

Instructor: Bülgözdi Imola bulgozdi.imola@gmail.com	Office hours: Tue 15 -16 and Wed 11-12
American Popular Culture AN3027MA	North American Studies MA Year 1
Thu 8 – 9.40	Rm 55

“Fiction reveals truths that reality obscures.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Course description: The aim of this course is to give an introduction to the theoretical background of Popular Culture and put theory into practice through the discussion of typical pop culture genres, such as chick lit, science fiction, the western, cyberpunk, television series or fandom studies. The position of pop culture in academia and everyday life will also be considered, as well as its changing evaluation ranging from escapist trash to serious works reflecting on the postmodern condition and pivotal questions of the 21st century, such as gender, race, ethnicity and identity construction.

Classwork, materials, and assignments will be managed via Google Classroom.

Evaluation: based on

- end-term paper (25%)
- take-home essay of 2500 - 2800 words (35%) **deadline Dec 20**
- 10-15 minute oral presentation (choice of topic, visuals, delivery) (15%)
- three short home assignments to be handed in at specified times (25%)

More than 3 absences will result in no mark, just like plagiarism!

Students should be advised that the quality of their written and spoken linguistic performance will count significantly toward their final mark.

Under the current regulations, the course is planned to be a face-to-face, classroom-based course, HOWEVER, if due to the pandemic we have to switch to remote teaching, PLEASE be prepared to use the University of Debrecen E-Learning system at elearning.unideb.hu. In case of such a switch, the course evaluation methods (e.g., for class participation) and grading rules may be subject to change. You will be notified of these changes by the instructor if needed.

It is our shared responsibility to observe effective hygiene rules and follow the relevant government, university and faculty regulations regarding the pandemic. If you become ill or experience any symptoms, please stay home to protect others from infection.

Schedule

Sep 10 Introduction: What is Popular Culture?

- Sep 17 High and low culture? The mass culture debate
Romeo + Juliet. (1996) dir. Baz Luhrmann
Gnomeo and Juliet. (2011) dir. Kelly Asbury
 Strinati, Chapter 1, pp. 1-19
- Sep 24 Mass culture and Americanization?
 Strinati, Chapter 1, pp. 19-45
home assignment: classics recycled in pop culture (10%)
- Oct 1 Definitions of Popular Culture and popular genres
 Storey, “Chapter 1: What Is Popular Culture?”
- Oct 8 The rise of Chick Lit
 McMillan, *Waiting to Exhale*
 Guerrero, “‘Sistahs Are Doin’ It for Themselves’: Chick Lit in Black and White”
- Oct 15 Disney, Pop Art, advertising and other iconic images
 Fiske, “Chapter 1: Understanding Popular Culture”
home assignment: iconic images (5%)
- Oct 22 Fandom Studies
 Fiske, John. “Chapter 6: Popular Discrimination.”
home assignment: pick 2 important ideas from set text and hand in a 200-250-word reflection on each (10%)
- Oct 29 The Postmodern take on Pop Culture
 Palahniuk, *Fight Club*
Fight Club. (1999) dir. David Fincher
- Nov 5 Consultation week
- Nov 12 Sci-fi and Cyberpunk
 Le Guin, “Coming of Age in Karhide”
 Gibson, “Johnny Mnemonic” and “Burning Chrome”
- Nov 19 Masculinity and the Western
 Crane, “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky”
The Searchers (1956) dir. John Ford
Into the Wild (2007) dir. Sean Penn
- Nov 26 Presentation class
- Dec 3 Presentation class

Dec 10 End-term paper

Evaluation in exam period

Set texts

Crane, Stephen. "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." (1898)
Gibson, William. "Johnny Mnemonic." *Burning Chrome*. (1986) London: Grafton Books, 1988. 14-36.
---. "Burning Chrome." *Burning Chrome*. (1986) London: Grafton Books, 1988. 195-220.
Le Guin, Ursula K. "Coming of Age in Karhide." *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories*. New York & London: HarperCollins, 2002.
McMillan, Terry. *Waiting to Exhale*. New York: New American Library, 1992.
Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*. London: Vintage Books, 2006.

Films

Fight Club. Dir. David Fincher. Perf. Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, Helena Bonham-Carter. 20th Century Fox, 1999.
Gnomeo and Juliet. Dir. Kelly Asbury. Perf. James McAvoy, Emily Blunt, Maggie Smith. Touchstone Pictures, 2011. Animation.
Into the Wild. Dir. Sean Penn. Perf. Emile Hirsch, Vince Vaughn, Catherine Keener. Paramount Vantage, 2007.
Romeo + Juliet. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Perf. Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes. 20th Century Fox, 1996.
The Searchers. Dir. John Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter, Vera Miles. Warner Bros, 1956.

Theoretical background

Fiske, John. "Chapter 1: Understanding Popular Culture." *Reading the Popular*. 1989. London & New York: Routledge, 2003. 1-12.
Fiske, John. "Chapter 6: Popular Discrimination." *Understanding Popular Culture*. 1989. London & New York: Routledge, 1994. 129-158.
Guerrero, Lisa A. "'Sistahs Are Doin' It for Themselves': Chick Lit in Black and White." *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*. Eds. Suzanne Ferris & Mallory Young. New York & London: Routledge, 2006. 87-101.
Storey, John. "Chapter 1: What Is Popular Culture?" *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 5th ed. London & New York: Pearson Longman, 2009. 1-15.
Strinati, Dominic. "Chapter 1: Mass Culture and Popular Culture." *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2005. 1-45.

Recommended reading

The course pack contains the books mentioned in the theoretical background, feel free to browse them, they will also be of help when picking a home essay topic.