toys as family. As the series continues, however, this message subtly changes. Toys are no longer viewed as family; instead, they become mere objects, or commodities. By *Toy Story 3*, the neglect the toys face becomes so intense that the series ultimately undermines family values.

Mallorey Blake, "I Love *The Hunger Games*: What Does that Mean?" This thesis examines Suzanne Collin's *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) as a piece of popular culture that is more than mindless entertainment. Examining the different types of entertainment culture and societal oppressions depicted in this work reveals surprising similarities between the fictional world of Panem and our world today. Further, these similarities suggest that it is possible to read the dystopic *Hunger Games* as a warning tale. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that those who love this trilogy might ask themselves whether or not they noticed that it critiques the same culture of entertainment in which it participates.

PANEL II: Radical Media: The Evolution of Popular Culture

Tracy Smith, "A Transformation in Popular Culture Stereotypes: Changing Representations of the LGBTQQ Community" Through an examination of various television shows and movies, this thesis presents both the positive and negative representations of the LGBTQQ community evolving within popular culture between the 1970s and the present. This social transformation – especially as it reveals itself in the treatment of stereotypes – analyzes both the resistance and perpetuation of LGBTQQ stereotypes in the culture at large.

Abigail Sprague, "*Dawson's Creek*: Complexity vs. Didacticism in Youth Culture
Kevin Williamson's WB television series *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) focuses on teenagers growing up in Capeside, Massachusetts. Although some critics might argue that this series exploits teen sexuality for the purpose of higher ratings, this thesis reveals that, in fact, *Dawson's Creek* reflects important developmental aspects of its youth audience. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, this close analysis of *Dawson's Creek* reveals that far from exploiting teen sexuality, the show instead portrays teens involved in generating a complex understanding of their own psychological, emotional, and moral behavior.

Laura Dzialo, "Redefining the American Family: A Feminist Analysis of *Juno* and *Knocked Up*" This thesis examines depictions of motherhood, marriage, and family in two 2007 films, *Juno* and *Knocked Up*. Both films initially seem to convey feminist ideals; however, a close examination reveals strains of patriarchal ideology beneath the feminism. The characters mock as well as adhere to patriarchal values and struggle to transcend patriarchal ideology; in fact, the patriarchal mindset is so pervasive that the characters cannot always effectually avoid it. Nonetheless, characters in both films do manage to propose significant redefinitions of the traditional American family structure.

Kate Marshall, "Facebook Phenomenon: Becoming the 'Authors' of Our Own Selective Fiction" Since its creation in 2004, Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook has become a part of our everyday lives. With over 500 million users, many might assume that Facebook is a fairly innocuous software tool, helping to bring global inclusiveness and immediate contact between friends and family. However, this analysis will reveal disturbing questions: Has Facebook allowed for more transparency within society; or, conversely, has it promoted an unhealthy tendency to create integrated multiple realities? Has Zuckerberg achieved his original goal to create "openness" or has he paradoxically allowed people to become authors of their own deceptively selective fictions?

PANEL III: Reifying the American Dream

Sara Zatir, "Time is Money, and Money is Life: A Marxist Analysis of *In Time*"
Cultural theorist Stuart Hall writes, "almost all cultural forms will be contradictory," and the film *In Time* (2011) is no exception. *In Time* might seem merely to be an entertaining film about an unreal, futuristic world where time has been transformed into currency. However, close analysis reveals two shockingly contradictory ideologies present within this film: Marxism and the American Dream.

Emily Rann, "*Forrest Gump*: Promoting 'Conservative Acceptance'" Many critics categorize *Forrest Gump* as a conservative movie since it both subtly and overtly promotes conservative ideology. However, that assessment fails to answer important questions (e.g., if the movie is purely conservative, why was it extremely popular across the entire country? And why does Forrest fall in love with a liberal?) This analysis reveals that the promotion of conservatism is actually alloyed with the promotion of a liberal value of acceptance, resulting in the movie's promotion of "conservative acceptance."

Samantha Duncan," Mocking the American Dream?: An Ideological Analysis of *The Office***"** NBC's Emmy Award winning television series *The Office* (2005-present) depicts characters experiencing mundane, yet comical, work day scenarios. Although the show might seem to be a simple comedy about office life, this thesis reveals its strong motivating ideologies. In particular, *The Office* reveals contradictory cultural attitudes within capitalism's dominant ideology: The American Dream.

PANEL IV: The Ideological Uses of Enchantment in Disney and Fairy Tales

Danielle Reagan, "*Once Upon a Time***: Breaking the Binary Between Fiction and Reality"** ABC's television show *Once Upon a Time* (2011-present) blurs the distinction between fiction and reality, which is both the entertaining premise and the subtle yet powerful conceptual foundation of the show. Drawing on popular culture theory, Bruno Bettelheim and J.R.R. Tolkien's definitions of fairytales/fantasy, the psychology of defense mechanisms, new critical close reading, and deconstructionism's insights into false binaries, this thesis will argue that *Once Upon a Time* demonstrates a depth of complexity that transcends its ostensibly simple status as popular culture.

Kayla Sweeney, "The Princess Fantasy: Does Disney Poison Consumer Culture?" This thesis explores an important question in cultural studies: who bears the blame for harmful ideologies inherent in consumer culture? This thesis will use The Walt Disney Corporation's phenomenally popular princess product line (including eleven films and nearly 30,000 Disney Princess related products) as a case study. After identifying several potentially harmful patriarchal stereotypes in both the Disney films and even more disturbing patriarchal trends in its Disney Princess product line, this thesis will raise the issue of culpability for the proliferation of these oppressive stereotypes. Moreover, this analysis simultaneously reveals why and how audiences "buy into" culture.

Hailey Davis, "Childhood Lessons of Evil: An Examination of Disney Villains" This thesis uses three Disney animated villains to reveal that there exists intrinsic analytical value to sustained study of these characters despite the fact that they exist in the genre of children's media. Focusing primarily on *The Great Mouse Detective*'s Professor Rattigan, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*'s Judge Frollo, and *The Princess and the Frog*'s Dr. Facilier, this thesis will analyze important variations within the range of archetypal Disney villains to reveal the complexities that of their brands of "evil." This thesis concludes that Disney villains are neither flat nor formulaic; indeed, they have a great deal to teach both children and adult audiences.

CULTURAL THEORISTS SPEAK . . .

PIERRE BOURDIEU
Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste **(1984)**
"To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, correspond a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class' [. . .]. The definition of cultural nobility is the stake in a struggle which has gone on unceasingly, from the seventeenth century to the present day […]. Even in the classroom, the dominant definition of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture, in a cultured household, outside of scholastic disciplines."

ROLAND BARTHES
"From Work to Text" (1977)
The reduction of reading to consumption is obviously responsible for the 'boredom' that many people feel when confronting the modern ('un-readable') text, or the avant-garde movie or painting: to suffer from boredom means that one cannot produce the text, play it, open it out, make it go."

MICHAEL SCHUDSON
"The New Validation of Popular Culture" (1987)
"Indeed, for Barthes, as long as a person reads passively, it matters little if the reading matter is Shakespeare or subway graffiti. The task is to read playfully [as if one were reading music to perform a score, which is the opposite of passive reading]. And the task for the humanities in the university I would infer from this, is not to create hierarchies of works but to educate readers in reading. If this can be one with Shakespeare, fine; if it is better achieved with newspaper cartoons, that's fine too. The task is to diminish the distance between writer and reader."

STUART HALL
"Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'" (1981)
[Popular Culture] is the ground on which [. . .social] transformations are worked"

RECENT COLLOQUIUM TOPICS

SPRING 2012: (de)Constructing the Popular: From Modor to Jersey Shore
SPRING 2011: American Literature of the 1960s
SPRING 2010: Transcendentalist Ideas in Mid-19th-Century American Literature
FALL 2009: Writing the American Landscape
SPRING 2009: Shakespeare and 'The Other'
FALL 2008: My Head's Not Bowed: Celebrating the Works of Annie Proulx, Louise Erdrich, Sandra Cisneros, Jumpa Lahiri, Maxine Hog Kingston and Toni Morrison

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*reader for more than one thesis

… Enifoghale Agodo - nifty colloquium poster

… Joseph L. Auger - A/V mentorship

… Paul Bender - public speaking rehearsal

… Karen Bilotti - crackerjack bibliography workshops

… Cyndy Chappell – things too numerous to list in this small space

… Renee Soto - *deus ex machina* programme rescue

… Jim Lemire – ENG Department website [http://departments.rwu.edu/english/index.html]

… Brendan Maddock & Alyssa Marshall website colloquium photographers (headshots) [http://departments.rwu.edu/english/colloquy_2013.html]