

A1

SEMINAR 10

Popular Culture

Quotes about Pop Culture and Media

Task 1 – Read the quotes, discuss your views with your partner, and then present their opinion to the class.

- 1 "To provide its happy people with perpetual* fun is now the deepest purpose of Western civilization."
– **Jeremy Seabrook** (b.1939), English author and contributor to the *Third World Network*.
- 2 "The media no longer ask those who know something to share that knowledge with the public. Instead they ask those who know nothing to represent the ignorance of the public and, in so doing, to legitimate it." – **Serge Daney** (1944–1992), French film critic.
- 3 "Whoever controls the media controls the mind." – **Jim Morrison** (1943–1971), American lead singer of *The Doors*.
- 4 "What the mass media offer is not popular art, but entertainment which is intended to be consumed like food, forgotten, and replaced by a new dish." – **W.H. Auden** (1907-1973), English poet in his essay, *The Dyer's Hand* (1962).
- 5 "Music is banned in Khomeini's Iran/ On the grounds that it stimulates the brain./ We've done him one better in the land of Coke and honey/ – Using music to put people's brains to sleep." – **Dead Kennedys**, American punk band in the song "Triumph of the Swill" (1986).
- 6 "I think that we have created a new kind of person in a way. We have created a child who will be so exposed to media that he will be lost to his parents by the time he is 12." – **David Bowie** (b.1947), English entertainer.
- 7 "The average American who spends six hours in front of the TV screen can not distinguish between these fictional situations and reality. For all too many Americans the real world has been replaced by the false reality of the TV environment. The control of the opinion-forming media is nearly monolithic."
– **Mohamed Raisudeen**, 20thc author of *Media, Jihad & All That*.
- 8 "A properly functioning system of indoctrination has a variety of tasks. Its primary target are the 'stupid and ignorant masses'. They must be kept that way: marginalized and isolated. Ideally, each person should be alone in front of the TV screen watching sports, soap operas, or comedies, deprived of organizational structures that permit* individuals lacking* resources to discover what they think and believe in, to engage in interaction with others, to formulate their own concerns and programs, and to act to realize them. This unfortunate mass of the population is the proper target of the mass media and a public education system focused on obedience and training in needed skills, including the skill of repeating patriotic slogans on timely occasions." – **Noam Chomsky** (b.1928), American writer, linguist, dissident.

From <http://www.newspeakdictionary.com/ot-quotes.html#QMedia>; and <http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com>

Reading – Popular Culture: A Background

Popular culture studies is the scholarly investigation* of expressive forms widely disseminated* in society. These materials include, but are not restricted to* products of mass media such as television, film, print, and recording. Thus, popular culture studies may focus on media genres such as situation comedies (sitcoms), film noir, best-selling novels, or rap music. Other, non-mediated aspects of popular culture would include such things as clothing styles, fads*, holidays and celebrations, amusement parks, both amateur and professional sports, and so forth.

Ideally, the study of these or any other popular materials should be done holistically*, viewing them both aesthetically and also within the social and cultural contexts in which the materials are created, disseminated, interpreted, and used. In this way the study of popular culture involves the use of methodologies from both the humanities and the social sciences in the effort to interpret expressive cultural forms, specifically those that are widely disseminated in a group (that is, those that are popular) as part of dynamic social intercourse.

Popular culture scholars study these created, expressive, and artistic materials as their primary data, much as literary scholars take the novel or the sonnet as their primary data. In this way popular culture studies is within the tradition of the humanities. However, popular culture studies differs from traditional humanities studies in that it recognizes* the existence of alternative systems of aesthetics which guide* the creation of popular materials and the evaluation of those materials by an audience.

Popular culture scholars apply this principle to popular arts such as television programs, popular films, popular music, best-selling novels, genre fiction such as mysteries or romances, and so on. The popular culture scholar situates the discussion of any aspect of popular culture within the larger context of the meanings and values of the society within which it exists.

The Discipline of Popular Culture

A fundamental debate exists over the essential nature of popular materials themselves. Some scholars equate* the materials of popular culture with the mass media, and therefore maintain* that popular culture did not exist prior to* the Industrial Revolution, the rise of a large middle-class segment* of society, and the simultaneous* rise of rapid printing. Other scholars use the term "popular culture" to refer to the expressive materials of any group, large or small, pre-industrial or post-industrial.

One might argue that the study of popular culture as a scholarly discipline can be traced back* at least as far as the writings of Giambattista Vico, who anticipated* today's cultural studies programs as he attempted* to discover the 'principles of humanity' in his *New Science* of 1775. However, most scholars agree that the last fifteen to twenty years have seen a significant movement among scholars of all backgrounds toward an awareness of* a large body of cultural expression that has fallen outside of most research prior to that time.

Adapted from <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/popc/bkgcmd.html>. Bowling Green State University, Department of Popular Culture.

Task 2 – Discuss and answer the following questions:

- 1) According to the definition of popular culture in the article (in bold), what are some forms of pop culture in the Czech Republic?
- 2) Can studying the fashion trends of 14-year-old girls tell us something important about society?
- 3) Can you give some examples of 'primary data' in this context?

Task 3 – Icons are symbols or typical images of a nation's or a society's popular culture.

Discuss the following questions:

- 1) What are some of the icons of your country?
- 2) What are some of the icons of the following countries?

France:

England:

United States:

Russia:

Germany:

- 3) Do you notice any patterns* or similarities?

Some Opinions on Pop Culture vs. High/Low Culture

Task 4 – Read the following quotes and then discuss the questions below.

“Low culture is based on marketing. Low culture is what you sell the masses, and they rush out and buy the latest CD...because everybody's doing it. And in two years' time it's in the dustbin - and quite rightly so.” - *Brian Sewell, Art critic.*

“I think the difference between high and popular culture is becoming increasingly difficult to define... I'm sure that Damien Hirst's shark, if it can be preserved in formaldehyde for another twenty, thirty years will stand the test of time because it was a ground breaking piece of art; nobody had done that before.”
- *Kim Evans, Executive Director, Arts Council.*

“The definition of what is high and what is popular culture has changed enormously over the last twenty, thirty years.” - *Mark Thompson, Director of Television, BBC.*

“I think there's a lot of nonsense talked about distinctions between high culture and so-called* popular culture.” - *Chris Smith MP, Culture Secretary.*

- 1) How do you understand the terms ‘pop culture’, ‘high culture’, and ‘low culture’?
- 2) Do you make a distinction* between these terms?
- 3) Do you think that the terms ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture are out of date and elitist*?
- 4) Can you think of some examples of ‘popular culture’?
- 5) Can you give some examples where high and low culture overlap?

Task 5 – Answer the following questions: use your imagination!

- 1) Which person from popular culture would you most like to meet? Why?
- 2) What would you talk about with them?
- 3) Do you think that what you would discuss could change your opinion of them?
- 4) What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of fame?
- 5) If you could be any celebrity just for a day, who would you be?

Task 6 – Complete the text using the following words:

colourfully immortalize* developed paintings railways drawings chalk
buildings boundaries development continued associated scribbling* trains

Graffiti

People have been (1)_____ on walls as long as they have been building them. The term ‘Graffiti’ comes from the Italian verb *graffiare*, meaning ‘to scratch.’ It covers a wide range of public inscriptions, from the early (2)_____ on the walls of caves at Lascaux to drawings quickly drawn on contemporary bathroom stalls. The late-twentieth century has seen the (3)_____ of a market for graffiti as an art form, although the majority of graffiti remains unsolicited* and anonymous.

Historically, graffiti has been used mainly as a form of personal communication. One of the earliest uses developed in the United States among hobos* who rode the (4)_____ across the country in the first decades of the twentieth century. The complicated symbolic language of these transients was scratched* in (5)_____ on fence posts to communicate the receptivity of the townspeople to future travellers. During the 1940s the exterior walls of (6)_____ in Hispanic communities in post-war Los Angeles were increasingly decorated with a kind of marking subsequently called ‘old school.’ Before the advent of spray paint, these black-and-white drawings were drawn in marker to communicate the (7)_____ of neighbourhoods controlled by rival gangs.

Although graffiti (8)_____ during the 1960s, it was not until the 1970s that it started attracting public attention as a serious social problem. The visibility of graffiti had steadily been increasing, as graffiti artists started using spray paint to cover larger areas more (9)_____ than was previously possible. By the mid-1970s the main target of graffiti artists had become the (10)_____ of the New York City subway system. Throughout the decade, the city of New York fought a battle with enterprising artists. Even as the transit authorities struggled to remove the colourful paintings, New York graffiti was achieving international recognition as part of a hip-hop culture that included rap music and break dancing. Several films (11)_____ this period, including *Wild Style* (1982) and *Beat Street* (1984).

Eventually, a coating* was developed that inhibited* the application of spray paint onto the surfaces of trains, and in the 1980s a booming* art market (12)_____ an interest in graffiti marketed as an art form. Several galleries in Manhattan began specializing in graffiti art, and former graffiti artists such as Keith Haring, who got his start doing quick marker (13)_____ in his characteristic outline style, and Jean-Michel Basquiat became instant celebrities, with works selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars. The public fascination with graffiti faded by the end of the decade, as graffiti became increasingly (14)_____ with the activity of urban gangs.

Adapted from a text by Deborah Broderson in *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*, Gale Group, 2002.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What are your personal reactions to graffiti?
- 2) Is graffiti an acceptable form of expression?
- 3) Do you think that graffiti is an art form?
- 4) Can you think of any examples of graffiti in your environment?
- 5) Does the Czech Republic have a problem with graffiti?
- 6) Should it be encouraged, controlled, or strictly prohibited?

Popular Film

Task 7 – Complete the table below using some of the following adjectives:

Moving/Tear-jerking: producing strong emotions, often of sadness

Violent: includes lots of scenes with fighting and death

Powerful: has a big effect on our emotions

Gripping: exciting and very interesting

Slow: boring

(Remember, you can use quite/really/very/extremely to alter the strength of the adjective e.g. quite moving, really/very moving, extremely moving).

Film	Type of film	Subtitled or dubbed?	Description of film
1. <i>The Godfather</i>	Action, thriller		Violent, gripping, exciting, fast-moving
2.			
3.			
4.			

Task 8 – Now discuss the following questions:

- 1) What are some of your favourite films?
- 2) What type of film do you usually prefer?
- 3) Is there any type of film that you refuse to see?
- 4) Who are some of your favourite actors? Which films have they been in? Try to provide a detailed description of this person.

Adapted from: English Vocabulary in Use, Stuart Redman, CUP 1997, pp. 148-149.

Grammar – Practice with Adverbs

Task 9 - Find the mistakes, if there are any.

1. The films at the festival will be simultaneous translated.
2. All the guests were warmly welcomed at the reception.
3. The study was done in a holistically way.
4. The material of his suit feels very smoothly.
5. Although the children were enthusiastically, the new fad was received cold by the parents.
6. He stayed up all night and worked hardly to get his project done on time.
7. The singer's voice sounded very clearly at last night's concert.
8. She looked beautifully in her designer evening dress.
9. The audience responded very appreciatively.
10. Although he looked hardly at the photo, he hardly recognized anyone.
11. The musician played so romantic on his guitar.
12. He looked at the project from a scholarly and aesthetically point of view.
13. Some people in the audience were so noisy that I could hard understand what the actors were saying.
14. Let's go straight home after the performance ends.
15. I nearly missed the beginning of the play.
16. As an actor he is high appreciated.
17. I have a month subscription to the theatre.

Vocabulary

1.	*perpetual	ustavičný
2.	*to permit; to allow	dovolit
3.	*to lack something	nemít, postrádat
4.	*scholarly investigation	vědecké, teoretické bádání
5.	*to disseminate	rozšířit se
6.	*to be restricted to	být omezen na
7.	*fad, trend	trend, pobláznění
8.	*holistic	holistický, zdůrazňující celostnost, pokládající celek za něco vyššího než souhrn součástí
9.	*recognize	uznat
10.	*to guide something	vést k něčemu
11.	*to equate	vyrovnat, uvést na stejnou úroveň
12.	*to maintain	udržet
13.	*prior to, before	před (časově)
14.	*segment of society	část společnosti
15.	*simultaneous	simultánní, souběžný
16.	*to trace back	mít původ, vysledovat do minulosti
17.	*to anticipate, predict	předvídat
18.	*to attempt, try	pokusit se
19.	*awareness of	vědomí čeho
20.	*pattern	model, ideál, vzor, vzorek, typ
21.	*so-called	takzvaný (ironicky)
22.	*to make a distinction	rozlišovat
23.	*elitist	elitářský
24.	to immortalize	učinit nesmrtelným, zvěčnit
25.	to scribble	čmárat
26.	to scratch	škrabat, škrábat

27.	unsolicited	nevyžádaný
28.	hobo	tulák, tramp
29.	coating	vrstva, nátěr
30.	to inhibit	zbrzdit
31.	to boom	prosperovat
32.	to fade	vytratit se, vymizet

Word bank

1. fine arts	krásná umění
2. performing arts	reprodukční umění
3. visual arts	vizuální umění
4. art lover	milovník umění
5. high brow	vysoká kultura
6. low brow	nízká kultura
7. to give a performance	podat výkon
8. exhibition of paintings	výstava obrazů
9. to publish a new edition	vydat novou edici
10. to release a musical	uvést muzikál
11. to show (at the theatre etc.)	dávat něco (v divadle atd.)
12. to be on (at the theatre etc.)	být na programu (v divadle atd.)
13. box office success	trhák
14. blockbuster	trhák
15. sold out performance	vyprodané představení
16. subscription to the theatre	předplatné do divadla
17. matinee	odpolední představení
18. to applaud	tleskat
19. critic	kritik
20. review	recenze, kritika
21. rave reviews	výborná, nadšená kritika
22. bad reviews	špatná kritika