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From Nietzsche to Superman

Popular Culture and the Posthuman

(3 credits)
Fall 2018

01:195:396:01 (INDEX: 13865) and 01:470:390:01 (INDEX: 16391)
T/Th 2:50-4:10pm, AB 4052

Course Description:

This course examines the gradual transformation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (overman) into the American *Superman* heroes of our contemporary culture. The superman myth and his many variations suggest a possible transgression of the classic division of mind and body, society and nature, human and animal, organic and technological and opens up the way to the post-human. We will analyze the impact of the fantasy of transgression on gender studies, animal studies, and contemporary media technologies: Hitler's racist Aryan superman and its dismantling in modern art; female versions of Superman such as Wonder Woman or the "material girl" in contemporary pop culture; the figure of the "outlaw" as negative version of the great hero; or the figure of the "idiot" who is bound to be great despite his lack of authority. We will also consider visions of transgression from human to animal and from human to inhuman (the cyborg) and their theoretical underpinnings.

Readings include: Hugo Ball, *Tenderenda*; Bertolt Brecht, *Baal*; Franz Kafka, "Metamorphosis" and "Report to An Academy," Heinrich von Kleist, *Penthesilea*; Jerry Siegel/Schuster, *The Superman Chronicles*. Films: *The Great Dictator*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Wonder Woman*. With theoretical support from Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Vicki Hearne, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Avital Ronell. Soundtrack provided by: David Bowie, Marlene Dietrich, Bob Dylan, Lady Gaga, Madonna, and Kurt Weill.

Taught in English. **Prerequisites:** None.

By the end of this course students will be able to: analyze the degree to which gender, race, and class difference shape our perspective on the world; critically reflect on our value system and the interrelatedness of philosophical and social issues and works of popular culture; close read a story or a film while critical engaging its social issues and philosophical underpinnings and the medium in which it is told; formulate well-organized written interpretations grounded in textual evidence and supported by secondary literature.

Required Books*

- Heinrich von Kleist: *Penthesilea* (Harper Perennial, 2000) ISBN-10: 0060956321 ISBN-13: 978-0060956325
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) ISBN-13: 978-0521602617 ISBN-10: 0521602610

*All other readings, images, and video clips on the syllabus are available on Sakai. The required films (*Wonder Woman*, *Forrest Gump*, *The Matrix*) must have been viewed before the beginning of class. They are available at the MediaReserve desk of Alexander Library.

Course Grading

Final Grade:

4 discussion board posts and 2 responses	30%
3 response papers (4 pages each)*	45%
Final exam (8-10 pages)	25%

*You may replace one response paper with an oral presentation (20 min).

No late work will be accepted. Only two unexcused absences allowed.

Grade distribution: A=90-100%; B+=85-89; B=80-84; C+=75-79; C=70-74; D=65-69; F=64 and below



Assignments

Discussion board posts and responses

Starting **Tuesday, September 18th**, you participate in regular topic discussion posts in order to formulate and refine some thoughts about that week's assigned reading(s) and our discussion in class. Go to "Discussion and Private Messages" on Sakai to post your message.

- To receive full credit for online discussion/blog posts section, you are required to **post one original message (150-250 words) about the week's assigned reading by Tuesday at noon.**
- In addition, you must **respond to at least two other posts over the course of the semester (75 words each).** You will be given one week to respond to a blog post.
- Discussion messages for a topic that are posted after the specified due dates will not be graded.
- Both your original postings and your responses need to **engage analytically with the assigned readings and the discussion.** See the instructions at the Sakai "Discussion and Blog Posts" page for more detail about my expectations.

Response Papers

Response papers (4 pages each; no less, no more!) should be submitted via "Dropbox" on Sakai. You are required to write a mini essay in response to class discussions or in form of own ideas in relation to a reading assignment. You may either focus on one reading or to compare two or more readings with each other. Response papers should not simply repeat back what we've already discussed; they build on the ideas formulated collaboratively in class discussion but the work of planning your argument, organizing material should be your own. Once you've thought about the question, work out your "thesis statement" or leading question (which you'll need to present clearly in a sentence in the opening paragraph of your response). Cite or paraphrase relevant passages (and *always* include page numbers, as you would in a paper). Check your quotations for accuracy.

Finally, be sure to proofread your essays to make sure that they're coherent, that they answer all aspects of the question, and that they're articulated grammatically and clearly. Poorly written essays will lose points. Format: 12-point Times or Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1" margins. Word-Document. Always include page numbers.

Final Exam

The final exam will be a take home exam (2 days). You will receive five questions; please choose three and compose a beautifully written mini essay, altogether 8-10 pages (according to the formatting

guidelines posted on Sakai). You should focus on one or more assigned readings and are encouraged to make use of your discussion board posts and individual analyses in your response papers. You can make reference to any outside source as well. Be sure to quote appropriately.

Save your essay as "**FinalExam-followed by your last name**" and in a **Word-Document** and upload on Sakai/Dropbox no later than **December 18, 12pm**.



Departmental Policies

Attendance

All students must attend regularly and arrive prepared; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Those who miss more than two class sessions without a compelling excuse should expect a one-step reduction in the course grade (i.e. an A becomes a B+, a B+ becomes a B). Every additional three absences may entail a further one-step grade-reduction. Three late arrivals count as one absence. Note: It is the responsibility of students who have been absent (for any reason) to find out what they have missed and obtain materials that may have been handed out.

Disability Support Services

Students who may be requesting accommodations due to disabilities are encouraged to familiarize themselves with procedures and policies regarding disability support services at the following website: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>. It is recommended that students seeking accommodations begin filing paperwork as soon as possible as the documentation review process may take up to 30 business days. Students are encouraged to speak with teachers about these issues at the beginning of the term. All such conversations will be kept strictly confidential.

Academic Integrity

Violations of academic integrity are an extremely serious matter, and can lead to a student's failing the course and being referred to the University's Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action. When referring to ideas other than your own, always acknowledge your sources clearly and completely, whether you are quoting or paraphrasing. Note also that use of online translation services is not permitted as a tool for generating work that you submit for course credit. Please see the University's policies on academic integrity at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers>, and discuss with your instructor any questions you may have about this and related issues.

Turnitin plagiarism detection

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) (directly or via learning management system, i.e. Sakai, Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle) for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) site.

Students who do not agree should contact the course instructor immediately.



Course Schedule (tentative)

Tue 9/4 Introduction

Overman – Superman – End(s) of Man

Thu 9/6 COMIC: Joe Siegel & Jerry Shuster, *Superman Chronicles* (1938-1946).

Tue 9/11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885), prologue

Thu 9/13 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, cont.

Tue 9/18 ART: John Heartfield, “Adolf, the Superman” (1932); Schmölders, *Hitler’s Face*, pp. 143-181; FILM clip: *The Great Dictator* (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1940)
[blog post due by 8pm.](#)

Wonder Women

Thu 9/20 Heinrich von Kleist: *Penthesilea* (1808)

Tue 9/25 *Penthesilea*, cont.

Thu 9/27 COMIC: *Wonder Woman* (1942); FILM: *Wonder Woman* (dir. Lauren Montgomery, 2017); Brake, “Feminist Symbol or Fetish?” **1st response paper due.**
[blog post due by 8pm.](#)

Outlaws and New Objectivity

Tue 10/2 Bertolt Brecht: *Baal* (1918/1919)

Thu 10/4 MUSIC: David Bowie: “Hymn of Baal.”
Baal, cont.

Tue 10/9 *Baal*, cont.; Walter Benjamin: “The Author as Producer” (in *Reflections*, pp. 220-238).

Thu 10/11 MUSIC: Bertolt Brecht/Kurt Weill, “[Pirate Jenny](#)” (1931), Bob Dylan, “[When the Ship Comes In](#)” (1964).
[blog post due by 8pm.](#)

Material Girls: Gender (and) Revolution

- Tue 10/16** Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" (in *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 223-284). FILM clips: Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel* (1930) and Josephine Baker's "Banana Dance" (1926)
- Thu 10/18** Butler, cont.; MUSIC VIDEOS: Madonna, "Material Girl" (1984) and Lady Gaga: "Born this Way" (2011). **2nd response paper due.**

Idiots and Losers

- Tue 10/23** Nietzsche, "The Ass Festival" (in *Zarathustra*, pp. 255-258); Dadaist poems by Hugo Ball and Hans Arp
- Thu 10/25** Hugo Ball, *Tenderenda* (1915-1921), excerpts
- Tue 10/30** Avital Ronell, "The Disappearance and Return of the Idiot" (in *Stupidity*, pp. 169-195); Franz Kafka, "The Test".
- Thu 11/1** FILM: *Forrest Gump* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 1994). Meister Eckhart: "Sermon on 'The Poor in Spirit'" (14th c.); recommended: Gilles Deleuze, "The Image of Thought" (in *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 164-176; 189-213)
blog post due by 8pm.
- Tue 11/6** *Forrest Gump*, cont.; Avital Ronell, *Loser Sons*, pp. 1-18
- Thu 11/8** Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" (1915)
- Tue 11/13** Kafka, cont.
- Thu 11/15** Kafka, "A Hunger Artist" (1924)
blog post due by 8pm.
- Tue 11/20** Kafka, cont. Peter Kuper's Kafka-comics; recommended: Sussman, "Extraterrestrial Kafka: Ahead to the Graphic Novel."
3rd response paper due.
- Thu 11/22** NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING RECESS)

More Human Than Human: Cyborgs

- Tue 11/27** Donna Haraway: "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985)
- Thu 11/29** FILM: *Ghost in the Shell* (dir. Mamoru Oshii, 1995)
blog post due by 8pm.
- Tue 12/4** *Ghost in the Shell*, cont.

Thu 12/6 Donna Haraway, "Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Otherness: The Human in a Posthumanist Landscape"

Tue 12/11 Final exam workshop

Final Exam (take-home): Friday, 12/14 noon – Sunday, 12/16 noon.