

Course Description and Logistics

Contacts / Hours

Lectures and tutorials:

Tuesdays :30—12:30, Talbot College, Room 303
Thursdays :30—11:30, University College, Room 222

Instructor: Calin Mihailescu

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【office hours】 Tue 12:30 - 2:30 [UC 361]
Wed 2:30 - 3:30 [UC 361]
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Course Description

【▼】 We will explore together a wide variety of phenomena characteristic of late 20th century culture. The main postmodern (PoMo) buzzwords—fragmentation, irony, pastiche, playfulness, kitsch & camp, “anything goes,” cool, pop, hypertext, etc.—will be turned inside out as they will be put to use in the fun and heavy work of interpretation. Literature, film, theory, visual arts, architecture, music, TV shows and computer games & habits will be discussed in the attempt of gaining a decently comprehensive understanding of what has been going on recently in world culture, and of how we are determined by these phenomena. The dynamics of a constantly reshaped connection between knowledge, sensation, language and the social contexts of the human body will be closely examined. Our main literary diet will include bits by Barthelme,

Brooke-Rose, Burroughs, Coupland, Coetzee, DeLillo and Pelevin, along with films by Almodóvar and Spike Jonze, artwork by Francis Bacon, Warhol and others, architectural projects by Gehry, Liebeskind, etc. Most theoretical and critical texts referred to in class are to be found in Thomas Docherty's *Postmodernism: a reader*.

Course Content and Aims

[▼] The course aims to introduce students to major literary, plastic, filmic and musical works from the second half of the 20th century, a period loosely defined as postmodern. While the material is predominantly North American, constant reference to other cultural areas (Western Europe and Russia in particular) will be made. We will discuss some of the recurring features of postmodern art and thought – fragmentation, playfulness, parody, pastiche, writing-as-reading, the cynicism of comfort, and “anything goes-ism,” – their intersections, and their relationships with high modernism and the avant-garde, along with elements of technology theory and contemporary political thought. The course is taught in English. All literary and theoretical works will be available in English translation.

Course Prerequisites

[▼] Prerequisite: CLC 1020, or permission of the Department.

Please Note: You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites (or have special permission from your Dean to waive the prerequisite) and that you have not taken an anti-requisite course. If you are not eligible for the course, you may be removed from it at any time, and it will be deleted from your record. In addition, you will receive no adjustment to your fees. These decisions cannot be appealed.

Course Guidelines

[▼] Students are expected to attend all lectures and to complete all required readings before coming to class. Class presentations (which are not to be longer than 15 minutes) should be articulate, informative and provide personal analytic touch. Essays must be submitted within the deadline.

Absenteeism

[▼] Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counselling

office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

UWO's Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>).

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

<https://studentservices.uwo.ca> under the Medical Documentation heading.

Plagiarism

[▼] “Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate, and by proper referencing such as footnotes and citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses plagiarism checking software. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.”

Course Requirements

[▼] A. Class Participation (20%)

As part of the grade for participation, students are expected to participate in class discussions and complete possible on-the-spot quizzes.

Notes on attendance: Attendance will be taken at the *beginning* of each class. If you have a legitimate reason to miss class (sickness, family crisis, religious holiday), please contact me beforehand so that we can arrange for you to make up any missed material. Missed classes and/or lack of class participation can add up and adversely affect your class participation grade.

[▼] B. Class Presentation (15%)

The presentation will be 10 to 15 minutes long. You are not required to hand in a written version of your presentation. It will be delivered orally and will be followed by class discussion.

[▼] C. Paper (25%)

A final paper of 6 to 8 pages will be due in class by December 3rd. The paper is to be written on a topic of your choice. All students are expected to have their topics approved during office hours. It would be a good idea to begin thinking about the final paper as early as possible in the semester.

[▼] D. Final Exam (40%)

The final exam will consist of identification and essay questions.

Syllabus

Class Schedule

[▼] **September 10 – Introduction**

A prelude to PoMo: after high modernism and the avant-garde, humankind is taken over by 'technique'.

Course administration matters will also be discussed.

[▼] **September 15 – PoMo atmosphere**

Reading: Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," in *Postmodernism: a reader* (henceforth *PR*), pp. 146-156

Slide show: visual art and architecture (Magritte, Escher, Rothko, Warhol; Jencks, Venturi, Rem Koolhaas, Frank Gehry)

[▼] **September 17 – PoMo atmosphere (2)**

Readings: Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is postmodernism?" and "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'," *PR*: 38-50

Musical interlude: (from) Luciano Berio, John Cage, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Janis Joplin, Keith Jarrett

[▼] **September 22 – PoMo & PoCo**

J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 1987

[▼] **September 24 – PoMo & PoCo (2)**

Reading: Simon During, "Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today," *PR* 448-462

[▼] **September 29 – Keep reading!**

Christine Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 1992 (together with a comprehensive introduction into the problem of writing reading into itself, which would involve a discussion of four early PoMo texts: Unamuno's *Fog (Niebla)*, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*").

[▼] **October 1 – Keep reading readings!**

Brooke-Rose's *Textermination*

Reading: Meaghan Morris, "Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism," *PR* 368-89

[▼] **October 6 – Tutorial: Brooke-Rose and quotations**

- [▼] **October 8 – Left and Left (1)**
Donald Barthelme, *Forty Stories*, 1987
Reading: Jean Baudrillard, “The Evil Demons of Images and the Precession of Simulacra,” *PR* 194-200
- [▼] **October 13 – Left and Left (2)**
Barthelme (and Cortázar & Butor)
- [▼] **October 15 – Left and Left (3)**
Barthelme (and John Barth & Guy Davenport)
- [▼] **October 20 – TV life-support systems**
Victor Pelevin, *Homo sapiens*, 2002
- [▼] **October 22 – TV life-support systems (2)**
Pelevin
Reading: Nelly Richard, “Postmodernism and Periphery,” *PR* 463-71
- [▼] **October 27 – From high on (1)**
William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 1959
- [▼] **October 29 – From high on (2)**
Burroughs, trans-gender and morphs
- [▼] **November 3 – From high on (3)**
Altered forms of being: Burroughs and Francis Bacon
Readings: Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *PR* 62-92; further reading: Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture”
- [▼] **November 5 – Product consumed**
Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1986
- [▼] **November 10 – Tutorial: PoMo Quiz**
- [▼] **November 12 – Product consumed (2)**
- [▼] **November 17 – The scattered subject**
Synecdoche, New York (Kaufman, 2008; film showing in class)

- [▼] **November 19 – PoMo Diagrams**
Review of main concepts
- [▼] **November 24 – The end-tail of the PoMo storm**
Douglas Coupland, *Generation X*, 1991
- [▼] **November 26 – The end-tail of the PoMo storm (2)**
Generation X and the following
- [▼] **December 1 – The changing gears of guilt**
Pedro Almodóvar's *All about my mother* (1999; film showing in class)
- [▼] **December 3 – The changing gears of guilt (2)**
Papers are due.
- [▼] **December 8 – Bungee jumping to conclusions.**

Resources

Copies of the following required texts are available at the UWO bookstore, in the CLC/2273 section.

Donald Barthelme, *Forty Stories* (Penguin), 1987
Christine Brooke-Rose, *Textermination* (New Directions), 1992
William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (Grove), 1966
J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (Viking), 1987
D. Coupland, *Generation X: tales for an accelerated culture* (St. Martin's), 1991
Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Penguin), 1986
Victor Pelevin, *Homo zapiens* (Viking), 2002
Thomas Docherty, ed., *Postmodernism: a reader* (Columbia UP), 1993

Other materials, distributed in class, will include magazines such as: JUXTAPOZ, Surface, TOKION, Inked, THRASHER MAGAZINE, NVISION Magazine, and Z!NK.

Learning Outcomes

[▼] By the end of this course the students will have become acquainted with some of the major pronouncements of postmodern art and thought. Increased critical awareness, the ability to connect aesthetic phenomena with their social, political and technological environments, and a more flexible usage of postmodern discursive features will be expected. Students will improve their ability to express themselves on these and other related topics, both orally (through in-class presentations) and in writing (in the form of essays).