

CURE2032: Youth and Popular Culture (Spring, 2025)

By Prof. Xuenan Cao

Thursday: 10:30 pm – 12:15 pm, William M W Mng Eng Building 804

Tutorials: 12:30pm – 13:15 pm, William M W Mng Eng Building 804

Appointment by email



Course Description:

The urban youth has long been a container for social terrors, pathologies, and anxieties. The studies of youth cultures can pose challenges to disciplinary, compartmentalized studies of the social and technological conditions. How do entertainment, home planning, art, and technology shape the concept of the vicious youth? What do we find so “terrifying,” “subversive,” or maybe just “cute” about the youth culture today? As a comprehensive, accessible lecture course on the critical studies of childhood, adolescent, and youth cultures and subcultures, this course introduces approaches to address social issues in youth cultures as subcultures, youth consumptions, and digital media.

Course Objectives:

The learning experiences in this course will enable students to:

- **Identify narratives** about youth, describe the multi-layered making of a narrative verbally and in writing, and evaluate how narratives cohere.
- **Restate political, social, and cultural issues** related to the portrayal and the treatment of youth in an advertisement, novels, films, television shows, social media, and arts.
- **Critically assess** the contributing social, economic, and technological conditions of youth cultures.

Grading:

Attendance and Participation	30%
Presentation	30%
<u>Final Essay/Photo Curation</u>	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

Course Assignments and Grading:

Attendance and Participation—30%

Attendance and contribution to the in-class activities are critical components of the course and your grade. It is essential that students complete all of the required readings before each class and be ready to participate in activities. Efforts to engage with peers will also be taken into consideration when calculating the participation grade.

Presentation—30% 2-4 people per group, on 9 pre-assigned topics. See tutorial scheduling down below in the weekly agenda.

In this group presentation, students with similar interests will come together to explore a topic. The effectiveness of collective research will be evaluated based on a group presentation in class. See tutorial scheduling down below in the weekly agenda. In the presentation, students will demonstrate their understanding of the required readings. During the presentation, students need to raise questions, explain how the analytical perspectives can help understand a specific issue, and lead a class discussion on that issue. A lack of critical discussion (such as simply presenting information as unexamined ‘facts’) will result in significant point reduction.

Final Essay, or Photo Curation —40% Choose only one!

Essay: 5-7 pages, double-space, 12 fonts

Photo Exhibition: with a title, a curatorial message, and 5-7 photos, each accompanied by one paragraph-length caption

You can choose to do **either** a photo curation, **or** an essay. In either form, you will use materials you have collected (written notes or photos) to explore a few related topics of their choosing. Each student needs to refer to at least *two* topics discussed during the course. This project will be evaluated based on the principle of clarity, concreteness, and appeal (i.e., how the students get their readers interested in the topic).

Weekly Agenda:

Week 1 Introduction	“Being Young Sucks”
	On the historical construction of “Youth”
	Reading: 1-8, “Introduction” from David Ambaras’ <i>Bad Youth</i>
	Reading: 1-12, “Introduction” from Lawrence Grossberg’s <i>Caught in the Crossfire</i>

1 st half of the semester: Youth-in-Trouble		
Week 2 Resistant Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical Overview <p>Birmingham School: resistant reading, and Stuart Hall</p> <p>“Encoding and decoding”</p> <p>*Theoretical overview introduces key concepts. You will learn to work with these big concepts of cultural theories in studying cultural objects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Youth Culture <p>Cultural Revolution as Youth Revolution</p> <p>The Occupy Movement as Youth Movement</p> <p>Artwork: Xu Bing, <i>Book from Sky</i></p>
Reading: 9-57 on “Theory” from Stuart Hall et al. <i>Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain</i>		
Week 3 Ambient Play	Moving away from the encoding-decoding message centric model to focus on the play aspect of communication.	
Reading: 1-22, “What is ambient play?” by Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson		
Supplementary: Excerpts from William Stephan’s 1967/1988 monograph <i>The Play Theory of Mass Communication</i> , in which he captures Mao’s China’s revolutionary fervor. He also has the term communication-pleasure, a curious inflection of the Freudian pleasure principle.		
Week 3 Tutorial on Week 1-2’s lecture topic, Youth and Norm, with reference to “Theory,” <i>Resistance through Rituals</i> .		
Week 4 Cultural Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical Overview <p>Frankfurt School: “Cultural Industry,” “Cultural Industry Reconsidered,” and the Propaganda Multiplier</p>	<p>Advertisement: <i>All iPhone Commercials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cases and Examples: Disney Gospels: what did you really learn from <i>Snow White</i>?
Reading: 1-21, most of the chapter “The Cultural Industry,” by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> (this is a slightly abridged version of the original chapter).		
Week 4 Tutorial on Week 3’s lecture topic, decoding, with reference to Stuart Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding”		
Week 5 Youth Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical Overview <p>High culture vs. Low Culture Fashion Y2K and Y3K</p> <p>In-class creative writing:</p>	<p>Movie short excerpts: <i>Tinny Times</i> <i>Everything, Everywhere, All at Once</i></p>

	imagine you are a cultural critic commenting on advertisements	
	Reading: 11-19, "The Cultural Industry Reconsidered," by Theodor Adorno in <i>Critical Inquiry</i> .	
Week 5 tutorial on Week 4 topic: Adorno, "Cultural Industry Reconsidered."		
Week 6 Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical Overview 	Movie excerpts: <i>Benny's Video</i> (middle-class youth) <i>A Touch of Sin</i> (working-class youth)
	Reading: 115-134, "Sex Trade Among Youth," Maria Krisch et al. in <i>Adolescence Research Review</i>	
Sex and Youthful Disaffection	Movie excerpts: <i>All About Lily Chou Chou</i> Reading: "Re/placing Barthes in the post-bubble era: youthful disaffection, online fandom and the reoriented visions of 'Japan' in Iwai Shunji's All About Lily Chou-Chou	
Week 6 has no tutorial; we will use the tutorial time to view clips from <i>A Touch of Sin</i> in class.		
Week 7 Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical Overview Youth labor	Documentary excerpts: <i>Sanbe Human Resources Center</i>
	Reading: 103-124, "The Elites, the Natives, and the Outsiders: Migration and Labor Market Segmentation in Urban China," Cindy Fan in <i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i>	
Week 7 tutorial on <i>A Touch of Sin</i>		
2 nd half of the semester: Youth-in-Paradise		
Week 8	Otaku and the <i>Moi</i> culture	
	Reading: 1-24, "The Otaku's Pseudo-Japan," Hiroki Azuma's <i>Otaku: Japan's Database Animals</i>	
Week 8 tutorial on Azuma Hiroki, "The Otaku's Pseudo-Japan."		
Week 9	The Korean Wave: Cosmopolitanism	
	Reading: 2308-2331, "Domestic Hallyu," Michelle Cho in <i>International Journal of Communication</i> .	
Week 9 tutorial on Michelle Cho, "Domestic Hallyu."		
Week 10	Streaming and Gaming Consumption, Production	

	Reading: 12-36, “Production, consumption, pro- Sumption” by George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson in <i>Journal of Consumer Culture</i>
Week 10 tutorial on 406-423, “Exploited YouTube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labor,” by Mark Andrejevic in <i>The YouTube Reader</i>	
Week 11	Memes
	Briefing on photo project/final essay.
	Reading: Introduction to An Xiao Mina’s <i>Memes to Movements: How the World’s Most Viral Media is Changing Social Protest and Power</i>
Week 12 tutorial on “The Translocalism of Hong Kong Popular Culture: An analysis of a Critical Internet Meme Co-created Across Hong Kong and China,” by Chew Ming-tak Matthew in <i>Hong Kong Studies</i>	
Week 12	Selfie: The Qualified Self
	Reading: introduction to <i>The Qualified Self</i> by Lee Humphrey
Week 12 tutorial on 187-203, “Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube,” by Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier in <i>The YouTube Reader</i>	
Week 13	Review of all concepts Photo project viewing in class.

Class Policies:

Late Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and is part of the requirement for passing the course. Late attendance will result in loss of attendance and participation points.

Absence: Please communicate with the professor about absences. Absences must be accompanied with a formal explanation in accordance with university guidelines. Each absence will incur the loss of one attendance point. More than 25% absence (i.e., missing more than 3 weeks out of a 13-week module) will result in the lowering of one grade level (e.g. A- to B-).

Late Work: No work will be accepted after the deadline.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Work for which plagiarism is proved will be awarded a grade of zero and relevant disciplinary procedures will be followed with the institution.

Email Notice: All students must check their emails for last minute changes, useful information and class announcements.

Supplementary Readings

The following readings are not included in the weekly agenda. You can read them according to your interests, for tutorial presentations, and in preparation of your final project. All supplementary readings will be uploaded on the course site for you to download.

- Barker, Chris. *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*. Page 15 on “Body,” 17 on “Bricolage,” 21 on “Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies,” 24 on “Postmodern City,” 28 on “Commodification,” 33 on “Consumption,” 44 on “Culture,” 46 on “Cultural Industry,” 115 on “Masculinity,” 142 on “Performativity,” 147 on “Popular Culture,” 204 on “Urbanization,” 210 on “Youth Culture.”
- Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. (1979; orig. 1946) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.
- Jameson, F. (1989) “Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.”