

## Chicana/Chicano Popular Culture

Instructor: John Jota Leños  
CCS 111—52852 / Fall 2003  
MWF 9:40-10:30 / Cowden 203  
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### **Brief Course Description:**

The study of popular culture focuses on deciphering meaning from the wide scope of cultural production, from highly produced entertainment (television, radio, film, magazines, etc.) to everyday life scenarios (family custom and ritual, language, identity, etc.). This course will be a critical investigation into the theories, production and consumption of Chicana/Chicano, Latino/Latina, Hispanic/Hispana forms of popular culture. We will study predominant as well as marginalized theoretical trends of popular culture that will assist us to reflectively engage the social significance and political impact of popular culture. We will examine the influence popular culture has on forming identity, shaping culture and as a mode of revealing, producing and reproducing ideology and political struggle.

#### Required Texts:

*Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture and Chicana/o Sexualities*

Edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba

*An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*

By Dominic Strinati

*Chicano Renaissance: Contemporary Cultural Trends*

Edited by David Maciel, Isidro Ortiz and María Herrera-Sobek

#### Optional Text:

*Latino/a Popular Culture*

Edited by Michelle Habel-Pallán and Mary Romero

### **Approach:**

This course will not be an historical survey of the most prominent Chicana/Latino popular cultural trends. The focus in this course will be in attempting to look at the wide scope of Chicana/Latino\* cultural production that includes under-recognized forms and critical perspectives with an emphasis put on cultural excavation and art making.

We will embark on an investigative inquiry into ways of looking at popular culture that will be driven by the students and professor alike. I will provide a framework from which to look at Chicana/Latino popular culture; however, students will be expected to direct the eventual flow and subject matter of the course as well as lead class discussions.

My approach to teaching is grounded in the ideas of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian liberation educator who wrote *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He believed that students must be

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\* I am using “Chicana/Latino” to encapsulate the dual gender of the cultural groups and in order to avoid rewriting the cumbersome Chicana/Chicano, Chicana/os, Latina/Latino, Latina/os, etc.

directly engaged in their education as a revolutionary act in a “quest for mutual humanization.” For Freire, knowledge materializes with constant and optimistic inquiry, experimentation and dialogue between student and teacher. Most importantly, Freire encouraged students and teachers to nurture a profound trust in each other as investigative partners and collaborators.

Some classes will be held online with **Blackboard** instead of inside the classroom. During these sessions, students will create and respond to questions about various topics.

### **Course Work/Expectations:**

1. CELL Groups: In this course, our research model will be based on a roving hierarchy in which each one of you and groups of you will lead discussions and modes of inquiry. All students will be placed into a CELL group. Each CELL will be responsible for making presentations based on the readings. Each CELL will be required to meet outside of class and to incite a stimulating discussion of the readings for that week. The challenge for the cell presentations will be to clearly draw links between the readings, the lectures and personal experiences. The CELL will be responsible for the following:
  - Giving an overview of the theses and main ideas of the text
  - Leading an insightful discussion about specific concepts *based in the text*
  - Proposing fundamental questions about the text
  - Putting forward theory and/or alternative ideas for discussion
  - Experimenting with the form of presentation
  - Generating excitement about the ideas in the text

It is important that all students come to class having done the readings and thought about them in a critical manner. Students will be responsible for the following:

- Turning in 2 pages of notes for each reading assigned (see below)
- Coming to class with three questions and/or perspectives that you would like to discuss
- Presenting these questions and perspectives in class

I will be available to guide the CELL in their proposed activity and assist you in highlighting and clarifying ideas during my office hours as listed above.

### Notes and Participation

Most of the written assignments will consist of notes on the week’s readings. Each student will turn in 2-page minimum of notes on the readings each week. (Please refer to the schedule below for the note and reading assignments.) Each student is free to structure the notes the way s/he wants. The notes can be handwritten or typed, but must be legible. Notes must be turned in the week the readings are due. **NOTES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE.** The notes are a way of organizing the ideas of the readings on paper. They will serve as springboards for participation and contribution to the discussions.

### Assignment I: (Due October 8)

Attend and review one of two plays put on by Teatro Bravo @ Playhouse On The Park, Viad Corporation Building, 1850 N. Central Ave., Phoenix:  
“West Hollywood Affair”—Sept. 19, 20, 28 and Oct 3  
“Fourteen”—Sept. 12, 13, 26 and Oct. 4  
See [teatrobravo.org](http://teatrobravo.org) for show times and ticket prices.

Write a **2-page reaction/critical analysis** of the play. This review should be similar to reviews of plays seen in the major newspapers or journals such as the LA Times, NY Times, the New Yorker, etc. (Please go online and refer to such reviews as models). This means that your analysis should not be based on whether you “like” or “dislike” the play, but rather on the quality of the storyline, acting, directing and overall message of the work. You will be graded on your ability to clearly and critically engage the ideas of the play and its characters. You can choose to concentrate on one aspect of the play, on one character, on one idea or link several ideas together; however, the review should be rooted in the theories that we have discussed in class.

### Midterm Assignment: (Due October 13 / Week 8)

Cultural Excavation Research and Critique: This assignment is intended to excavate marginal, but influential Chicana/Latino cultural production (visual art, performance, music, spoken word, poetry, graffiti art, etc.) and apply the theories discussed in class to your findings. You should try to extend your knowledge base of what is ‘out there’ by trying to find cultural producers that have not been written about extensively. Your research can be web or book based, ethnographic in nature or done via word-of-mouth. Your chosen “cultural product” must be put into one or more of the theoretical frameworks studied during the semester—this is your opportunity to apply what the ideas we have to discussed to Chicana/Latino popular culture. You will present a **5-page paper and oral report** documenting your research during Week 8. There should be some attempt to contact the source of the work and address the following concerns:

1. Describe the cultural product as popular culture
2. How do you theoretically frame this cultural product according to one or more of the theories we have been studying (i.e. what is its importance and social meaning)?
3. What is your critical stance on this work? (For example, how does it relate to racial or feminist politics? Does it effectively provide a oppositional politics or is it effectually maintaining the status quo?)

Each student will sign-up to give a ten-minute abstract of his/her findings in class during Week 8.

### Final Project

#### **Proposals Due November 17 & Final Project Due December 8**

For the final project, each student will create a “Foto-Novela.” You will choose a Chicana/Latino cultural artifact and write a critical essay in the form of a Foto-Novela. This assignment will give you the opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of cultural critique and Chicana/Latino popular culture. It will also give you the chance to engage in creative and critical art making. You will have to turn in a sketch and written proposal of

your project that explains the what the work is about, what it will try to accomplish, what the work will look and feel like.

### **Evaluation and Grading:**

Since this course is based on dialogue, exchange and artistic experimentation, most of your grade (55%) will be based on the quality and quantity of your preparation outside of class and your participation in class. This portion of your grade will be evaluated through the effectiveness of your group's presentations, the Blackboard sessions, your ability to speak to ideas during class, allow others to speak and listen and, finally, your notes on the readings. The final portion of your grade (45%) will be based on the thoroughness and inventiveness of your midterm and other assignments (20%) as well as your final project (25%). (Please note that you cannot pass the course without over 90% attendance and without turning in all of the assignments.)

### **Attendance**

Attendance and *presence* is required. If you miss two classes during the semester, you cannot receive better than a B in the course. If you miss three classes during the semester, you will have missed an entire week of classes and will receive no higher grade than a C. If you miss more than three classes, you will be dropped from the course. (In case of medical emergency or sickness, you will have to provide a doctor's note). If there is some reason that you cannot make class, please let me know before hand and we can work around your absence. Perfect attendance will be rewarded with extra credit.

## **Schedule and Assignments**

### **Week 1**

August 25–

#### **Introductions and Expectations**

August 27–

#### **Representation, Semiotics and CELL Building**

August 29–

#### **Chicana/o Cultural Resistance**

##### Readings:

- Ybarra-Frausto, "Notes from Losaida: A Forward" in *Velvet Barrios*
- Gaspar de Alba, "Introduction, Or Welcome to the closet of Barrio Popular Culture" in *Velvet Barrios*

### **Week 2**

September 1–

#### **No Class (Labor Day)**

September 3–

#### **Cultural Criticism & Transformation**

##### Video: bell hooks

September 5–

#### **Cultural Criticism & Transformation**

Video: bell hooks

### **Week 3**

#### **Theories of Popular Culture (CELL 1 PRESENTATIONS)**

September 8—

#### **The Frankfurt School—“Commodity Fetishism” and “Modern Capitalism”**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, Pages 51-61

September 10—

#### **The Culture Industry**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, Pages 61-85

September 12—

#### **CLASS MEETS ONLINE (BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION BOARD)**

Reading:

- Coco Fusco (Handout)

### **Week 4**

#### **Theories of Popular Culture (CELL 2 PRESENTATIONS)**

September 15—

#### **Structuralism and Semiology—Structural Linguistics**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, pgs 87-108

September 17—

#### **Barthes and Semiology**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, pgs 108-128

September 19—

#### **CLASS MEETS ONLINE (BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION BOARD)**

Readings:

- Coco Fusco (Handout)

### **Week 5**

#### **Theories of Popular Culture (CELL 3 PRESENTATIONS)**

September 22—

#### **Marxism**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, pgs 129-159

September 24—

## **Gramsci and Hegemony**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, pgs 160-176

September 26—

**CLASS MEETS ONLINE (BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION BOARD)**

ASSIGNMENT—Attend “Chicana/o Studies on Stage”

Chicana/o Benefit—featuring the play “14”

## **Week 6**

**Theories of Popular Culture (CELL 4 PRESENTATIONS)**

September 29—

**Feminist Theory**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, pgs 177-201

October 1—

**Feminism and Popular Culture**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Dominic Strinati, pgs 201-218

October 3—

**Dora la Exploradora, Bilingüismo y Feminism**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading: TBA

## **Week 7**

**Chicana/Latino and Mass Media**

October 6—

**“Latino” Media**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Arlene Dávila, “Latinos Inc.” (Handout)
- Arlene Dávila, “Spanish Media and U.S. Latinidad” (Handout)

October 8—

**Chicana/o Representation**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings & Teatro Bravo Play Review

Reading:

- Arlene Virginia Escalante, “The Politics of Chicano Representation in the Media” in *Chicano Renaissance*
- Diana I. Ríos, “Chicana/o and Latina/o Gazing: Audiences of the Mass Media in *Chicano Renaissance*

October 10—

**Chicanas in Cinema**

Reading:

- Domino Renee Pérez, “Lost in Cinematic Landscapes: Chicanas as Lloronas in Contemporary Film” in *Velvet Barrios*

Film: Mulholland Drive

**Week 8**

**Mid-Term Cultural Excavation and Critique**

October 13—

Assignment Due: Cultural Excavation Presentations and Critique

October 15—

Assignment Due: Cultural Excavation Presentations and Critique

October 17—

Assignment Due: Cultural Excavation Presentations and Critique

**Week 9**

October 20—

**Agency, the Politics of Beauty and Food**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- María P. Figueroa “Resisting ‘Beauty’ and *Real Women Have Curves*” by in *Velvet Barrios* (pgs 265-282)

Film—*Real Women Have Curves*

October 22—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading: TBA

Film—*Real Women Have Curves*

October 24—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading: TBA

Film—*Real Women Have Curves*

**Week 10**

**Pachucos and Pachucas: Gendered Icons (CELL 4 PRESENTATIONS)**

October 27—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Arturo Madrid, “In Search of the Authentic Pachuco” in *Velvet Barrios*

October 29—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Rosa Linda Fregoso, “Re-Imagining Chicana Urban Identities in the Public Sphere, *Cool Chuca Style*” (HANDOUT)

October 31—

**Día de los Muertos**

Readings: TBA

**Week 11**

**“Family” Politics (CELL 3 PRESETATIONS)**

November 3—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Richard T. Rodriguez, “The Verse of the Godfather: Signifying Family and Nationalism in Chicano Rap and Hip-Hop Culture” in *Velvet Barrios*

November 5—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Ralph Rodriguez, “A Poverty of Relations: On Not ‘Making *Familia* from Scratch,’ But *Scratching Familia*” in *Velvet Barrios*

November 7—

**CLASS MEETS ONLINE (BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION BOARD)**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Karen Mary Davalos, *La Quinceañera: Making Gender and Ethnic Identities in Velvet Barrios*

**Week 12**

November 10—

**Foto-Novelas, Pochonovelas and Historietas**

Reading:

- Coco Fusco—Pochonovelas (HANDOUT)
- Carlos Avila—“Foto-Novelas” (HANDOUT)
- Kurt Hollander—Historietas de la Vida/Real Life Comics” (HANDOUT)
- Los Bros Hernandez & La Cucaracha

November 12—

**Chicana/o Performance (CELL 2 PRESENTATIONS)**

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Suzanne Chávez-Silverman, “Gendered Bodies and Borders in Contemporary Chican@ Performance and Literature in *Velvet Barrios*

November 14—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- David Román, “Latino Performance and Identity”

### **Week 13**

November 17—

Assignment Due: Foto-Novela Proposals (Individual Meetings)

**Chicana/o Feminismos/ismas (CELL 1 PRESENTATIONS)**

November 19—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Catrióna Rueda Esquibél, Velvet Malinche: Fantasies of “the” Aztec Princess in the Chicana/o Sexual Imagination” in *Velvet Barrios*

November 21—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- Denise Michelle Sandoval, “Cruising Through Low Rider Culture: Chicana/o Identity in the Marketing of *Low Rider Magazine* in *Velvet Barrios*

### **Week 14**

November 24—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- “Choosing Chicano in the 1990s: the Underground Music Scene of Los(t) Angeles” by Yvette C. Doss (HANDOUT)

November 26—No Class (Thanksgiving)

November 27—No Class (Thanksgiving)

### **Week 15**

December 1—

Assignment Due: Notes from Readings

Reading:

- “Rights of Passage: From Cultural Schizophrenia to Border Consciousness in Cheech Marin’s *Born in East L.A.*” in *Velvet Barrios*

Film: *Born in East L.A.*

December 3—

Class Discussion

Film: *Born in East L.A.*

December 5—Chicana/o Studies Moving (NO CLASS)

### **Week 16**

December 8—**Final Projects Due**