

Academic Year/course: 2021/22

## 27842 - Popular Culture in English-Speaking Countries

### Syllabus Information

**Academic Year:** 2021/22

**Subject:** 27842 - Popular Culture in English-Speaking Countries

**Faculty / School:** 103 - Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

**Degree:** 416 - Degree in English

**ECTS:** 6.0

**Year:** 4 and 3

**Semester:** First semester

**Subject Type:** Optional

**Module:**

### 1. General information

### 2. Learning goals

### 3. Assessment (1st and 2nd call)

### 4. Methodology, learning tasks, syllabus and resources

#### 4.1. Methodological overview

The methodology followed in this course is oriented towards the achievement of the learning objectives. All class activities will be complemented by individual tutorials that form part of the face-to-face teaching and that can also be carried out by e-mail or via Moodle. The learning process is based on the student's active participation and encourages the accurate planning of their autonomous work, which includes the writing of a compulsory individual essay. The learning process fosters the development of the student's analytical skills and critical thinking, reasoning and argumentation, and involves the necessary reading of some texts and viewing of some films in the light of the recommended bibliography and the in-class teaching and theoretical approaches.

English will be the language used in all class activities, tutorials, essays, and exams, and the literary texts and films are expected to be read/viewed in their original English version.

#### 4.2. Learning tasks

This is a 6 ECTS course organized as follows:

- **Lectures** (1.2 ECTS: 30 hours). Sessions consisting of lectures pertaining the topics under scrutiny as well as classes on theory and methodology (which include, for each unit, the study of historical and cultural context, the main features of popular culture and its different manifestations, the introduction to authors, texts and films, and presentation of relevant critical and methodological approaches) will be based on PowerPoint presentations and other materials available at the course Moodle platform. Student participation will be encouraged in these sessions by means of relevant questioning and feedback activities.
- **Practice sessions** (1.2 ECTS: 30 hours). Part of every average session in class consists of the critical analysis of the compulsory literary texts and films. Previous reading on the part of students is essential for the correct development of the course, which may include guided commentary with the whole class, small group discussion, or the writing of brief individual or group analyses to be presented orally. Debates, questions, brainstorming or role

play for character analysis may also be used in order to activate theoretical and practical knowledge, reinforce basic concepts and develop synthesis, analysis, interpreting, relating, and expressing skills as well as attitudes such as cooperation and valuation of the work of others.

- **Individual tutorials** (0.1 ECTS: 2.5 hours). Tutorial attendance (alternatively, e-mail consultations or participation on the Moodle platform) is compulsory for the guided writing of essays, and optional for the rest of issues concerning the course.
- **Autonomous work and study.** (2.8 ECTS: 70 hours; or 3.4 ECTS: 85 hours for students who do not write the optional essay)
  - Compulsory readings and films, use of secondary sources and Moodle-unizar materials. The students' autonomous activities include revising the concepts studied in class, reading and analyzing the compulsory texts, viewing and analyzing the films, reading secondary sources, and visiting the Moodle page on a regular basis.
  - Elaboration of a 1,000 to 2,000 word essay (0.6 ECTS: 15 hours), optional. By the 8th week of the semester, students will decide on a topic that will be agreed upon by the teacher. They will work on the development of a draft which should include a working hypothesis, a clear outline, and the selected bibliography, which will be presented to the teacher no later than the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> week. The elaborated final essay will be handed in by the day of the exam.
- **Assessment tasks** (0.1 ECTS: 2.5 hours).
  - It will consist on a global exam which comprises 70% of final marks. The exam will take place on the date assigned by the Faculty officials. Students will have 2.5 hours at the most (in case of sitting both parts of the exam).
  - Essay: 30% of final marks. Students can chose to sit the final exam for an extra hour and elaborate on a topic proposed by the teacher as part of the global evaluation or prepare and deliver an optional written essay prior to the beginning of the final exam, in compliance with the schedule and deadlines provided above.

### 4.3. Syllabus

This course will address the following topics:

#### Topic 1. What is Popular Culture?

1. An Introduction and overview of the course:
  - Culture, popular culture, high versus low culture, mass culture, and globalization.
  - A short history of popular culture
  - Theoretical approaches to popular culture
2. Cultures in the post-WW2 period: Fuzziness and hybridity in contemporary manifestations of popular culture
3. Ideologies from the past, ideologies for the future:
  1. Classic vs. contemporary science: Religion, Humanism, and the Posthuman paradigm. McLuhan's Extensions of Man
  2. Urbanization, culture, mass production, and the simulacrum
4. Art manifestations in Popular Culture:
  1. Art Deco, Pop Art, Pop Music
  2. Minimalism and the limits of realism

#### Topic 2. The New Frontier and the popular hero

1. From the graphic novel to the big screen: politics, society and the new superhero
2. Advertising: fashion, banality, and consumerism
3. Fiction, Film, and TV: from the nerd to the zombie.

#### Topic 3. A bleak future for popular fiction and cinema

1. Posthumanity, posthumanism, and Sci-Fi:
  1. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the *Übermensch* and the eternal return.
  2. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, the machine made flesh
  3. William Gibson's 'The Gernsback Continuum' and 'The Belonging Kind,' patterns of dystopia

#### Topic 4. Manliness, gender definition, and simulation

1. Violence, games, contact sports, and video-games:
  1. Traditional games: Scottish prowess, Maori dancing, Hong-Kong Kung Fu, and American football.

2. The copy of a copy of a copy: Reality and simulacrum in the Wachowski's *The Matrix*
3. Misogyny, fascism, space-monkeys and the new lost generation: Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* or the copy that becomes reality.

#### **Topic 5. Living to what end? Apocalypse and surrogation in popular manifestations of culture**

1. Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism and the commodification of culture and being
2. Classic pre-apocalypse: *Mad Max* and the Australian wilderness
3. Minimalist post-apocalypse: McCarthy's *The Road*
4. The vanquished human. Ultimate enslavement and the present culture of surrogation.

#### **Compulsory readings and films:**

- Gibson, William. 1986. *Burning Chrome*. Selected short stories
- Jameson, Frederic. 1991. *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Excerpts.
- Kubrick, Stanley. 1968. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (film).
- MacCabe, Colin. 1986. "Defining popular culture" in *High culture/low culture: analysing popular television and film*. Manchester UP., pp 1-10.
- McCarthy, Cormac. 2006. *The Road* (novel) / and John Hillcoat, Dir. *The Road*, 2009 (film).
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw Hill. Excerpts.
- Miller, George. 1979. *Mad Max* (film). Excerpts.
- Palahniuk, Chuck. 1996. *Fight Club* (novel) / and David Fincher. 1999. *Fight Club* (film).
- Scott, Ridley. 1982. *Blade Runner* (film).
- Storey, John. 2006. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Excerpts.

**Complementary sources and other materials:** Excerpts from longer works and other limited material will be shown in class sessions and be available at the Moodle page.

#### **4.4. Course planning and calendar**

Classes (lectures and critical analysis of the compulsory texts and films) will take place in two weekly sessions, following the official schedule. Three to four weeks will be necessary for the presentation and discussion of each unit in the program. Topic 1 will take a little longer.

Individual tutorials will follow the schedule provided by the teacher, taking into account the students' class hours.

Students can write an optional individual essay guided by the teacher taking into account the following key dates:

- Deadline for notifying the choice of subject: last tutorial date of week 8.
- Deadline for handling the detailed draft and the bibliography: last tutorial date of week 13.
- Deadline for handling the final essay: right before the beginning of the final exam both by email (Word file) and as a written copy, signed by the student.

The final global exam includes the handling of the optional essay and will take place in the official date assigned by the University.