

entangling the popular: an introduction to popular culture: a reader

Parallel to the ever ubiquitous presence of 7 Eleven and just behind a tacqueria, we came across a most unusual façade in a city known for bewildering visual landscapes. Whether driving, waiting for a bus, or walking, one can't help but notice this tattered front. There is a haphazard mixture of graffitied words, stickers, and massive posters glued to its walls. Upon first glance, we immediately asked: 'What is this place?' The immense 'Obey' poster of Andre the Giant's face next to a poster of Angela Davis circa early 1970s, and a mural of Vladimir Lenin in now common Obey-esque graphics, and a virtually unreadable banner flapping over the forbidding entrance to Oh yes, there is one more sign. It is small, hand painted, and barely visible. The wooden placard reads: 'It's a skate shop!' A second glance, now that we've been enlightened as to the nature of this structure, still doesn't reveal any obvious connection between the products sold and its façade. The flapping banner does provide what we now understand to be the name of this elusive place. 'Juvee'. And the banner does contain an image, not of a skateboard but of a young turntablist. The only blatant relation to skateboards and skate equipment is found in the form of stickers wall-papering the open door. Juvee certainly does not present either its products or its sense of place in the marketing rhetoric of 'extreme' sports, Gen X sport star endorsements, and culture industry caricatures that range from video games to Hollywood film, from fast food (for example, Stouffers' 'Maxaroni') to soft drinks (Mountain Dew's marketing slogan – 'Do the Dew').

Juvee entangles its subject. What does the act of skating have to do with Lenin? The black power movement? These are hardly iconic in the world of Tony Hawk video games and ESPN2's X-Games! On the surface of Juvee skating, youth culture, urban space, Los Angeles geographies, street graphics, and the history of radical politics mix. Like the hands of the cartoon DJ depicted over its threshold, Juvee's façade mixes political ideology, style, and commerce. The function of these 'samples' are not immediately apparent, yet demand that the subject of skating, or perhaps popular culture in general, be understood as configurations that are neither smooth nor always obvious. The messy blend of signs that Juvee uses

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to create its public face are hardly silenced once Juvée announces its actual purpose to be the sale of skate gear. If anything, its semantically complicated and irreducible façade alerts us that the study of popular culture requires a mindset that can handle such complexity and even contradiction.

Our description of the richness of this particular cultural composite is intended to serve as an illustration of the equally rich composite of the popular that the essays in this book promote. *Popular Culture: A Reader* provides a range of scholarly approaches to its subject matter. Its purpose is to show how such interventions have played a key role in shaping what we understand by the concept. This presents a major challenge because what gives the study of popular culture its richness also makes it a rather unwieldy subject. Specifically, any careful consideration of popular culture's intellectual histories will show that it reflects neither a unified way of thinking nor an easily mapped path of development. Formal interest in popular culture may be heavily rooted in European thought – the 'Great Tradition' of literary critique, the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, and the interdisciplinary workings of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, to name a few highly influential examples – but it far from envelops the ways that popular culture has been theorized. A great deal of influential work has also emerged from North America. Michael Denning, for example, makes a compelling argument for the interwar emergence of the popular front as a wide-scale 'laboring of culture'. According to Denning, 'the heart of this cultural front was a new generation of plebian artists and intellectuals who had grown up in the immigrant and black working-class neighborhoods of the modernist metropolis' (1997: xv). Considerations of diaspora and the intercultural regional dynamics of areas like the black Atlantic, the Pacific Rim, and the Caribbean have further enriched the means by which we can recognize and understand the workings of popular culture.

Moreover, popular culture has frequently been considered from diverse disciplinary perspectives. Unlike the study of poetry, more or less predictably housed in language departments, the study of popular culture has taken place under the rubrics of sociology, music, communications, media studies, cinema studies, history, economics, and so on. Matters are further complicated in the US because popular culture's common home within cultural studies has frequently been an extension of literary studies. In conjunction with disciplinary bounds, the study of popular culture in the classroom is ever burdened with the imposing challenge of generational divide and the related issue of canon formation. Carla Freccero's *Popular Culture: An Introduction* (1999) accurately points out that contemporary students do not share a standardized cultural canon, the type of canon that has frequently served as a counterpoint for critics of popular culture in the past. Far in advance of Freccero's observation, Marshall McLuhan recalls an early teaching experience of comparable significance. The following story is recounted in a 1967 interview with G.E. Stearn in *McLuhan Hot & Cool*:

In 1936, when I arrived at Wisconsin, I confronted classes of freshman and I suddenly realized that I was incapable of understanding them. I felt an urgent need to study their popular culture: advertising, games, movies. It was a pedagogy, part of my teaching program. To meet them on their grounds was my strategy in pedagogy: the world of pop culture. (1967: 303)

In recognition of such challenges, this *Reader* adopts a proviso elaborated within Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's *The Popular Arts* (1964): in order to best meet the needs of 'media-saturated pupils', teaching practices should engage popular forms. Our introductory essay surveys key words such as mass, popular, and culture to determine both how they have been understood and the context of their analysis. As we touch upon approaches to these key words, we discuss a range of related concepts and schools of thought that have been recognized as markers of pivotal transformation in the way that the distinctly modern phenomenon of popular culture and the issues that it informs have been conceived. Our gloss of the competing intellectual projects that have shaped the study of popular culture begins with the late nineteenth-century and extends only to the 1970s because this period forms the backdrop for the bulk of material contained within this *Reader*. Since most of the selections that we include reflect developments in the study of popular culture since the 1980s, commentary on recent work is treated in detail in the short introductions that precede each section of the book. The general introduction offers students a general sense of how we got here.

The danger of such an approach, one that recounts the development of a canon, is that it can very easily replicate that canon. Nevertheless, recognition of the processes that create a canon can be remarkably useful.¹ Within them are traces of the social, economic and political factors that have shaped discussions of the popular. Our approach emphasizes that scholarship on popular culture has not emerged in a vacuum. Theorists and critics have actively considered and often responded to social and material developments in their environments through their work on popular culture. It also stresses that the study of popular culture has been heterogeneous and in foregrounding both the context of its production and the competing projects that have endeavored to define it, we hope to provide the sort of textured survey of popular culture's intellectual history that shows the specificity and impact of its gender, class, and racial assumptions.

A commonly held view on popular culture is that it is simultaneously incredibly easy to talk about (Juvee is after all a skateshop) and incredibly difficult to talk about (a skateshop that associates skating with histories of urban radical politics). Reasons for this apparently paradoxical view are that the popular is astonishingly pervasive and that intellectual polemics have targeted popular culture as an overwhelming influence on historical perceptions of, and social relations to, culture. *Popular Culture: A Reader* remains sensitive to this pervasiveness. It addresses the combination of economic, technological, political, social and cultural shifts that shape our ability to define popular culture. The essays that it contains provide a sense of the stakes and complexities that characterize the realm of the popular as well as its material and ideological expression in our daily lives. In other words, the famous maxim by Raymond Williams that 'culture' is one of 'the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (1976: 87) is no doubt as true today as when first uttered in 1976. The etymology of 'culture', as Williams and others have shown, is a complex assemblage produced through distinct Western philosophical and literary traditions. Antiquity understood 'culture' (*colere*) and 'civilization' (*civis*) to act in similar ways: as both a socialization process of 'cultivation', and membership of and identification with the *polis*. 'Civilizing' was a political, moral, and ethical process premised upon 'an achieved state, which could be contrasted with 'barbarism' [and] an achieved state of *development*,

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which implied historical process and progress' (Williams, 1976: 13). In contrast, Richard Drinnon argues that modern writers have *not* used the terms so interchangeably. His book, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building*, explains that in making a distinction between 'culture' and 'civilization' writers like Sigmund Freud have employed the latter 'to distinguish Western superculture, or the one true "civilization", from so-called primitive cultures' (1990: xxviii). This semantic shift, whereby civilization comes to connote a unity that contrasts the plurality of cultures that abound, has infused debates over culture in general and popular culture in particular with potentially ethnocentric hierarchies. Much recent scholarship on the subject has worked to uncover and, in some cases, to counter the implications embedded within these connotations.

Certain nineteenth-century developments have played a particularly prominent role in constituting today's understanding of culture as a special enclave of a society's values.² Most notably, a powerful literary tradition characterized by new ideas on culture emerged in response to the industrialization of the epoch and the social transformations for which it was responsible. Romantic works like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Constitution of Church and State* (1837) and Thomas Carlyle's *Signs of the Times* (1829) actively engage the social, economic, political, and technological changes transforming culture and humanity within the modern age. Coleridge draws a distinction between the concepts of 'culture' and 'civilization'. 'Culture' becomes an active, spiritual, process ('cultivation'), whereas 'civilization' is associated with the violence of modernization. Carlyle argues that the reorganization of the social through the 'mechanical age' of industrialization and capitalism demanded human culture to seek refuge in a literary elite. Both writers place 'culture' in the hands of a vanguard, a literary intelligentsia called on to protect and preserve its integrity. Influenced by Coleridge as well as Plato's *Republic*, Mathew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) defines 'culture' as 'the best that has been thought and said in the world', thus continuing to equate 'culture' with 'goodness'. The latter is, in turn, conceived as 'a study of perfection'. The pursuit of perfection (or 'cultivated inaction') exists in opposition to the unrefined working-class culture of the 'populace'. This culture of the populace, emanating from 'the raw and unkindled masses', is for Arnold dangerous and destructive. He goes so far as to brand it 'anarchy'. Like Coleridge and Carlyle, Arnold demands an intervention: the State and the institution of education would have to function as policing agents to civilize the populace.

If 'culture' is indeed as complicated a word as Williams claims, what then are students to make of its numerous antecedent adjectives like 'folk', 'mass' and 'popular'? How might they come to terms with even more recent pairings like 'counterculture', 'subculture', 'common culture', or 'mainstream culture'? Popular, in particular, has heralded heated debate because (like *Juvee*) it is not always necessarily clear what we're looking at when we look to popular culture. Its definitions are historically contingent and therefore frequently incongruous. It draws from the connotations of 'folk culture' often evoked to conceptualize the cultural practices and forms (for instance, the folksongs of an oral tradition, dance, and material culture) circulating in pre-industrial and pre-urban societies, and is notoriously irrelevant of the boundaries meant to distinguish mass-produced culture from more 'organic' or ostensibly 'rooted' culture. For these reasons, it is worth taking the time to elaborate on the development of these words' interconnected meanings.

The influence of Carlyle, Coleridge, and Arnold's complementary views helped establish a hierarchy for making sense of culture – a hierarchy premised upon

separations between culture and civilization, the equation of 'culture' with perfection and goodness, and social progress/order (cultural preservation) through education – that has lasted well into the twentieth century. This is evidenced as recently as the publication of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* (1992), though the most prominent examples of this legacy are consolidated in the works of F.R. Leavis, Q.D. Leavis and Deny Thompson. An additional proponent of this trajectory has been T.S. Eliot.³ Like Arnold, Eliot maintains a Platonic view of society: the cultural decline of his period is attributed to a leveling of social classes, the democratization of high culture, erosion of religious faith, and the degradation of culture brought about by the 'lower standards' produced through mass education. The mass or 'substitute' culture of Eliot's period takes the blame for gradual destruction of the high class or 'elite' culture within which 'goodness', 'cultural heritage', and 'tradition' work in accordance with Christian values to maintain a 'whole way of life'. For the Leavises, culture presented itself via two forms: a 'minority culture' that preserves and transmits the literary tradition indicative of Arnold's 'best that has been thought and said' and through commercial culture aimed at an uneducated mass ('mass civilization'). The mass media of the press, popular novels, radio, and film were thought to be expressive of the 'cultural leveling' that the Leavises feared would replace the influence of minority culture. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, these critics called for a vanguard to house and protect culture from the influences of the masses and mass culture. An organic view of culture unobstructed by industrial society, commercial interests, and mass media colors their respective works. Folk culture, derived from the German word *volk* for 'people', 'common people', or 'the masses', signals a form of culture thought to originate from the elusive category 'the people'. It is often regarded as culture *made by or of* 'the people' and, for this reason, has been thought to serve the needs and interests of its producers. Critics of mass-produced culture like Eliot predictably champion (and mourn the posited loss of) folk culture of an imagined pre-industrial epoch as a homogeneous, more 'authentic', and 'organic' experience in contradistinction to capitalist society. With this maneuver, they simultaneously idealize folk culture of earlier epochs, and place it in opposition to the supposed 'cultural decline' of the interwar period.⁴

Clearly, a great deal of political and social investment typifies claims about mass culture. Williams, whose entry on this word appears in this collection, explains that powerful positive and negative connotations of the term vie for prominence: mass as 'something amorphous and indistinguishable' and mass as 'an avoidance of unnecessary division or fragmentation and thus an achievement of unity'. Historically, mass culture has been deemed contrary to both the posited authenticity of culture untarnished by reproduction and high culture premised upon social and cultural hierarchies. Mass-produced commodities have been regarded as inauthentic, formulaic, simplistic, and banal. Because they are designed to appeal to global commercial markets rather than reflect the specificity of unique cultural expression, many have and continue to argue that such objects neither challenge aesthetically, morally or spiritually, nor promote active engagement and critical contemplation. Where the German intellectual tradition of the nineteenth century invested in the concept of *kultur* as emblematic of creative achievements in the arts and humanities, the opposite can be said to inform mass culture. If *kultur* addresses 'high' or 'elite' European culture, mass (*masse*) covers the gambit of the 'low', 'common' or 'plebian'. It is culture for the uneducated and the uncultured, a purportedly indiscriminate consuming majority.

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In the interwar period, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's collaboration produced a highly influential approach to mass culture. Their work on the culture industry (a neologism meant to suggest a paradox in that 'culture' was thought to be antithetical to 'industry') asserts that this institution 'has molded people as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product' (1944: 127).⁵ Not just products, but themselves as product called consumer, is what the culture industry offers its audience.⁶ Miriam Bratu Hansen makes this point abundantly clear as she points out that in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'Horkheimer and Adorno ascribe the effectivity of mass-cultural scripts of identity not simply to the viewers' manipulation as passive consumers, but rather to their very solicitation as experts, as active readers' (Hansen, 1997: 89). Particular to the culture industry, however, 'is that the irreconcilable elements of culture, art and distraction, are subordinated to one end and subsumed under one false formula: the totality of the culture industry' (Hansen, 1997: 136). Art critic Clement Greenberg shared Adorno and Horkheimer's disdain for mass culture. His 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', which originally appeared in the *Partisan Review* (1939) criticizes mechanical reproduction and the mass production of culture. 'Kitsch', his term of choice for mass culture, is used in a derogatory sense. It connotes a tawdry and tasteless absence of aesthetic purpose; cultural production dismissed as inferior and designed to appeal only to the popular tastes believed to epitomize mass markets. As kitsch, mass culture marks a crisis in the separation between high and low culture, which leads Greenberg to describe it as 'a spreading epidemic' that replaces the dominant role of the avant-garde as gatekeepers of taste and culture.

While associated with the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin's deliberations on culture mark a break from the distrustful position of his contemporaries. The theorization of mass culture that he advances in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1992 [1936]) attributes a potentially powerful political element to the consumption of mass culture. For example, Benjamin focuses on mechanical reproduction, the means by which capitalism mass-produces commodities, in order to posit a participatory, potentially democratic relationship to consumption, rather than the negative and authoritarian understanding maintained by the culture industry thesis. The passivity assigned to the consumption of mass culture is transformed, such that 'mechanical reproduction of art changes the reactions of the masses towards art'. In other words, mechanical reproduction's ability to change our relationship to art by making it more accessible (which Benjamin argues also makes it less auratic) pressures a reconceptualization of the function and nature of art rather than appraisal of mass culture from the privileged perspective of high culture. A great deal of subsequent cultural criticism has swung between the contrasting though not at all unrelated positions of the Frankfurt School.

The potential of popular culture was also powerfully theorized by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci, who was both a writer (an essayist in particular) and a political activist, played a leading role in the Italian Socialist Party. Until his death in 1937 Gramsci produced a body of work (over 2,000 pages of articles, essays, and fragments), some of which has been collected in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971). One of the most influential themes to develop within the *Notebooks* is that of hegemony. Above all, hegemony represents Gramsci's answer to economic reductionism. As Chantal Mouffe writes, hegemony comes to represent the 'complete fusion of economic, political, intellectual and moral objectives

which will be brought about by one fundamental group and groups allied to it *through the intermediary of ideology* when an ideology manages to “spread throughout the whole of society not only united economic and political objectives but also intellectual and moral unity” (1979: 181, italics in original). This fusion enables a hegemonic class to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own by means of ideological struggle.⁷ From the perspective of hegemony theory, popular culture is a contradictory mix of competing interests, values and shifting balances; yet Gramsci’s concept came into prominence as a major theoretical tool for explaining popular culture’s position within power relations long after his death. For example, it has played a major role in the development of British cultural studies and is clearly evident in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson’s edited collection, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (1976) and Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979);⁸ while Ranajit Guha has adapted Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to considerations of colonialism in *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (1998).

In the immediate post-war period, work on mass-produced culture reflected both a new set of concerns and new ways of thinking about the relationship of culture and society. The advance of the Cold War greatly impacted conceptualizations of culture. Recognition of popular culture’s *overt* political role heightened substantially and distress over the effects of ‘Americanization’ abounded. The type of cultural criticism produced significantly broadened the scope of earlier debates on mass culture. Attempts to determine and maintain distinctions between mass and high culture persisted, yet they also gave way to far broader considerations of culture than had previously been entertained.⁹ The analytical tools brought to bear on these expanded deliberations were drawn from disciplines like linguistics, communications, and anthropology.

For example, Gary Genosko, author of *McLuhan and Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion* (1999), claims that the publication of Marshall McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (1951), Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957), and Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) marked a shift in cultural criticism of post-war popular forms. He emphasizes that each writer expresses a ‘sense of regret’ about: ‘the emergence of a mythic consciousness whose distinguishing feature was that it did not want to be identified and that it erased itself in order to more fully and powerfully peruse and influence social and cultural life: French bourgeois ideology ex-nominates itself; American magazines offer satisfyingly comprehensive attitudes and opinions to their readers; and the emerging mass form is a “faceless”, “classless” and “characterless” culture’ (Hoggart, 1957: 31–2). McLuhan, therefore, opens his preface to *The Mechanical Bride* with a new and striking metaphor – that of a whirlpool – through which to conceive of mass media. If mass media is a whirlpool, then McLuhan advocates that we ride the current, rather than attempt to hold our hands up against the onslaught of the deluge. For it is precisely in such a critical appropriation of the cultural material in circulation that new strategies for dealing with mass culture can be created, or as McLuhan himself queries: ‘Why not use the new commercial education as a means to enlightening its intended prey?’ (1951: v). Barthes, who approached the whirlpool from the perspective of Marxian semiology, sought to understand the *mélange* of signs that informed the ideological structure of cultural meaning and meaningfulness that he refers to as ‘myth’. His purpose, as stated in the Preface to the 1957 edition of *Mythologies*, was ‘to reflect regularly on some

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myths of French daily life' (11); a task that he carried out on phenomena as diverse as wrestling, toys, film, automobiles, and food. Barthes' work infused analyses of culture with new dimensions and analytical possibilities, for it maintained that the most powerful work of mass culture was carried out not at the level of primary signification (or what it denotes), but at the level of its secondary signification (or connotation). The intelligibility of secondary signification, in turn, rests on the culture at large in the same way that a word means something in relation to the language of which it is a part.¹⁰ Hoggart, who focuses his attention on the British working class, explores the idea that culture might include a wide array of common activities. He interprets such activities by way of literary paradigms, and in doing so effects quite a dramatic break from the emphasis of early twentieth-century debates on the superiority of high culture. As Graeme Turner spells out in *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*:

The Uses of Literacy observes conflicting social and theoretical allegiances: to both the culture and civilization tradition from which its ideological assumptions and analytical practices proceed, and to a working-class cultural and political tradition that acknowledges significance in the *whole* of the cultural field. (1996: 45)

The emphasis that Hoggart places on the cultural character of the working class, a unity based on shared traditions, rituals, speech and status, feeds an admitted nostalgia for a vision of organic working-class culture as a way of life, a nostalgia that stems from concerns over the effects of Americanization and mass culture on the cohesion of this way of life.

These and other authors took up a range of concerns that emanated from major shifts in the organization of political power across the globe. For example, although not included in Genosko's survey of 1950s cultural criticism, Raymond Williams added his voice to Hoggart's call for a broad yet thoroughly nuanced understanding of culture as the fabric of social life. Williams' work charted a path that variously unsettled and reinforced aspects of the early twentieth century's literary and aesthetic position on mass culture. This is especially apparent in the statement that 'culture is ordinary', which was the basis of an article published in Norman McKenzie's *Convictions* (1958) and further developed in Williams' *The Long Revolution* (1961).¹¹ Henri Lefebvre effected a considerable contribution to the development of intellectual work on mass culture in his analyses of the French 'everyday' and 'everyday life'.¹² For Lefebvre, a Marxist humanist who was also greatly concerned over American influence on French culture, the everyday is a concept that refers to several things: reified and alienated life under capitalism, pleasure and resistance by members of a community, and a psychic relationship between objects and persons. Such a focus on the everyday emanates from a desire to foreground the importance of transforming consciousness by changing the routines and material elements of daily life, and from the belief that: 'In order to change life, society, space, architecture, even the city must change' (1987: 73). As Kristin Ross points out in 'French Quotidian': 'In the 1950s and 60s, something that could be called Americanism (or multinational capital, in another formulation) was insinuating itself into France not by means of any heavy-handed ideological takeover but precisely through the quotidian: blue jeans, car culture, cleaning products' (1997: 22). The concept of 'everyday life' was in no way restricted to the 1950s and 1960s. The English translation

of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) reintroduced the concept along with an influential study of everyday practices ('ways of operating') that ranged from walking in cities to reading tactics. These ideas were incorporated into the study of popular culture in the USA through work on media fandom, audience, and the active pleasures of discriminating consumption.¹³

This brings us to a point where we might begin to understand how competing positions over what constitutes culture, and the role of mass culture and folk culture in these positions, comes to inform a working understanding of the popular. The term 'popular' houses a broad range of meanings. Incorporating folk culture's link to organic community – of the people – as well as mass culture's status – being well liked or merely widely available – popular culture brings together diverse and sometimes contradictory associations. As many essays contained within this *Reader* will attest, the word 'popular' is often dismissed out right as vulgar or cheap, used interchangeably with 'mass' or in place of, or popular culture is championed as a term synonymous with 'the people's' experiences with and discriminating uses of mass-produced commodities. For example, in his 'A Theory of Mass Culture' (1957 [1953]) Dwight Macdonald opts to use 'mass' rather than 'popular', since being 'solely and directly an article for mass consumption' (p. 59) renders an object unworthy of the title 'popular'. Andrew Ross, when working through US post-war mass culture debates in his *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (1989) prefers 'popular' to 'mass' because of the connotations of elitism that mark 'mass'. And John Fiske diligently distinguishes 'folk' from 'popular' when he writes that 'popular culture is made out of industrially produced and distributed commodities that must, in order to be economically viable and thus to exist at all, offer a variety of cultural potentialities to a variety of social formations' (1989: 170).

Most profoundly, however, the intellectual shifts that pressed toward a reckoning of the popular have sought to understand how it is a site of struggle where the ability to create meaning is recognized as a significant form of power. Such work on popular culture, which has grown exponentially since the 1960s, also actively reflects social and political transformations, including but not limited to a wide array of interconnected political interventions ranging from new feminisms, civil rights activities, decolonization and class-based movements. For example, the mass political mobilization of workers and students in 1968 is frequently hailed as a watershed event, particularly for French intellectuals, and by extension their contribution to the shape of scholarly inquiry into popular culture.¹⁴ These events indelibly marked a generation of scholars, scholars like Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Guy Debord, and Henri Lefebvre, who wrote about and theorized the period as well as its implications for future political and intellectual work.¹⁵

In the USA, the late 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by fierce countercultural movements, anti-war protest, and radical political activism. Examples include the efforts of the Black Power movement, emergent Chicano/a nationalism (frequently linked with pronounced labor advocacy), gay and lesbian rights campaigns, disability awareness, and new dimensions of feminist protest. There was also change within the academy itself. The social and political transformations of the post-war era ushered in a diversity of scholars, including more people of color and of working-class origins. These scholars' experience impacted what would be studied and how. Ethnic studies, postcolonial studies and cultural

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studies would not exist today without this influx of scholars, for as traditional organizations of power were challenged so too were traditional ways of organizing knowledge. Ultimately, this created the basis for profound breaks in the constitution of authority that connected a commitment to radical change and social justice with the production of new knowledge.

The late twentieth century witnessed a great diversification of issues and approaches that structured intellectual engagements with popular culture. For example, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies focused much of its energies on what analyses of youth could tell us about meaning and agency in the post-war cultural realm.¹⁶ The British journal *Screen* utilized Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian elaboration of ideology to explore the relationship between identity, visual media and power at approximately the same time. Feminist film criticism and analyses of other forms of cultural production – from television to romance novels and from pornography to subculture – powerfully transformed how the politics of culture are perceived to operate.¹⁷ Considerations of gender and sexuality have, in turn, been fruitfully informed by the significant epistemological and historical work of queer theory.¹⁸

The study of popular culture also came to supplement the analyses of the everyday, audience, and pleasure mentioned earlier in relation to de Certeau with detailed considerations of postmodernism (Fredric Jameson (1991) *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*; Jim Collin (1989) *Uncommon Culture: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism*; Angela McRobbie (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*; George Lipsitz (1990) *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*; E. Ann Kaplan (1987) *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture*) and fandom (Constance Penley (1997) *Nasa/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*; Henry Jenkins (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*; Lisa A. Lewis (ed.) (1992) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*). Concurrently, a shift in emphasis toward the role of globalization (Arjun Appadurai (2001) *Globalization*; John Tomlinson (1999) *Globalization and Culture*; Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (eds) (1998) *The Cultures of Globalization*; Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (eds) (2000) *Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*) and diaspora (Rey Chow (1993) *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*; George Lipsitz (1994) *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*; Paul Gilroy (1995) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*) along with renewed interest in the study of imperialism (Edward Said (1994) *Culture and Imperialism*; Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (eds) (1994) *Cultures of United States Imperialism*) has contributed to more intricate engagements with identity. Work on visual and material culture (Lynn Spigel (1992) *Make Room for TV*; Anna McCarthy (2001) *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*; Dick Hebdige (1988) *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*; Jeffrey Sconce (2000) *Haunted Media*), as well as new media (Lisa Nakamura (2002) *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity on the Internet*; Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins (eds) (1998), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*; Paul Théberge (1997) *Any Sound you can Imagine*; Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh N. Tu and Alisa Headlam Hines (eds) (2001) *Technicolor: Race, Technology and Everyday Life*; Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigen (eds) (2004) *First Person: New Media as Story, Performan and Game*) account for the changes to media that

impact contemporary experiences of the popular. In brief, there is no longer a clearly dominant paradigm. Like Juvee's façade, it takes time to digest the 'mixed-bag' approach that we operate with today. As Freccero insisted, there is no popular canon that students possess, and there is no canon by which scholars of popular culture abide. Biography works alongside ethnography. Textual analysis accompanies studies of economics.

Our *Reader* welcomes this moment. And it does so by acknowledging the relationship between historically situated debates on mass/popular culture and the wide range of knowledge production on the subject of popular culture today. We hope that the preceding paragraphs demonstrate just how much popular culture has been characterized by change, for this is precisely what we try to illustrate through our selection and organization of diverse subject matter. As a result, the presentation of popular culture tendered by this *Reader* begins with and rests on a key premise: that popular culture is the site of a dynamic process – a zone of interaction, where relationships are made and unmade to produce anything from meaning to pleasure, from the trite to the powerful. Three factors in this dynamic that most frequently structure developments in and experiences of popular culture include its status as a product of industry, an intellectual object of inquiry, and an integral component of people's lives. Considerations of production, conceptualization and practice are therefore brought together to promote an engaging and informative elucidation of the subject.

This structure illuminates the motives behind this book's organization. It speaks to why specific scholarly interventions have been highlighted to represent the significance that popular culture currently commands. More specifically, *Popular Culture: A Reader* is composed of edited articles and chapters from fields within the humanities, such as cultural studies, media studies, queer theory, American studies, and ethnic studies, that assemble a cross-section of trans-Atlantic popular practices examined from a number of perspectives. This heterogeneous group of interventions mark general turning points in the shape of popular culture study in the USA and the UK.

Essays are placed within seven complementary thematic sections, each framed by a brief expository introduction. Each section combines essays that engage, extend, and critique the specific conceptual actions being explored within this book. The seven thematic sections are:

- Delineating: Culture–Mass–Popular
- Commodifying: The Commodity, Culture and Social Life
- Marketing: Socio-economic Considerations of Popular Culture
- Practicing: Popular Tastes and Ways of Consuming
- Voicing: Identities and Articulation
- Styling: Subculture and Popular Performance
- Locating: Space, Place, and Power

Let us explain exactly why we have organized the *Reader* in such a manner. To organize the essays into useful themes through which to analyze specific aspects of popular culture, we have opted to categorize them according to seven present participles. Each of the verbs we have chosen signifies an action or a process, and in applying familiar language in a verb form we hope to speak to the present condition of popular culture's uses as well as the array of actions that it carries out.

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Although the titles are not intended to exhaust the diverse actions of the essays that they name, they do give a fair indication of relationships between the essays. They offer a flexible yet recognizable means of helping readers who may be grappling, perhaps for the first time, with the study of popular culture. We hope that you will find this decision an illuminating and intentionally self-reflexive example of the collection's project.

On the one hand, we do not feel that a *Reader* on popular culture for a twenty-first-century student body can be organized into sections premised upon specific media. Topics like 'mass literature', 'motion pictures', 'television and radio' may have successfully allowed the critics of *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (Rosenberg and White, 1957) to consider popular phenomena of their day; however in the epoch of media convergence, new media, digital technology and remediation, this separation becomes increasingly difficult and far from desirable. Popular culture is experienced, produced, practiced, marketed, lived, and consumed ubiquitously due to the ever-increasing presence of media technology in all aspects of everyday life and the entertainment industry's cross-market repurposing practices. (Herein lies the main significance of our emphasis on the commodity form!)¹⁹ Contemporary popular culture's presence is not defined by a single medium, which means that considerations of media within a collection on popular culture should, and in this *Reader* does, traverse and interconnect all sections.

On the other hand, and in an attempt to forego historical or paradigmatic hierarchy, the conceptual actions are designed to be fundamentally pluralistic. Each actively endeavors to engineer a minute, *site-specific* consideration of broad intellectual categories such as Marxism, structuralism and postmodernism because adherence to such categories can easily push discourses on feminism, race, ethnicity, and sexuality to sideline positions. The latter may appear as brief chapters or subsections within a larger normative tale of popular culture's history overdetermined by Western literary traditions and their investments in British and American cultural studies. For us, it is of the utmost importance that the social histories and processes behind the experience of identity are central to any understanding of the stakes and operations of popular culture. To consider popular culture as a dynamic process is to stress a set of axiomatic principles. First, all aspects of popular culture are political. Secondly, the caliber of engagement with popular culture that we are calling for requires an understanding of both the history and development of the commodity form. And thirdly, the significance of popular culture is impacted by its relation to social movements and transformations in social consciousness. For this reason, considerations of racialization, gender, sexuality and class also run through each section of the book.

Lastly, *Popular Culture: A Reader* provides its users with a 'play list' at the end of each section introduction. Borrowing from the performance set of live music and the arrangement of self-produced compilation cassette tapes, CDs and MP3 libraries, the play lists extend the performance of this *Reader's* ideas and contents. They are composed of familiar academic texts (books, edited collections, articles) dedicated to the study of popular culture, films and music that have been discussed within the section as well as media that addresses the specific section's emphasis, and popular texts (magazines, fanzines, web pages) that critically speak from within and to popular culture phenomena. Meant to stand in for and enlarge the function of the standard 'suggested readings' included in similar

collections, our play lists take a step toward acknowledging the diverse media and disparate practices through which popular culture is expressed. Though obviously bound by the limitations of print media (not least of which are binding and general productions expenses), we hope that the play lists will surpass aspects of the book's restrictions and allow the user to study the popular *across* culture.

notes

1. After such an exegesis it is important to note that there are many ways to narrate the history of approaches to popular culture. One might, for example, be inclined to trace the way we think about popular culture to antiquity. Plato or Aristotle's pronouncements on the popular reception of drama and their subsequent impact on the shape of modern views of culture would be useful for an analysis of the popular that focuses on aesthetics (formalism, taste, etc.). In contrast, Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc organize their introduction to *Hop on Pop* (2002), a collection of new work on the subject of popular culture, according to the field's initial anthropological cast, followed by an account of commercialization and the impact of taste and power relations on the way that popular culture has been understood. These points are followed by Marxist perspectives on the popular as well as their legacy in the form of critical theory. Ultimately, the introduction to popular culture provided by *Hop on Pop* speaks to the volume's investment in the politics of pleasure that motivate a major contemporary trajectory in the study of the popular. What we are trying to demonstrate by this account of the ways that popular culture can be approached is that although the history of the study of popular culture has attained the status of doctrine that the initiated can rattle off with ease, what is compelling about the study of popular culture is that each addition to the conversation has the potential to radically transform the way that the concept and field, as well as the stakes that animate it, function.

2. The roots of these ideas may also be said to extend to antiquity. For example, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'the good' is expressed through fulfillment of a teleology, or essential purpose. The essential purpose of human beings is to realize their nature, which he identifies as the correspondence of the soul and reason. Human culture is thus an expression of this self-realization. The function and character of culture has since been continually reshaped and successive views on humanity have generated their own position on the role of culture in human development.

3. See F.R. Leavis (1930) *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, included in this volume; Q.D. Leavis (1978) *Fiction and the Reading Public*; F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson (1933) *Culture and Environment*; and T.S. Eliot (1948) *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.

4. Such work paints specific pictures of what folk culture looks like in contrast to the culture of mass civilization. According to Eliot, culture includes 'all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar' (1948: 31). The 'loss' recorded in Leavis and Thompson's *Culture and Environment* presents itself in the following way: 'Folk-songs, folk-dances, Cotswold cottages and handicraft products are signs of expressions of something more: an art of life, a way of living ...' (1933: 1-2).

5. Such a claim is very much in keeping with the work of Siegfried Kracauer, one of Adorno's philosophical mentors. Kracauer's work on the mass ornament develops the idea of the mass as entity offered up to itself in *The Mass Ornament* (1995 [1926]).

6. Further to this, Adorno writes: 'By reproducing [the reified consciousness of the audience] with hypocritical subservience, the culture industry in effect changes this

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consciousness all the more, that is, for its own purposes. ... The consumers are made to remain what they are: consumers.'

7. Gramsci distinguishes two main ways of achieving hegemonic status. These are transformationism – or passive revolution which neutralizes non-dominant interests – and expansive hegemony – whereby an active and direct consensus develops between the hegemonic class and the interests of popular classes. This consensus creates a genuine 'national-popular will'.

8. For a more detailed discussion of Gramsci's impact on British cultural studies, see Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woolcott (eds), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process* (London: Batsford, 1981) or Stuart Hall's 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity' (*Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2: 5–27, 1986) and 'Notes on Deconstructing "The Popular"' (1981) contained within this *Reader*.

9. For example, a very lively debate (well represented in the work of Dwight Macdonald, whose 'A Theory of Mass Culture' (1957) is included in this book) sprang up to probe the implications of mass culture on US life. This debate is evident in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White's *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (1957). Rosenberg and White admit that one of their major challenges as editors was to secure work that spoke to the potential of mass culture because the fact that 'there have been far more excoriators of mass culture than defenders became readily apparent to us as we sought representative selections for both points of view' (v). In contrast to and as evidence of the type of approach that later came to characterize the study of popular culture is the 1964 publication of Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's *The Popular Arts*. This book diverges from the majority of earlier works on popular culture in that it calls for an exploration of the possibilities rather than the negative impact of electronic communication and culture. Hall and Whannel also advocate a shift away from what they consider to be false distinctions used to discuss new media (such as serious versus popular and entertainment versus values) as poor frameworks for reference and judgment (45), and maintain that new media are linked to social change (45). Largely geared toward educators, its rationale is that in order to best meet the needs of media-saturated pupils, didactic practice should engage popular forms rather than dismiss them wholesale.

10. Barthes is especially indebted to the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course in General Linguistics* (1983 [1916]) elaborated on a proposed new science dedicated to 'the life of signs within society' and proposed a structural approach to language that emphasized the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. The name that Saussure chose to describe this science was semiology (from the Greek *semeîon*, or 'sign') (16). For a discussion of semiology in the context of cultural studies, see: Kaja Silverman (1983) *The Subject of Semiotics*; and Richard Harland (1987) *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*.

11. An especially important concept to subsequent work on popular culture is Williams' elaboration of 'structures of feeling' in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Through this term, Williams theorizes the relationship between transformations of meaning and change: 'It is a structured formation which, because it is at the very edge of semantic availability, has many characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articulations – new semantic figures – are discovered in material practice: often, as it happens, in relatively isolated ways, which are only later seen to compose a significant (often in fact minority) generation: this often, in turn, the generation that substantially connects to its successor' (134).

12. Henri Lefebvre's approach to cultural criticism as published in *Critique de la vie quotidienne I* (1946) and *Critique de la vie quotidienne II* (1962) did not become widely available in the English until the publication of Sacha Rabinovitch's translation of the work as *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1984). Nevertheless, the work has exerted a not inconsiderable influence both through its role in the emergence of a French cultural studies tradition and the impact of this tradition on cultural studies in other locations.

13. Particularly in debt to de Certeau's work are: John Fiske (1989) *Understanding Popular Culture*; and Henry Jenkins (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

14. For commentary on these events see: Les Evans (ed.) (1968) *Revolt in France: May-June 1968 - A Contemporary Record*; Ronald Fraser (1988) *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*; D.L. Hanley and A.P. Kerr, (eds) (1989) *May '68: Coming of Age*; Henri Lefebvre (1969) *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*; Keith A. Reader and Khursheed Wadia (1993) *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*; Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville (1968) *Red Flag/Black Flag: French Revolution 1968*; Situationist International (1974) *Ten Days that Shook the University*; Alain Touraine (1971) *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform*; Immanuel Wallerstein (1989) '1968, Revolution in the World-System: Theses and Queries'.

15. In addition, many continental works that have come to be central to the formation of cultural studies were translated into English during this period and impacted the way that UK and US scholars would approach the subject of popular culture. Much of Karl Marx's work was translated in the 1970s, and Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* was made available to English-speaking audiences in 1971. Jacques Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* and *Ecrits*, which expounded upon theories of subjectivity that were to have a profound effect on the shape of feminist film studies, both appeared in English in 1977.

16. What has come to be known as British cultural studies, often associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, built on the legacy of sociology and Marxism to promote class-conscious analyses and empirical studies of the large-scale changes that characterized the post-war era. Prominent members and affiliated scholars included the likes of Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Phil Cohen, John Clarke, Paul Willis, and Dick Hebdige. Important revision of the scope of British cultural studies was ushered in by the criticism of scholars like Angela McRobbie and Paul Gilroy whose work sought to account for the ways in which gendered and racialized experience was part and parcel of, though not exhausted by, the categories of class, generational or national identity.

17. Roughly concurrent with the consolidation of British cultural studies was the emergence of an energetic new focus in *Screen*, which came to represent a branch of analysis known as 'Screen Theory'. Originally an educational journal from the Society for Education in Film and Television in the 1950s, *Screen* published work on a variety of new developments in cinema studies. For example, it provided a forum for work that explored the implications of structuralism, semiotics and ideology on our understanding of cinema. *Screen* also became the preeminent site of exploration of the relationship between subjectivity, sexuality and cinema in the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing heavily from psychoanalytic and feminist theory, *Screen* pressed readers to consider the ways that visual experience created gendered subject positions. Yet these subjects were far from neutral in that they reinforced repressive power structures. For example, Laura Mulvey's foundational 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) argues that narrative cinema, especially in its creation of a placental form of identification, underscores 'the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form'. Additional emphases within this period of *Screen*'s publication history include the role of stereotype in representations and contestations of both sexual and, to a lesser extent, racial difference. Additional theorizations of gender, sexuality and the popular have been developed by a variety of scholars including, but not limited to, Janice Radway, Meaghan Morris, Judith Butler, Ella Shohat, Tania Modleski, Angela McRobbie, Teresa de Lauretis, Linda Williams, Lauren Berlant, Ian Ang, Laura Kipnis, Angela Davis, Mary Ann Doane, Jane Gaines, bell hooks, Carol Clover, Barbara Creed, Annette Kuhn, Kaja Silverman, Elizabeth Cowie, Pam Cook, Jacqueline Rose, Griselda Pollock, Gaylyn Studlar, and Constance Penley.

18. The following scholars have made particularly influential contributions to the advance of queer theory: José Esteban Muñoz, Judith Halberstam, Sue-Ellen Case, Eve Sedgwick, Philip Brian Harper, Alexander Doty, Chris Straayer, Richard Fung, Richard Dyer, Rhona J. Berenstein, Marion Riggs, Kobena Mercer, Judith Butler, Judith Mayne, Ann

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Cvetkovitch, Samuel Delaney, Lisa Duggan, Lee Edelman, Diana Fuss, Martin Manalansan, Jay Prosser, Adrienne Rich, Jackie Stacey. There is, of course, a great deal of overlap between scholars of heterosexual and same-sex identity formations, especially given the extent to which theorizations of gender and sexuality have highlighted the relational core of both. Many of the scholars noted previously have thus made contributions to the development of queer theory and vice versa.

19. For example, reflecting on his collaboration with Max Horkheimer on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno clarifies their decision to substitute the phrase 'mass culture' with their neologism 'culture industry'. The latter excludes 'from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves ...'. For our purposes, however, there is no necessary incompatibility between the terms 'culture' and 'industry'. Their relationship is actually the *sine qua non* of the popular as it is conceived and presented in this volume. This is the reason that we dedicate two sections of the *Reader* to the socio-economic impact of the commodity form and marketing practices. If we hold out for an ideal of the popular as that which resists commodification, then we fail to understand the interrelated complexities of either.

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