

WRTG 3018 – WRITING ABOUT POPULAR CULTURE: BLACK MIRROR



Instructor: Nathan Meyer

Term: Spring, 2021

Office Hours: M/W/F 11:00-11:50 and 2:00-2:50 (and by appointment)

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Textbook: Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory: Fourth edition, by Peter Barry (available on Amazon.com). Additional readings will be posted/linked to on Canvas.

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Overview:

Popular culture is often a reflection of society's conversations, values, and actions and a metric by which we may assess hopes and fears of its consumers; WRTG 3018 acts as an introduction to the critical analysis of popular culture by providing students with the theory, skills, and practice to critically examine their mass entertainment environment. To accomplish this WRTG 3018's primary text is Black Mirror (2011-present), a British science fiction TV series inspired by The Twilight Zone (1959-64), which examines controversial topics surrounding emerging technologies and how their unanticipated consequences impact modern culture and social structures. Specifically, the aims of WRTG 3018 are to:

- Analyze Black Mirror's visual, thematic, semiotic, and cinematographic elements.
- Survey paradigms of mass culture and cultural/literary theory and how they intersect with the greater world through the primary/secondary texts.
- Assess Black Mirror from different theoretical perspectives.
- Develop a range of arguments on the text's themes and support them with research, logical, and critical analysis.
- Engage primary/secondary texts to develop analytic frameworks and become active critics and contributors to popular culture discourse.

Please note:

- Students are strongly advised to take WRTG 2010 or equivalent prior to this course.
- This course engages with controversial subjects and content some students may find disturbing.

To accomplish these objectives, students will complete a series of written, multimodal, and presentation

assignments.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

This is a student-centered course and instruction will incorporate current methodologies including flipped classroom models, spiral learning, and content and language integrated learning. Typical class meetings will include discussions, debates, group activities, peer teaching, and interactive workshops in addition to traditional lectures. Technology and online resources will be integrated into the learning process and students are encouraged to bring and use laptops/tablets/smartphones when appropriate (see course policies). Outside class sessions announcements, homework, project descriptions, and other resources will be found on Canvas.

III. EVALUATION AND GRADING SCALE

- **Minor assignments, activities, & quizzes (10%):** Students receive credit for work/quizzes completed in/out of class.
- **Student group episode analysis and discussion (20%):** Student groups will develop and present a comprehensive analysis (creation, interpretation, connection) of a *Black Mirror* episode based on their knowledge and research on film/cultural theory and their connection to current events.
- **Terms and theory exam (15%):** Students will be assessed with a comprehensive exam of the critical theory and film-making terms discussed in the course.
- **Theoretical analysis essay (30%) and literature review (5%):** Students will further research one theory of popular culture to generate a compelling reading of a Black Mirror episode through this lens (accompanied by a literature review).
- **Episode pitch (10%):** Students use their knowledge, creativity, and visual media skills to develop an idea for an original episode of Black Mirror which they will pitch to the class in the form of a presentation.
- **Episode pitch thematic analysis essay (10%):** Students will write a brief essay explaining how their pitched episode story makes a thematically appropriate, timely, meaningful, and rhetorically important contribution to the Black Mirror series.
- **Poor participation and preparation reduction (up to -5%):** The University of Utah Asia Campus expects all students to be ready and engaged throughout the entire class time and a student's lack of preparation or participation negatively impacts the effectiveness of individual class sections and the course overall for both students and instructors. It is therefore expected that all students:
 - attend every class session as scheduled (on time and prepared),
 - always and readily contribute to discussions by raising thoughtful questions and providing their own comments and building on others' ideas, and
 - work productively on all in-class activities (either individual, small group, or entire class work).

In the event this course is conducted online at any point in the semester, all students will follow these guidelines:

- Students' faces must be fully visible and properly illuminated during the entire class.

- Students must have backup technology (ie. phone, tablet, spare computer) ready to log into Zoom in the event a microphone or camera malfunctions.
- Students must be located in a place where their surroundings will not disrupt the class (no walking, driving, public transportation, hallways, workplaces, cafes, etc.).
- Students will not engage in conversations or other interactions with people outside the class either verbally or via text messaging.
- Students will not be watching videos, engaging in social media, or other non-class related uses of technology during class.
- Students will need to make sure pets and cohabitants do not disrupt the class.

Students whose participation and preparation do not meet these general standards will have their final grade reduced by up to 5%.

Please note: Detailed assignment descriptions will be presented in class and/or posted on Canvas.

Grading scale:

94-100	A	80-83	B-	67-69	D+
90-93	A-	77-79	C+	64-66	D
87-89	B+	74-76	C	60-63	D-
84-86	B	70-73	C-	Below 60	E

IV. COURSE POLICIES

1. Professionalism: Students are required to maintain the norms of conduct consistent with the standards and expectations of academic and professional environments including:
 - Being respectful and courteous at all times to all class members/instructor and contributing to a positive, productive academic environment.
 - Tolerance for opposing points of view, allowing others to express their thoughts freely, and contributing to discussions.
 - Demonstrate academic curiosity by engaging with controversial material and a willingness to take issues beyond superficial understandings.
2. Preparation: It is vital that students come to class having done all preparatory work and equipped with the tools and materials necessary to fully engage with the learning objective. Failure to come prepared may result in the student being marked absent.
3. Technology: ***EXCLUSIVELY FOR CLASS USE*** You are encouraged to bring your smartphones, laptops, and other personal devices to class on a daily basis which may **only be used for class-related educational activities**. Students who use their personal tech devices for other than permitted educational use may be asked to leave the class and marked absent.
4. Attendance: Students are required to attend all classes from the first day of the semester. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class and any student arriving more than 5mins

late (without prior written approval) will be marked absent. If you have missed a class it is your responsibility to consult a classmate or Canvas for information about the missed class and/or homework. The following are the results of being absent:

- Missed classwork assignments and points cannot be made up.
- Late homework (or homework not handed in by the student) will not be accepted.
- Students can miss **1 class** without absences impacting their grade. After the first absence, the student will receive a 1/3 grade deduction for each class missed until the 3rd class. Example: a student who has a B+ and misses two classes will have their grade reduced to a B. If the student misses three classes their grade will be reduced to a B-. Upon the 4th missed class, the student will receive an E for the course.

Additionally, a student may be counted as absent for the following reasons:

- Not participating in class activities or being unprepared for class.
- Sleeping during class time.
- Speaking a language other than English in class.
- Leaving class for more than 5 minutes.
- Coming to class without the necessary materials.
- IVC UPDATES (in the event the course is conducted online):
 - not having cameras and microphones working properly,
 - not having cameras on and faces fully visible and illuminated throughout the entire class,
 - being located in a place where surroundings disrupt the class (ie. walking, driving, public transportation, hallways, workplaces, cafes, etc.),
 - engaging in conversations or other interactions with people outside the class either verbally or via text messaging,
 - watching videos, engaging in social media, or other non-class related uses of technology during class.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This policy applies to both excused and unexcused absences; they are considered the same in this course. This policy does not apply to UAC's COVID-19 absence policy.

5. Homework: All homework assignments support a set learning objective therefore no late work will be accepted. You will receive a zero if you do not submit or present your work on time. To make sure all homework is properly recorded students **must** follow this standard format unless otherwise noted by the instructor:
 - Assignments are typed (unless otherwise noted).
 - Font: Calibri (11 point) or Times New Roman (12 point).
 - Margins: 1-inch all around.
 - Double space text, no extra space before or after paragraphs.
 - Paper: A-4 paper.
 - Multiple pages must be stapled.
 - **All assignments uploaded to Canvas need to be saved as Word docs or PDFs.**

Note: Failure to follow these format requirements will result in no credit for the assignment.

6. Due dates: All classwork and minor assignments are designed to meet a set learning objective on a set schedule. Keep in mind that:
 - Missed classwork and homework cannot be made up or accepted.
 - There is no extra credit offered to individual students in this course.
 - Late submissions for major assessments have their total score reduced by 20%. After 48 hours late major assignments will be marked a 0.
7. Assignment Grades: All submitted assignments are considered the student's final work product and a reflection of the student's best efforts. It is critical for students to seek help/assistance from the instructor during class or office hours appointments and the UAC Writing Center **prior** to the due date.
8. E-mail: Contact with the instructor outside of class is done via email. When sending an email please note the following:
 - This course maintains a level of casual professionalism so it is necessary to use accepted formats when sending e-mails. If you are unsure about correct formatting there are many websites on the subject to cross-reference for best practices.
 - Every effort will be made to answer your email within 1 business day. However, please keep in mind that the semester can become busy so if you have not heard from your instructor after 1 business day feel free to send a follow-up email.
 - Please keep in mind email is only read/responded to between the hours of 8am-5pm Monday-Friday (holidays excluded).
9. Canvas: The course's homework assignments, project prompts, and other content will be posted to Canvas. It is your responsibility to check for new postings regularly to stay current with the course's progression.
10. Recording and Documentation: At times the instructor may make visual records of certain lessons or class activities to be used exclusively for evaluation, teacher training aids, and other professional purposes.
11. Office hours: Students are always encouraged to ask questions and seek assistance during class meetings. For additional, personalized help on assignments and other issues students are warmly welcomed to meet with their instructor during office hours. Appointments are necessary, will usually be scheduled in +/-30min blocks, and take place during stated office hours (or alternative time depending on the instructor's availability). To schedule an appointment contact the instructor via email at least 24 hours in advance.
12. English: The course's language of instruction is English and it is necessary to speak only in English during class. To accomplish this our course will adhere to the UAC language policy:
"The University of Utah Asia campus is committed to providing and fostering an environment that is safe and free from prohibited discrimination. The following language policy applies to all academic and administrative units of the University and to all members of the University community, including faculty, staff, and students. English

is recognized as the official language of instruction, assessment, and curriculum. In addition, English is the official language for all administrative and business related matters of the University.”

If a student communicates with others in a language other than English the instructor reserves the right to ask the student to leave class and mark him/her absent.

V. UNIVERSITY POLICIES

1. Attendance: The University expects regular attendance at all class meetings. Instructors must communicate any particular attendance requirements of the course to students in writing on or before the first class meeting. Students are responsible for acquainting themselves with and satisfying the entire range of academic objectives and requirements as defined by the instructor.
2. The Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Utah Asia Campus seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the UAC Office of the Dean of Students, 804 Utah Building, 032-626-6002. The UAC Office of the Dean of Students will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the UAC Office of the Dean of Students.
3. Addressing Sexual Misconduct: Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the UAC Office of the Dean of Students, 804 Utah Building, 032-626-6002. For support and confidential consultation, contact the UAC Mental Health Counseling, 3052 Multi-complex Building, 032-626-6142.
4. Student Code: All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting as outlined in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Policy 6-400 of the University Regulations Library (<http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html>).
5. Instruction and Evaluation, including Accommodation Policy:
<http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php>
6. Wellness Statement: Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed

and thrive at the University of Utah Asia Campus. For helpful resources, contact the UAC Mental Health Counseling Center; asiacampus.utah.edu/mental-health-counseling-center/; 032-626-6142.

7. Language Policy: The University of Utah Asia campus is committed to providing and fostering an environment that is safe and free from prohibited discrimination. The following language policy applies to all academic and administrative units of the University and to all members of the University community, including faculty, staff, and students. English is recognized as the official language of instruction, assessment, and curriculum. In addition, English is the official language for all administrative and business related matters of the University.

8. Academic Misconduct: “Academic misconduct” includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one’s work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct. Please refer to the University’s Student Code (<http://www.sa.utah.edu/code.html>) for regulations concerning academic honesty.
 1. “Cheating” involves the unauthorized possession or use of information, materials, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise, or the unauthorized communication with another person during such an exercise. Common examples of cheating include, but are not limited to, copying from another student’s examination, submitting work for an in-class exam that has been prepared in advance, violating rules governing the administration of exams, having another person take an exam, altering one’s work after the work has been returned and before resubmitting it, or violating any rules relating to academic conduct of a course or program.
 2. Misrepresenting one’s work includes, but is not limited to, representing material prepared by another as one’s own work, or submitting the same work in more than one course without prior permission of both faculty members.
 3. “Plagiarism” means the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person’s work in, or as a basis for, one’s own work offered for academic consideration or credit or for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one’s own, without attribution, any other individual’s words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.
 4. “Fabrication” or “falsification” includes reporting experiments or measurements or statistical analyses never performed; manipulating or altering data or other manifestations of research to achieve a desired result; falsifying or misrepresenting background information, credentials or other academically relevant information; or selective reporting, including the deliberate suppression of conflicting or unwanted

data. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data and/or results.

5. Consequences:

- An “E” for the test/assignment or the course
- Possible expulsion from the university
- The student may be required to appear before the Academic Misconduct Committee (please see <http://www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-10.html>)

VI. FINAL NOTES

1. The instructor reserves the right to make alterations to the syllabus and course calendar if needed.
2. Emergencies will happen. Should an emergency occur it is your responsibility to notify the instructor in a timely and appropriate manner in the case reasonable accommodation is permissible according to university policies and the instructor’s discretion.

VII. PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

WRTG 3018 Preliminary Schedule		
<i>Note: This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change. Students are responsible for regularly checking Canvas for assignments, materials, due dates, and other important course information.</i>		
Week	Topics:	Major due dates:
Part 1: Theory		
Week 1: Course Intro		
2/22- 2/28	<u>Activity:</u> Intro to course <u>Creation:</u> Sound in cinema	
Week 2: No Class		
3/1- 3/7	No class	
Week 3: Reader Response Theory		
3/8- 3/14	<u>Primary text:</u> “The National Anthem” <u>Creation:</u> Mise-en-scene	

	<p><u>Interpretation</u>: Reader-response theory</p> <p><u>Connection</u>: Social media and politics, role of the press, public power in democracies, voyeurism vs. art, etc.</p>	
Week 4: Feminist & Marxist Theory		
3/15- 3/21	<p><u>Primary text</u>: "Nosedive"</p> <p><u>Creation</u>: Shots sizes</p> <p><u>Interpretation</u>: Marxist theory</p> <p><u>Connection</u>: Social credit scores, gender and social media, class and economics, etc.</p>	
Week 5: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism Theory		
3/22- 3/28	<p><u>Primary text</u>: "USS Callister"</p> <p><u>Creation</u>: Framing</p> <p><u>Interpretation</u>: New historicism and cultural materialism theory</p> <p><u>Connection</u>: Toxic fandom, incels and online sexism, gender/race in pop culture, gaming culture, cultural nostalgia, etc.</p>	
Week 6: Lesbian/Gay Theory		
3/29- 3/30	<p><u>Primary text</u>: "San Junipero"</p> <p><u>Creation</u>: Depth of field</p> <p><u>Interpretation</u>: Feminist theory, lesbian and gay theory</p> <p><u>Connection</u>: Sexism and homophobia, online/virtual relationships, death and class differences, 'price' of immortality, etc.</p>	
Week 7: Postcolonial Criticism		
4/5- 4/11	<p><u>Primary text</u>: "Men Against Fire"</p> <p><u>Creation</u>: Angles</p> <p><u>Interpretation</u>: Postcolonial theory</p> <p><u>Connection</u>: Propaganda, hate speech, the role of technology social media in ethnic conflict, etc.</p>	
Part 2: Practice		
Week 8: Student Group Episode Analysis Work and Consultation Week		
4/12- 4/18	<u>Activity</u> : Student group episode analysis work day	
Week 9: Student Group Episode Analysis		

4/19- 4/25	<u>Activity</u> : Episode analysis (creation, interpretation, connection) – student group 1	
Week 10: Student Group Episode Analysis (cont.)		
4/26- 5/2	<u>Activity</u> : Episode analysis (creation, interpretation, connection) – student group 2	
Week 11: No Class (Reading Day)		
5/3- 5/9	No class (Reading Day)	
Week 12: Terms and Theory Review/Essay Outlines and Drafts		
5/10- 5/16	<u>Exam</u> : Terms and Theory Review <u>Activity</u> : Theoretical Analysis Essay drafting and consultation week.	Lit review
Week 13: Theoretical Analysis Essay Peer Review Workshop and Consultations		
5/17- 5/23	<u>Activity</u> : Theoretical Analysis Essay working draft peer workshop and consultations.	
Week 14: Pitch an Episode Projects Work and Consultations Week		
5/24- 5/30	<u>Activity</u> : Pitch an Episode Presentations draft/work/individual consultation week.	Analysis Essay
Week 15: Pitch and Episode Presentations		
5/31- 6/6	<u>Activity</u> : Pitch an Episode Presentations and final comments.	