

A. Persuasion in Popular Culture
Irv Rein, Professor, Communication Studies
Tuesdays, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Popular culture figures are some of the most powerful and persuasive on the planet. This course will challenge you to think critically about media darlings, commercial fads, social movements, and appeals to targeted and mass audiences. Each lecture will be accompanied by relevant, visual examples. By examining the hot topics of yesterday and today, we will answer some crucial questions. How is popular culture defined, and what is its relationship to persuasion? Who are the real creators of popular culture? How does it impact us on a daily basis? What are the key elements and theories of what works and what doesn't? The course tackles a wide range of persuasive strategies, from traditional to cutting-edge, that can affect every aspect of daily life. The music you hear, the car you drive, the food you buy – they are all vying for your attention and devotion.

Jun. 22 How Is Popular Culture Persuasive?

Popular culture is changing all the time, but there are foundational elements that are critical to understanding it at any point in time. In this opening lecture, we will survey the evolution of popular culture throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Seen through this historical lens, it is evident that technology has played a critical role in what succeeds in the popular market, and under which circumstances. We will also consider the evolution of popular music – from the invention of the gramophone, to the advent of the microphone and electrified instruments, to where we are today with highly-automated production, recyclable fads, and manufactured stars.

Jun. 29 “Image”

There are different methods of crafting and perceiving identities in popular culture. We will discuss the strategies of crafting an image, and how it differs from others like “brand” and “ethos.” What helps build an effective image? Dance, music, and acting help to build brands, images, and ethos. All of these become part of a highly-persuasive strategy built on minimal information. Not every strategy will work for every star. Elegant dancing was a major image-builder for Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers during the Depression of the 1930s – whereas Elvis Presley's singing was a personification of an empowered youth culture in the 1950s. Image and its related strategies are woven into the fabric of popular culture, which would not be nearly as persuasive without them.

Jul. 6 Media Distribution

How are you choosing to spend your time and money on entertainment and information? Popular culture reaches its audience through a number of channels. We will discuss the breadth of distribution channels and illustrate how each is differentiated. From televised poetry to Hollywood comedies, podcasts to sports-streams, channels compete for your attention.

Jul. 6 (cont'd)

Today, the number of choices has never been greater. The emphasis of this lecture will be upon their similarities and differences in how they are received by audiences. In today's fast-paced media market, producers seek a competitive edge to cut through the myriad of media choices.

Jul. 13 Supermarkets and Environmental Rhetoric

What do supermarkets have to do with popular culture? It might seem like a stretch because food is so easily taken for granted, but the industry generates trillions of dollars and incorporates the dynamic elements of popular entertainment that are so persuasive. There are a myriad of ways to buy food, from the boutique Amazon Go-style stores and elaborate mega-stores, to stores that are only located online. The modern supermarket incorporates lights, sound, color and movement to encourage purchases – just like entertainment. Each generational change in supermarkets has reflected new technologies and fewer employees. Today's youngest consumers are more interested in efficiency, personalized experiences, and convenience. We are witnessing unprecedented levels of automation, drone-deliveries, and consolidated mega-corporations. The food industry survivors will incorporate popular culture strategies, while delivering food in unprecedented ways.

Jul. 20 Television Comedy

Storytelling is important to sitcoms and other communication fields such as marketing, public relations, and advertising. Much of TV comedy is about overcoming obstacles that reflect everyday experiences. Celebrated sitcoms combine formulaic structure and production with creative, resonant writing – Friends and Seinfeld are two very different takes on the apartment comedy, yet both were runaway successes. We will look at the history of sitcom, and see how the format has evolved to where it is today. The world of the network sitcom is ever-changing, and is now giving way to diversified streaming content. The new school of televised comedy uses many of the same tactics of the TV giants of the 20th century, but the technology, values, and takeaways reflect today's audiences.

Jul. 27 High Visibility

The world of popular culture is built around celebrities. Their high visibility establishes them as models for our behavior, and guides for how to interpret popular culture. Underpinning all of this is how easily stars can be morphed and manufactured, and ultimately venerated and detested. Today, the traditional filters for stars-in-the-making have disappeared. Distribution channels have become more accessible, adding spontaneity to celebrity-making. In this lecture, we will combine a summary of the class with a discussion of visibility-making; its success, and how it affects us in our everyday lives. We will also look at how the high-visibility industry has become commonplace in religion, politics, corporate life, and just about every corner of our society. Celebrity culture is the lens through which we interpret popular culture. Without stars, popular culture would not have nearly the same impact as it does currently.

B. Exploring the Human Condition through Russian Stories
Gary Saul Morson, *Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of the Arts and Humanities; Professor, Slavic Languages and Literatures*
Tuesdays, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m

Russian literature is famous for addressing ultimate philosophical questions, like: the meaning of life, the significance of death, the basis of ethics and responsibility, the essence of the human, and the nature of choice and intentions. Russian stories often show people struggling with such questions or allow the reader to do so. The extreme conditions of the Soviet period sharpened these questions. The stories (and a few story-like essays) below are organized both by author and by questions. Please be sure to use the translations listed in the recommended books list on the next page.

Jun. 22 Death Reveals Life
Leo Tolstoy, “The Death of Ivan Ilych”

**Jun. 29 Anton Chekhov Answers Tolstoy, “A Dreary Story,” and
Fyodor Dostoevsky, Choice and Responsibility**
Extracts from A Writer’s Diary (abridged edition)
“Environment,” pp. 10-24
“Spiritualism,” pp. 115-122
Articles on the Kairova case, pp. 165-172
“A Lie Is Saved By a Lie,” pp. 448-51

Jul. 6 Chekhov: Stories about Empathy
“Misery”
“Nervous Breakdown”
“Vanka”
“The Bishop”
“Enemies”

Jul. 13 Chekhov: Stories about Ideas
“Happiness”
“Lights”
“On the Road”
“In Exile”

Jul. 20 Extreme Conditions Reveal the Irreducibly Human
Isaac Babel, stories from Red Cavalry
“Crossing Into Poland”
“The Road to Brody”
“The Death of Dolgushov”
“The Life and Adventures of Matthew Pavlichenko”
“Salt”
“After the Battle”
Varlam Shalamov, from Kolyma Tales
“In the Night”
“Carpenters”

Jul. 20 (cont'd)
"Cherry Brandy"
"A Day Off"
"My First Tooth"
"Prosthetic Appliances"
"Quiet"

Jul. 27 **Mystery and Meaning**
Chekhov, "The Lady with the Dog"
Chekhov's trilogy: "The Man in a Case," "Gooseberries," "About Love"
"The Student"
Tolstoy, "God Sees the Truth, But Waits to Tell"
"What Men Live By"

Recommended Books: Please be sure to use the translations listed below.

Babel: The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel, translated by Walter Morison (<https://tinyurl.com/isaac-babel-stories>).
If unavailable, Isaac Babel, The Essential Fictions, translated by Val Vinokur

Chekhov: Chekhov's stories may be found in volumes from the 13-volume set of Chekhov's stories translated by Constance Garnett (<https://tinyurl.com/hfutnptd>). These volumes are available separately either in paperback or free on Kindle:
"The Bishop" in volume 8, "The Bishop and Other Stories"
"Dreary Story" in volume 5, "The Wife and Other Stories"
"Enemies" in volume 11, "The Schoolmaster and Other Stories."
"Happiness" in volume 6, "The Witch and Other Stories"
"In Exile" in volume 9, "The Schoolmistress and Other Stories"
"The Lady with the Dog," volume 3, "The Lady with the Dog and Other Stories"
"Lights" in volume 13, "Love and Other Stories"
"Misery" in volume 9, "The Schoolmistress and Other Stories"
"Nervous Breakdown" in volume 8, "The Chorus Girl and Other Stories"
"On the Road" in volume 8, "The Bishop and Other Stories"
"The Student" in volume 6, "The Witch and Other Stories"
"Vanka" in volume 12, "The Cook's Wedding and Other Stories"
Trilogy stories in volume 5, "The Wife and Other Stories"

Dostoevsky: A Writer's Diary, abridged edition (<https://tinyurl.com/writers-diary>)

Shalamov: Kolyma Tales, translated by John Glad (<https://tinyurl.com/kolyma-tales-glad>)

Tolstoy: For "The Death of Ivan Ilych" – use the Maude translation, which can be found in Leo Tolstoy, Great Short Works (<https://tinyurl.com/leo-tolstoy-maude>)
For "God Sees the Truth" and "What Men Live By" – use the Maude translation, available in The Portable Tolstoy or Collected Shorter Fiction, volume 1 (<https://tinyurl.com/tolstoy-maude>)