

English 2250G: Introduction to Cultural Studies

Class: Wednesday, 6-9, KB-K103

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Course Description

“You are the screen,” writes Marshall McLuhan, a famous Canadian media theorist. With the advent and proliferation of iPhones, Androids, and Blackberry’s, for instance, McLuhan’s remark about the relationship between you and technology is especially relevant today. What kind of world do we live in where the line between screen and self is blurred, like in the above film still from David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983)? This is but one area of cultural studies that we will think about. With an interest in exploring the very nature of culture – what exists, who makes it, and why – this course introduces a number of theoretical frameworks to help us analyze films, fashion, music, commercials, memes, social media, video games, food, pets, and others products and practices. Turning to the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, then, we will think through works associated with the Birmingham School, Frankfurt School, feminism, postmodernism, and others in order to address questions ranging from how cultural production and consumption affect identity to how we coexist with more than just the human. By the end of the course, you will have a thorough understanding of the key concepts of cultural studies, and you will be able to employ them in your studies and, hopefully, beyond.

Texts

Custom Course Reader (available at Western's bookstore)

Screenings: *Holy Motors*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Wall-E*, and, most likely, the short film *Plastic Bag*

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Assignments	Value	Date	Length
Attendance and Participation	10%	Cumulative*	N/A
Short Analysis	15%	Week 4	1000 words
Midterm	15%	Week 6	50 minutes
Proposal & Research Essay	5% 20%	Week 9 Week 13	1000 words 2000-2500 words
Final Exam	35%	TBA	3 hours

*In addition to classroom participation, you need weekly comments on Owl (*see Attendance and Participation*).

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- Understand the nature of cultural studies as a discipline;
- Analyze a wide range of cultural texts from many different critical perspectives;
- Apply a new vocabulary of concepts to everyday life;
- Employ critical thinking within an interdisciplinary framework;
- Navigate and interpret the often contradictory meanings of cultural texts through a number of strategies and practices; and
- Engage in an expansive critical discourse and mode of thinking that knows how to take into consideration questions of aesthetics, ethics, politics, and identity while launching specifically logical arguments with supporting evidence.

Evaluation

Attendance and Participation: If you want to successfully complete this course, then come to class. I will take attendance. Listening to lecture, taking notes, reading texts, asking questions, observing and engaging in discussion—these activities will enhance your learning experience.

In addition to classroom participation, you will need to post comments in the forum on Owl. Once a week, after every class, a question or conversational topic will be posted. You have an entire week to respond with a posting that is around 100-250 words. Anything submitted after the week is up (i.e. 11:59 p.m. on a Wednesday night) will not be accepted. Please think of this as an opportunity to engage with your peers rather than

just another task. This will go towards your participation mark (remember: it is not just about the number of posts, but the quality of posts, too.)

Short Analysis: The short analysis is 4 pages long or 1000 words and it is due during week 4. This assignment requires you to select a text – preferably a cultural practice, meme, or advertisement – and offer a close, semiotic reading of it. The purpose of the short analysis is to exercise your critical skills in preparation for the research essay.

Midterm: The midterm is worth 15% of your mark; it takes place on week 6. Your midterm will be comprised of multiple-choice questions testing your reading comprehension and a short answer portion not unlike the short analysis.

Proposal: The proposal is 4 pages long or 1000 words and it is due during week 9. The proposal is broken down into the following component parts: a 3-page proposal and a 1 page annotated bibliography. Your proposal will answer the *what*, *how*, and *why* of your project and, importantly, indicate 2-3 useful sources for it. More details about this will be handed out on week 5, if not sooner. *After you submit your proposal, you will set an appointment with me to discuss your research essay; this meeting will count towards your participation mark (you will sign up in class).*

Research Essay: The research essay is 8-10 pages long or 2000-2500 words and it is due during week 13. For your research essay, you will engage the arguments in one of the critical readings covered in the course. In doing this, you will deploy a strong, critical point of view through a reading of a text. You can pick any text on the syllabus to write about. Alternatively, you can select any text that is not on the syllabus (e.g. music video, ad, novel, TV show, etc.), but you have to discuss it with me first. Responding to one of the many theoretical essays in the course, your critical interpretation of a work will have little to no errors, grammatically, logically, or otherwise. More details about this will be handed out on week 5, if not sooner.

Final Exam: Your final exam will be cumulative, and it is worth 35% of your grade. The Registrar will schedule it. I will let you know the format of your final exam during week 13.

Electronic Submission of Assignments

Both the short analysis and the research essay are to be electronically submitted via Owl's Essay Drop Box (.doc or .rtf files). Once marked, both assignments will be uploaded and returned with comments. Please read the comments. Feedback is crucial for developing your writing and critical skills. My positive and constructive criticism includes an attention to argumentation, method, logic, structure, exemplification, grammar, and style.

Turnitin.com

In addition to electronically submitting your assignments via Owl, I request that you also submit them to Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com reviews textual similarity through a plagiarism detection software that is licensed to Western University.

Electronic Devices

Technology is, of course, permitted, but keep in mind that disruptions affect not only your learning experience, but your peers' learning experience, too. I cannot always police you, so please police yourself.

Late Policy

Papers submitted after the due date will receive a penalty of 2% per day late, including weekends (I will not accept anything over a week late unless you get academic accommodations; this means that you can lose a maximum of 14% if your work is a week late). If you need an extension, then please email me 48 hours in advance of the assignment's due date. Extensions may be granted for assignments depending on the seriousness of your case. If you have a medical or personal emergency, then email me as soon as possible and we will negotiate an alternative due date (keep in mind that academic accommodation may be required in this situation). Remember: anything that is worth 10% or more requires you to see academic accommodations if you so choose.

Email Policy

If you have questions or concerns throughout the course, then please email me or your TA to address them or to setup a meeting. While I will try to get back to you as soon as possible, please allow a 24-hour response period. Also, keep in mind that emails are not always checked, let alone answered, during evenings or weekends.

Owl

In addition to hosting your posts, Owl will provide a number of services and resources:

- PowerPoint slides from lecture
- Close reading samples
- MLA links and examples
- Clips for course related media (e.g. interviews, adaptations)
- "Collect Worlds" Blog
- Announcements (e.g. marks, cancellations)

University Policies

Prerequisites: At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036 E or both of English 1027F/G or 1028F/G, or permission from the Department.

Academic Accommodation: Students missing participation components, assignments, performances, or the exam due to medical issues – anything worth 10% or more – can seek academic accommodation. To do so students must consult their Academic Counselling office in their home faculty and submit documentation to their faculty’s Office of the Dean.

Accessibility: For information on accessibility at Western please visit <http://accessibility.uwo.ca/>

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else’s work. An act of fraud and misrepresentation, plagiarism is an academic offence with strict penalties such as a zero on an assignment or failure of the course.

Students must write their assignments in their own words. If you reference or quote someone else’s words from a book, article, the Internet, or any other source, then you need to include not only a parenthetical citation, but also a Works Cited page according to MLA guidelines.

Final Grades: For all English courses, students must pass the term work *and* the exam to pass the course. If a student’s average between the term work and the exam is 50%, then she or he will receive a default grade of 48%.

Schedule*

Class	Lectures	Readings	Assignments
Week 1 (Jan. 7)	Introduction & Culture and Mythology	Saussure (from <i>Course in General Linguistics</i>); Barthes, “Myth Today”	Short Analysis distributed
Week 2 (Jan. 14)	Barthes, Bourdieu, & 33 1/3’s <i>Let’s Talk About Love</i>	Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”	
Week 3 (Jan. 21)	Bourdieu & the Music Video	N/A	
Week 4 (Jan. 28)	Holy Culture Industry Screening: <i>Holy Motors</i> (pt. 1)	Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry”	Due: Short Analysis
Week 5 (Feb. 4)	Aura Screening: <i>Holy Motors</i> (pt. 2)	Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”	Proposal and Research Essay specifics distributed
Week 6 (Feb. 11)	Hey, Ideology	Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus”	Midterm

READING WEEK (Feb. 16-20)			
Week 7 (Feb. 25)	Sex and Gender	Butler, “Bodily Inscriptions/Performative Subversions”; Halberstam, “Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance”	
Week 8 (Mar. 4)	Queering Culture pt. 1	Sedgwick, “Introduction” and “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles”	
Week 9 (Mar. 11)	Queering Culture pt. 2 Screening: <i>Being John Malkovich</i>	N/A	Due: Proposal
Week 10 (Mar. 18)	<i>Being John Malkovich</i> & Staying Healthy!	Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended”	
Week 11 (Mar. 25)	Eating & Wasting Culture pt. 1 Screening: <i>Wall-E</i>	TBA (via OWL)	
Week 12 (Apr. 1)	Eating & Wasting Culture pt. 2 Screening: <i>Wall-E</i>	TBA (via OWL)	
Week 13 (Apr. 8)	Exam Review	N/A	Due: Research Essay

*This syllabus’ schedule, assignment weighting, and procedures are subject to change if any unexpected issues arise.