



Society and Politics in Popular Culture
Erasmus+

Teacher: **dr Wojciech Lewandowski** (Institute of European Studies, University of Warsaw)

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Academic Year: 2014/2015

Summer term: 8 h

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

DURATION

Days and hours:

- **Monday (4 May), 15:15-16:45, room P22**
- **Tuesday (5 May), 17:00-18:30, room U35**
- **Wednesday (6 May), 15:15-16:45, room U41**
- **Thursday (7 May), 9:45-11:15, room U42**

Place: **Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University**

EVALUATION

- 1. Presence.**
- 2. 1500 word coursework essay, word limit including footnotes, excluding bibliography.**
- 3. Class participation.**

COURSE AIMS/OBJECTIVES

The course is aimed at discussing selected aspects of the way socio-political phenomena are presented in popular culture with special focus on international relations. Specific social and political problems of contemporary world will be discussed in class along with the analysis of their coverage in selected pieces of popular culture.

COURSE SCHEDULE/CONTENT

1. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES IN POPULAR CULTURE. INTRODUCTION

Problems:

1. Cultural studies – basic terminology.
2. Popular culture – definitions and interpretations.
3. Popular culture vs mass culture.
4. High culture vs low culture.
5. Politics and society in popular culture – introduction.

Essential Readings:

- Storey, John. 2009. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction*. Pearson, Longman, 1-16.
- Zoonen, Liesbet van. “A Day at the Zoo: Political Communication, Pigs and Popular Culture.” *Media, Culture & Society* 20 (1998): 183-200.

Further Readings:

- Barker, Chris. 2002. *Making Sense of Cultural Studies. Central Problems and Critical Debates*. London-Thousand Oaks-New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Fiske, John. 1995. *Understanding Popular Culture*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Strinati, Dominic. 2000. *An introduction to studying popular culture*. London: Routledge.

2. POPULAR CULTURE AND POLITICAL DISOBEDIENCE: THEORETICAL, MORAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS

Problems:

1. The nature of political obligation.
2. Political disobedience – theoretical and moral aspects.
3. From protest through civil disobedience to violence – forms of political disobedience.
4. Popular culture and political disobedience.
5. Individual vs totalitarianism – anatomy of disobedience in Alan Moore’s and David Lloyd’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta*.

Popular Culture Texts:

- Moore, Alan (w.), and David Lloyd (a). 2008. *V for Vendetta*. New York: DC Comics.
- V for Vendetta*. Directed by James McTeigue. Performed by Natalie Portman, Hugo Weaving, Stephen Rea, John Hurt. Warner Bros. Pictures. 2006. Film.

Essential Readings:

- Di Liddo, Annalisa. 2009. *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, p. 111-125.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

- Keller, James R. 2008. *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche. A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel and Film*. Jefferson, NC, London: McFarland & Company, Inc., chap. 1-2.
- Morreall John, "The Justifiability of Violent Civil Disobedience." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976): 35-47.

Further Readings:

- Bentouhami, Hourya. "Civil Disobedience from Thoreau to Transnational Mobilizations: The Global Challenge." *Essays in Philosophy* 8 (2007), <http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip/vol8/iss2/3>.
- Bedau, Hugo Adam, ed. *Civil Disobedience in Focus*, London, New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Kowalski, Dean A. "R for Revolution. Hobbes and Locke on Social Contracts and Scarlett Carsons." In: *Homer Simpson Goes to Wasington. American Politics through Popular Culture*, edited by Joseph J. Foy, 19-40. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008.
- Sanders, John T., and Jan Narveson, eds. *For and Against the State: New Philosophical Readings*, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1996.

3. WAR AND WAR ON TERRORISM IN POPULAR CULTURE

Problems:

1. War as a theme in popular culture.
2. War movies – between fiction and reality.
3. From propaganda to – war in comic book panels.
4. War trauma in Rogers Waters' and Pink Floyd's songs.
5. War on terrorism – its moral and practical aspects as portrayed in popular culture.

Popular Culture Texts:

24. Created by Joel Surnow, Robert Cochran. Performend by Kiefer Sutherland, Elisha Cuthbert, Dennis Haysbert. Imagine Television, 20th Century Fox Television. . 2001-2010. TV series.
- A Bridge Too Far*. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Performend by Dirk Bogarde, James Caan, Michael Caine, Sean Connery. United Artists and Joseph E. Levine Productions, 1977. Film
- Ennis, Garth (w), Peter Snejberg (a). "Dear Billy." In *The Complete Battlefields. Volume 2*, Garth Ennis (w), Peter Snejberg (a). Mt. Laurel: Dynamite Entertainment, 2009.
- Saving Private Ryan*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Performend by Tom Hanks, Edward Burns, Matt Damon. DreamWorks Pictures, Paramount Pictures. 1998. Film.
- Spiegelman, Art (w&a). 2011. *The Complete Maus. 25th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Vaughan, Brian K. (w), and Niko Henrichon(a). 2008. *Pride of Baghdad*. New York: DC Comics.
- Waters, Roger. *The Wall* (1979), *The Final Cut* (1983), *Radio K.A.O.S.* (1987), *Amused to Death* (1992). Albums' lyrics. Online.

Essential Readings:

- Kendrik, James. "Representing the Unrepresentable: 9/11 on Film and Television." In: *Why We Fought. America's Wars in Film and History*, edited by. Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor, 511-528. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky 2008.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

- Scott, Cord. 2007. "Written in Red, White, and Blue: A Comparison of Comic Book Propaganda from World War II and September 11." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40: 325-343.
- Weed, Jennifer Hart, "President Palmer and the Invasion of China. The Beginning of a Just War." In: *24 and Philosophy. The World According to Jack*, edited by Jennifer Hart Weed, Richard Davis, Ronald Weed, 57-66. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
- O'Mathuna, Donal P. "The Ethics of Torture in 24: Shockingly Banal." in: *24 and Philosophy. The World According to Jack*, edited by Jennifer Hart Weed, Richard Davis, Ronald Weed, 91-104. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Further Readings:

- Hurka, Thomas. 2005. "Proportionality in the Morality of War." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33: 34-66.
- Rollins, Peter C. "Using Popular Culture to Study the Vietnam War." In: *Why We Fought. America's Wars in Film and History*, edited by Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor, 367-398. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky 2008.
- Strömberg, Fredrik. 2010. *Comic Art Propaganda: A Graphic History*. Lewes: ILEX.
- Wright, Bradford W. 2003. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

4. HIDDEN REALITY: CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES AND POPULAR CULTURE

Problems:

1. Conspiracy theories – its nature and history.
2. Conspiracy theories and their popularity in contemporary popular culture.
3. Blood stained monarchy – secret identity of Jack the Ripper.
4. Governmental X-Files: The case of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Popular Culture Texts:

- Azzarello, Brian (w)., and J.G. Jones (a). "Comedian." in *Before Watchmen: Comedian, Rorschach*, Brian Azzarello (w), J.G. Jones, Lee Bemejo (a), DC Comics: New York, 2013.
- Brown, Dan. 2009. *The Da Vinci Code*, New York: Anchor Books.
- Moore, Alan (w)., and Eddie Campbell (a). 2004. *From Hell. Being a Melodrama in Sixteen Part*. Marietta: Top Shelf Productions.
- Newman, Paul (w)., and John Tartaglione (a). August-October, 1964. *John F. Kennedy: 1917-1963*. New York: Dell Publishing
- Straczynski, J. Michael (w)., and Adam Hughes (a). "Dr. Manhattan." in *Before Watchmen: Night Owl, Dr. Manhattan*, J. Michael Straczynski (w), Andy Kubert, Adam Hughes, Eduardo Risso (a), DC Comics: New York, 2013.
- The X-Files*. Created by Chris Carter. Performed by David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Robert Patrick. Ten Thirteen Productions, 20th Television, 20th Century Fox Television. 1993-2002. TV series.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

Wein, Len (w), and Jae Lee (a). "Ozymandias." in *Before Watchmen: Ozymandias*, Crimson Corsair, Len Wein, John Higgins (w), Jae Lee, John Higgins, Steve Rude (a), DC Comics: New York, 2013.

Essential Readings:

Dawe, Ian. "JFK: Comic Book Hero." Seqart Organization, November 22, 2013, accessed: March 17, 2014, <http://seqart.org/magazine/35074/jfk-comic-book-hero/>.

Dawe, Ian. "Lee Harvey Oswald: A Comics Villain?" Seqart Organization, November 20, 2013, accessed: March 17, 2014, <http://seqart.org/magazine/34564/lee-harvey-oswald-a-comics-villain/>.

Parnet, Herbert S. "The Kennedy Myth and American Politics." *The History Teacher* 1 (1990): 31-39.

Rudmin, Floyd. "Conspiracy Theory As Naive Deconstructive History." newdemocracyworld.org, April 2003, accessed: April 12, 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20080517055713/http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/conspiracy.htm>.

Further Readings:

Bratich, Jack Z. 2008. *Conspiracy Panics. Political Rationality and Popular Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lewis, John E. 2012. *The Mammoth Book of Conspiracies*. London: Constable & Robinson.

LECTURER

Wojciech Lewandowski, Ph. D. – Assistant Professor at the Institute of European Studies at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science at the University of Warsaw. Co-founder and coordinator of British Socio-Political Studies Research Group BRITANNIA. Guest Lecturer at American Studies Center, Warsaw University. Host of a music radio show “Art.Rock Universe”.

Scientific interests

- Cultural interpretations of social and political processes;
- British and American culture (special focus: graphic novels and comic books, counterculture of the 60’s, progressive rock, horror literature);
- History of Political Thought: American transcendentalism, anarchism; ethics and politics;
- Transatlantic relations (especially cultural and political relations).

Selected publications

- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2013. “Scotsmen versus Englishmen: Ancient Antagonisms as Depicted in a Comic Book.” In *Facets of Scottish Identity*, edited by Aniela Korzeniowska, Izabela Szymańska, 145-152. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2013. “Brytyjski komiks polityczny. Zarys problematyki.” [British Political Comic Books. Basic Problems] *Przegląd Europejski* 4(30): 108-119.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2013. “Soft Power jako narzędzie geopolityki. Znaczenie kultury popularnej.” [Soft Power as a Strategic Instrument in Geopolitics. The Role of Popular Culture] In *Polityka zagraniczna państw Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej na przełomie XX i XXI wieku. Ujęcie geopolityczne* [The Foreign Policy of the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe at the Turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries. The Geopolitical Perspective], edited by Józef Tymanowski, 59-69. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych UW.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2012. “Kultura brytyjska.” [British Culture] In *System polityczny Zjednoczonego Królestwa* [Political System of the United Kingdom], edited by Przemysław Biskup, Małgorzata Kaczorowska, 109-129. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2011. *Wolność i samotność. Myśl społeczno-polityczna amerykańskiego transcendentalizmu*. [Freedom and Loneliness. Social and Political Thought of American Transcendentalism] Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych UW.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech., and Franciszek Gołembski, Przemysław Biskup, Małgorzata Kaczorowska, eds. 2011. *Polityka brytyjska po wyborach parlamentarnych 2010. Analiza wybranych problemów*. [British Politics after the General Election 2010: Analysis of Selected Problems] Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2010. “Pudel, mąż agentki i niedoszły zbawca Brytanii. Obraz Tony’ego Blaira w wybranych tekstach kultury popularnej.” [Poodle, Agent’s Husband and Would-Be Saviour of Britain: Tony Blair’s Depiction in Selected Texts of Popular Culture] In *Era Blaira i Browna. Wybrane problemy polityczne rządów Partii Pracy w Zjednoczonym Królestwie 1997-2010* [Blair’s and Brown’s Era. Select Political Problems of Labour Government in the United Kingdom 1997–2010], edited by Franciszek Gołembski, Przemysław Biskup, Małgorzata Kaczorowska, 67-79. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2009. “Poleganie na sobie i obywatelskie nieposłuszeństwo jako formy odpowiedzialności w myśli politycznej amerykańskiego transcendentalizmu.” [Self-Reliance and Civil Disobedience as Forms of Social Responsibility in the Political Thought of American Transcendentalism] *Civitas Hominibus. Rocznik filozoficzno-polityczny* 1(4): 17-30.
- Lewandowski, Wojciech. 2007/2008. “The Dark Side of Walden.” *The Americanist. Warsaw Journal for the Study of United States* 24(American Popular Culture as Import and Export): 117-132.