

AP/POLS 3262 3.0

Popular Culture and International Politics

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S103R
Wednesday 2:30 - 4:30 pm
Blended

“Everything is art. Everything is Politics”
(Ai Weiwei)¹



Straight, Ai Weiwei
<http://brendanhoffman.photoshelter.com/image/100000iMefJkrrs8>

¹ Clifford Coonan, “An artist's struggle for justice in China: Beaten to within an inch of his life, Ai Weiwei is still defiant” *The Independent* 27 February 2010. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/an-artists-struggle-for-justice-in-china-1912352.html>

Our common ideas about international politics present a reified world of diplomats, heads of state, military officers or, more abstractly, of states 'acting' in some way. This course asks: What can we learn about international politics from popular culture? The common notions of international politics are certainly found in many of the expressions of contemporary popular culture: novels, television, and, particularly, film have made the world of international espionage one of its staples. With the declaration of a 'war on terror' in 2001, terrorists and the provision of security against them have also provided important themes for popular entertainments. However, by virtue of being 'popular', popular culture also presents the possibilities of politics that are not abstracted and insulated from the concerns and experiences of everyday life and experience. Thus, while international politics in popular culture can reproduce alienated or elite versions of our world's politics it can also be a site of resistance, and even more importantly a place to imagine international politics differently. This course draws the popular culture in which we all live in our 'daily' lives into the classroom, beginning from popular culture expressions to explore the nature, limits, and possibilities of contemporary international politics.

Aims and Objective

- To introduce students to the places where the popular and the political meet.
- To begin to develop critical skills particular to the political analysis of popular culture.
- To introduce the links and mutual influences of world politics and popular culture.

Course Organisation

The course will follow a blended format, mixing classroom lectures with online components.

Grading

Component	Date Due	Grade
Seeing Discussion	January 13-26	10%
Film Blog	February 7	15%
Playing Discussion	February 10-23	10%
Game Blog	March 6	15%
Doing Discussion	March 9-23	10%
Doing Blog	March 29	15%
Final Exam (Online)		25%

Overview of the Course Components

Dates	Module	Activity	Location
Jan 6	Introduction	Lecture: Introduction	In Class
Jan 7-12	Introduction	Reading / Online discussion	Online
Jan 13	Introduction	Lecture: IR and Popular Culture	In Class
Jan 14 - 26	A: Seeing	Reading / Online discussion / Formulate questions	Online
Jan 27	A: Seeing	Lecture: Seeing	In Class
Jan 28 - Feb 6	A: Seeing	Watch Films / Post blog entry / comment on blogs	Online
Feb 7	Blog Closed		
Feb 7 - 23	B: Playing	Reading / Online discussion / Formulate questions	Online
Feb 15 - 19	Reading Week		
Feb 24	B: Playing	Lecture: Playing	In Class
Feb 25 - Mar 5	B: Playing	Play games / Post big entry / comment on blogs	
Mar 6	Blog Closed		
Mar 7 - 15	C: Doing	Reading / Online discussion / Formulate questions	Online
Mar 16	C: Doing	Lecture: Doing	In Class
Mar 17 - 26	C: Doing	Analyzing and engaging in online activity / Post blog entry / comment on blog	
Mar 29	Blog Closed		
March 30	Conclusion	Lecture: World Politics and Popular Culture	In Class

Reminder: Lectures will be held on January 6, January 13, January 27, February 24, March 16 and March 30

Course Outline and Readings

January 6 - 13 Introductions

The first two weeks will provide in class introductions to the subject matter of the course, the approaches to that subject matter, as well as the approach of the rest of the course. Following these weeks most of the next nine weeks will be conducted online.

January 6

In Class

Course Introduction

- The Popular, the Political, and the International
- Overview of the course and its methods

Reading

Grayson, K., Davies, M. and Philpott, S. (2009), "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture–World Politics Continuum". *Politics*, 29: 155–163.

January 13

In Class

What are Popular Culture and International Politics?

- A (re)introduction to International Politics
- Thinking about Popular Culture

In preparation for the class, please read the following. There is an online discussion form for you to have a conversation with your group. This discussion **will not be graded**, but is to familiarize you with online discussion.

Readings

Cynthia Weber (2010) "Introduction: Culture, ideology, and the myth function in IR theory" *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* 3rd Ed. (London: Routledge): 1-11.

Joke Hermes (2005) "Introduction: Popular Culture / Cultural Citizenship" in *Re-reading Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell): 1-17.

John Street (1997) "Popular Culture as Politics" *Politics & Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity): Chapter 2.

January 14 - February 3
Module A: Seeing

*For the past century film and then television has been at the centre of popular culture. We are today living in a supposed golden age of television, with cable networks and streaming services creating content of unparalleled quality and sophistication. This module explores the two dimensional screen and asks about the **representation** and **reproduction** of world politics in film and television.*

January 14-26
Online

Read the following material and conduct an online discussion in your group to develop **two or three** analytic questions to ask about a film. The discussion should be conducted on the group Wiki. Your participation in this Wiki discussion will be graded.

Readings

Joseph M. Boggs and Dennis W. Petrie, (2008) *The Art of Watching Films* 7th Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill): Chapter 2 (Thematic Elements: 19-38) and Chapter 12 (Analysis of the Whole Film: 403-28)

Jack Shaheen (2008) "Reel Negatives" *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press) Chapter 2.

Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard (2006) "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism" *New Political Science* 28 (3): 335-351

Klaus Dodds (2008) "Screening terror: Hollywood, the United States and the construction of danger" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1(2): 227-43

Isabelle Freda (2004) "Survivors in the West Wing": 9/11 and the United States of Emergency" in Wheeler Winston Dixon, ed. *Film and Television After 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 226-44.

- Also please watch 'Isaac and Ishmael', Season 3, Episode 1 of *The West Wing* (first aired 3 October 2001). On reserve in the SMIL.

Annika Hagley and Michael Harrison (2014) "Fighting the Battles We Never Could: The Avengers and Post-September 11 American Political Identities" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 47 (1): 120-24.

Lori Crowe (2012) "Masculinities, Militarism and Popular Culture: The Warrior Superhero in Hollywood" in Linda Åhäll and Laura Shepherd, eds. *Gender, Agency and Political Violence* (Basingstoke; Palgrave Macmillan), 19-38

January 27
In Class

Seeing World Politics: Film and Television

- o An introduction to the methods of visual analysis and film/television criticism
- o Reading a film: an interactive lecture

January 28- February 3
Online

You have now developed a set of questions to use in analysing a film. Using those questions, watch two of the following films and analyse them using the techniques discussed in class. Then each student must post a blog entry **of up to 1000 words** answering one or more of the questions you have developed.

Films are on reserve at the SMIL (Ground floor of the Scott Library), and I will post links for any that I can find online.

The Dark Knight (2008)

Iron Man (2008)

Skyfall (2012)



February 3 - March 2
Module B: Playing

*In the past few years video games have passed movies as the largest grossing entertainment industry. In 2013 films grossed \$36 billion worldwide, while the gaming industry grossed \$70 billion. At the same time, the changes to television have made live sport an even more important feature in the political economy of popular entertainment. It is not an exaggeration to say we live in a ludic culture. This module will explore **the politics of play**.*

February 3-23**Online**

Read the following material and conduct an online discussion in your group to develop **two or three** analytic questions to ask about a game. The discussion should be conducted on the group Wiki,

Readings

James Newman (2004) "Why Study Videogames?" in *Videogames* (London: Routledge): 1-7.

Nina Huntemann (2010) 'An Embarrassment of Riches: Video Games and the Recession', *Popular Communication* 8 (3): 198-202.

Nick Dyer-Witthford and Greig de Peuter (2009) "Empire@Play: Virtual Games and Global Capitalism" *CTheory* <http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14761/5633>

Watch the UK Documentary: Charlie Brooker (2014) 'How Videogames Changed the World' (Channel 4): <https://vimeo.com/86920129>

James Ash (2013) "Technologies of Captivation: Videogames and the Attunement of Affect" *Body and Society* 19 (1): 27-51.

Christopher Bartlett, Craig Anderson, and Edward Swing (2009) "Video Game Effects—Confirmed, Suspected, and Speculative: A Review of the Evidence", *Simulation & Gaming* 40 (3): 377-403.

- *This piece provides a review of the literature on the effects of gaming. You do not need to read it in the way you read others, but it provides useful context for thinking about the effects and affects of gaming.*

Roger Stahl (2006) "Have you Played the War on Terror?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23 (2): 112-30.

Vit Sisler (2008) "Digital Arabs: Représentation in video games" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 11 (2): 205-19.

Nicholas Robinson (2012) "Videogames, persuasion and the war on terror: escaping or embedding the military-entertainment complex?" *Political Studies* 60 (3): 504-22.

Robertson Allen (2011) "The Unreal Enemy of America's Army" *Games and Culture*, 6 (1): 38-60.

February 17 Reading Week

**February 24
In Class**

Playing at World Politics: Video Gaming and Sport

- o An introduction to the methods of analysing games, both interactive and spectator.
- o Reading a game: an interactive lecture

**February 25 - March 2
Online**

You have now developed a set of questions to use in analysing a game. Using those questions, play one of the following games in each column (Mainstream, Alternative, Procedural) and analyse the games using the techniques discussed in class. Then each student must post a blog entry **of up to 1000 words** answering one or more of the questions you have developed.

Availability	Mainstream	Alternative	Procedural
Free	<i>America's Army</i> https:// www.americasarmy.com	<i>September 12</i> http:// www.newsgaming.com/ games/index12.htm	<i>Unmanned</i> http:// unmanned.molleindustri a.org
Other Platforms • These games are available on a range of platforms but cost	<i>Call of Duty</i>	<i>Spec Ops: The Line</i>	<i>Sunset</i>
	<i>Battlefield</i>	<i>Haze</i>	<i>This War of Mine</i>
	<i>Medal of Honor</i>		



Module C: Doing

*The popular landscape has been transformed in the past twenty years by the rise of an online universe. The cyber-world has opened up avenues of creativity and communication that were unimaginable before the spread of the internet. One of the more important political consequences of this growth has been the emergence of new forms of online political activism, as well as the mediation and facilitation of more traditional forms of political activity. This module will explore the the place of **online mediation of everyday political activity**.*

March 10 - 16 **Online**

Read the following material and conduct an online discussion in your group to develop **two or three** analytic questions to ask about a game. The discussion should be conducted on the group Wiki. By March 16 you should have agreed your questions.

Readings

Martha McCaughey, ed. (2014) *Cyberactivism on the Participatory Web* (Oxford: Routledge), Introduction (McCaughey, "Cyberactivism 2.0") and Chapter 12 (Lee Salter, "Emergent Social Movements in Online Media and States of Crisis")

Larry Elin, (2003) "The Radicalization of Zeke Spier: How the Internet Contributes to Civic Engagement and New Forms of Social Capital" in Martha McCaughey and Michael Ayers, eds. *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge), Chapter 4.

Mohammed El-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis (2014) "Blogging Against Violations of Human Rights in Egypt: An Analysis of Five Political Blogs" *International Journal of Communication* 8: 962-82.

Benjamin Burroughs (2013) "Obama Trolling: Memes, Salutes and an Agnostic Politics in the 2012 Presidential Election" *The Fibreculture Journal* 22: 258-276.

Limor Shifman (2014) "When Internet Memes Go Global" *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press): 151-170.

Dan Garrett (2014) "Superheroes in Hong Kong's Political Resistance: Icons, Images, and Opposition" *Political Science & Politics* 41 (1): 112-19.

March 16**In Class**

Performing World Politics: Activism and the Day to Day

- Introduction to political activism, day to day politics, with special attention to social media
- Mixing it up: an interactive lecture.

March 16 - 25**Online**

You have now developed a set of questions to use in analysing online political activity. Using those questions, analyse a set of memes on a contemporary issue of international politics (begin by searching memes on the issue with your favourite search engine, and analyzing the top ten, or more) using the techniques discussed in class.

Create your own meme on the issue (there are a number of free meme generators online).

Then each student must post a blog entry **of up to 1000 words** answering one or more of the questions you have developed. Include the meme you have created.

**Conclusion**

In the final week of the course we will return to the beginning to ask what are the links between world politics and popular culture? Where are they found? What, if anything, is new? and does pop culture belong in a Department of Political Science?

March 30**In Class**

World Politics and Popular Culture