



**University of Cyprus
Department of English Studies
Course Syllabus
ENG 239 – INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL CRITICISM
(5 ECTS)**

Instructor: Tziovanis Georgakis (PhD)
Email: georgakis.tziovanis@ucy.ac.cy
Course Days: Mondays and Thursdays
Course Time: 15:00 – 16:30
Course Venue: ΧΩΔ01 107
Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays: 12:30 – 14:30
Office Hours Venue: M105A

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course introduces and familiarizes students with the theoretical and methodological concerns of cultural theory and criticism. It investigates the disciplinary boundaries of various trends within the contemporary terrain of comparative cultural criticism and seeks to locate possible intellectual disruptions of those trends within their historical development. In particular, the course explores Marx's philosophy as a critique of political, social, and economic constructions of culture and its subsequent adaptation by other seminal thinkers. It additionally contextualizes the intricate relationships between class, race, gender, and agency and examines inevitable complications when the aforementioned 'concepts' are performed by social actors of different sorts, marginal or not. All philosophical readings assigned to the course are juxtaposed with pieces of cinematic artwork and literature so that students develop critical thinking skills through a combination of distinct but infused mediums.

Core Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will:

- understand the multiple and difficult issues that trouble social theorists.
- participate in different debates that take place within the field of cultural criticism.
- be able to deduce meaning from complex philosophical texts.
- interpret and analyze works of cinema and literature.
- be in a position to distinguish, evaluate, and construct arguments.
- develop an attentive eye to the marginal and the unconsidered.
- foster the necessary critical and analytical skills that each university student needs to utilize in every academic setting.

Bibliography

(Included in the Course Pack)

- Adorno, Theodor W. 'The Schema of Mass Culture.' *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. Bernstein, J. M. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. 61-97. Print.
- Butler, Judith. 'Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire.' *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Doring, Simon. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 340-53. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. 'The Negro and Language.' Trans. Markmann, Charles Lam. *Black Skin, White*



- Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1986. 17-40. Print.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 'Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc.' *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*. Ed. Forgacs, David. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 189-221. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies.' *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. During, Simon. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 97-109. Print.
- Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 'Manifesto of the Communist Party.' Trans. Milligan, Martin. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988. 203-43. Print.

(To be purchased by students)

Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.

(To be viewed in class)

Lang, Fritz. *Metropolis*. 118 minutes. Germany: Universum-Film AG, 1927. Film.

Class Preparation and Participation

The class will be run seminar-style, by which the class instructor will do some lecturing. At the same time, students are expected to participate actively in class discussions. This format will not work unless all students are well-prepared for the class. It is very important that students engage discussions and readings so that the whole classroom participates in a dialectic exchange of thoughts and ideas. If students are having difficulty understanding parts of the class material, they should inform the instructor. In general, the instructor will not summarize the readings for the students' sake. The readings are for the students to discuss during the discussion portion of the class. The instructor will merely supplement the assigned readings. Part of class preparation also includes taking detailed notes, noting down pressing questions, understanding and evaluating arguments, responding to complex arguments, forming new arguments, and thinking critically about one's own positions. This class will thrive only if all students take responsibility to participate. In addition, the instructor expects that all seminar members will treat each other with the respect necessary for a philosophical discussion. Students should be courteous to the other students in the classroom and avoid disrupting their right to a positive learning environment. To this end, students should not arrive late to class or leave early, engage in side conversations, or pack their belongings before class has concluded. Students should not leave their mobile phones on, use text messaging on their phones, or surf the Internet during class. If students are using a laptop in class, they must sit near the front so as not to distract other students. If students anticipate arriving late to class or need to leave early from class, or are expecting a call (if they need to be reachable for an emergency), they should let the instructor know before class begins.

Attendance Policy

Attending class is extremely important. Missing any class, coming in late, or leaving early will detract from the final grade. If students miss a class, they are still responsible for finding out what was delivered in class that day and if there were any assignments given by the course instructor. Class success is determined by the students' active presence and by how much work they are willing to put in. Students are urged to make a commitment to the coursework for themselves and for their colleagues.



Course Assignments and Assessment

Midterm examination: 40%
Final examination: 50%
Attendance and participation: 10%

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to the following: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, bribes, examination by proxy, grade tampering, and submission of non-original works. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic grade of 0. Information about plagiarism and citation rules will be provided during the semester. If students have any questions or are unsure of what constitutes academic dishonesty, they should ask the course instructor.

Office Hours and Availability

If students have any questions or wish to discuss course progression, course material, general philosophy or literature questions, or just to talk, the course instructor is available to them on Mondays and Thursdays from 12:30–14:30. If deemed necessary, they can schedule an appointment. The instructor strongly encourages all students to stop by and introduce themselves. Before students send an email with a query, they can come to office hours first. If they are unable to attend the designated office hours, they can email the instructor at georgakis.tziovanis@ucy.ac.cy. The instructor will do everything possible to respond to any questions, comments, or issues within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on the weekends.

Course Schedule

A. THEORY, PRACTICE, AND THE CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

Week 1: Foundations of Cultural Criticism

Weekly reading:

Hall, Stuart. 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies.' *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. During, Simon. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 97-109. Print.

Topics to be covered:

Birth of cultural studies; discursive formations within cultural criticism and their objects of study; Marxist critical practice; dialogic approach to theory; theoretical work as political practice and interruption; the production of organic intellectuals; feminism; the question of race; postcolonial studies; encounters with structuralism and poststructuralism.

Week 2-3: The Communist Manifesto

Weekly reading:

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 'Manifesto of the Communist Party.' Trans. Milligan, Martin. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988. 203-43. Print.

Topics to be covered:

Communism; bourgeois and proletariat; class revolution; relations of production and exchange; exploitation; industrial revolution; the interests of the immense majority; abolishment of individual property; augmentation of capital; capital as collective product; abolition of bourgeois family structure, education, nationality, and religion; critical utopian socialism.



Week 4-5: Hegemony and Force

Weekly reading:

Gramsci, Antonio. 'Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc.' *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*. Ed. Forgacs, David. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 189-221. Print.

Topics to be covered:

Structure and superstructure; the real dialectical process; the concept of 'historical bloc'; ethico-political history and hegemony; political ideologies and the process of becoming; validity of ideologies; relations of force; theory and practice of 'economism'; the concept of 'organic crisis.'

Week 6-7: Mass Culture

Weekly reading:

Adorno, Theodor W. 'The Schema of Mass Culture.' *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. Bernstein, J. M. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. 61-97. Print.

Topics to be covered:

Domination of mass culture; the positivistic spirit and its inherent contradictions; cultural self-reflection and the representation of reality; the contemporary state of art; mechanical reproduction and betrayal of expectation; temporality of the work of art; information, advertising, and curiosity; participation and modes of behaviour.

Week 8: Film Viewing: *Metropolis* (1927)

MIDTERM EXAMINATION: 40%

B. ISSUES OF RACE AND GENDER IN LITERATURE

Week 9-10: Race and Language

Weekly reading:

Fanon, Frantz. 'The Negro and Language.' Trans. Markmann, Charles Lam. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1986. 17-40. Print.

Topics to be covered:

Language as a cultural tool; language and colonial subjugation; death of local cultural originality; the Negro and his civilizing process; local dialects vs. official languages; the Prospero complex and the psychology of colonialism; speech as existence for the other; language and the process of de-colonization; the many faces of neo-colonialism.

Week 11-12: Gender and Sexuality

Weekly reading:

Butler, Judith. 'Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire.' *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. During, Simon. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 340-53. Print.

Topics to be covered:

Contemporary feminist interests; gender vs. sex; women and the category of 'women-ness'; gender roles as cultural performances; heterosexuality and normativity in social regimes; cultural negative codings; the body and same-sex desires; deconstruction as performative act; identity talk and language as a discourse of difference.

Week 13: Cultural Criticism and Literature

Weekly reading:

Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.

Topics to be covered:



Gender and race inequality; sexuality as a cultural expression; the 'Negro slang' and its place in mass culture; the African American experience of displacement and dwelling; alienation, homelessness, and material poverty; utopia, dystopia, and disappointment; the ethics of human closeness and empathy; memory, imagination, and nostalgia.

Exam Week: Passing the Final Exam
FINAL EXAMINATION: 50%