University of Zagreb
Faculty of Political Science

**Media and Popular Culture**

**Professor Zrinjka Peruško, PhD**

**Wednesday** 12:00-13:15 (lectures),
13:30 – 15:00 (seminar)

**Room:** C

**Office hours:** Spring semester 2014/15, Wednesday at 15.00 (or by appointment), office 13, 3rd floor

**Email:** zperusko@fpzg.hr

**ECTS:** 5

**Language:** English

**Duration:** Spring semester 2014/15, 2+2: lecture (30 hours) & seminar (30 hours)

**Status:** elective, 6th semester undergraduate journalism and political science

Requirements for enrolment: Active knowledge of English (speaking and writing) is necessary for class participation and successful completion of this course. The number of enrolled students is limited to 40. Please do not choose this course if you cannot attend class and regularly fulfill course obligations.

**Course description**

The course explores the significance of popular culture whose codes are embedded in popular media texts. Popular media culture is based on genre as that type of media text and product defined by the repetition of key elements of content and form. Genre is the basis for the audience choice of a particular media product or program, and media industry plans the production and distribution of popular culture also in accordance to generic considerations. Decoding of the codes of popular culture is related to the generic characteristics of media texts and the social conditions of their reception.

The course will analyze the structural, production and reception aspects of genre as the framework for categorization, production and consumption of popular culture. The aim of the course is to provide the students with the critical understanding of the fundamentals of the genre as key to understanding media as popular culture:

- What defines a genre: key elements defining products of popular culture and its boundaries
- Interpretation and influence: the social meaning and significance of generic categories of popular culture
- Evolution and hybridization: how and why are media texts changed in time, and what generic characteristics are recombined in new media genres
In the framework of this course we will analyze examples of various popular culture genres, including film, radio and television programs, commercials, and new media genres like the video games. Media programs are divided into fact or reality genres (news, documentaries), fiction (film, drama and serialized, soaps, crime, sci-fi, etc.), contest & entertainment (sports, game shows, reality genres) and persuasions (advertising.) The four groups fall into two main program classes, according to the strong or weak emotional potential and high and low objective aspects of the texts. The aspect of objectivity deals with the nature of the relationship a media text has with reality. This is the central point of their differentiation, as well as the central area of blurring of the lines between the genres. The hybridization of genres happens exactly by the shifting of the ways the reality is constructed, especially in terms of the softening of the differences between fact and fiction, or in their changing places altogether.

The classic distinctions between information and entertainment (fact and fiction, emotion and objectiveness) are hard to maintain in contemporary programs with blurred boundaries. This is also how infotainment happens, and a growing concern about the continued role of media in democracy. We will look for ways in which media programs are exhibiting the softening (emotionality), the fictionalization, and the dramatization of the factual, in the issue-oriented programs; or the actualization, insertion of public and policy issues, in the fictional and entertainment programs.

The course will analyze the ways in which the audiences interact with popular culture media texts creating their own identities and pleasures, and thus move beyond the traditional understanding of audience as passive and popular culture as worthless or of low quality. Popular culture is media culture, and the entertainment genres (dramas and contests) in addition to genres of reality (news and current affairs programs) define our understanding of the world, social values, as well as stereotypes or prejudices.

**Evaluation of student work and grading:**

The final grade will be a composite of class participation, seminar presentations, and exam results. 100 points are available in regular activity, plus bonus points for additional literature reviews.

The grades will be on the following scale: 60-69 points – 2 (B), 70-79 points – 3 (C), 80-89 points – 4 (B), 90 – 100 points – 5 (A):

A. Class participation in lectures and seminars (20 points)
B. Homework – 2 reviews of readings on 2 pages each; first is due before the midterm exam, the second by the end of May (5 points each, total 10 points)
C. Midterm exam – written test in class (30 points)
D. Final exam – a take home essay exam - (40 points). Questions/topics and instructions for the final exam will be posted one month before the end of class.

**All course work will be in English.**

The course consists of lectures (2 hours per week) and seminars (2 hours per week). Students are required to read in advance and be prepared to discuss at least one text for the lecture. Students are expected to attend class regularly, including both lectures and
seminars. More than 2 (unexcused) absences will result in the loss of signature for class attendance.

Lecture schedule, topics & readings for 2014/15:

1. February 25, 2015

Social and political significance of popular media programs
(Entertainment vs. Reality, Entertainment vs. Art, Entertainment vs. Work, Popular culture vs. Elite culture)

2. March 4, 2015

What are media texts?

3. March 11, 2015

Approaches to popular media messages: rhetorical, cultural, & feminist perspectives

4. March 18, 2015

Narrative theory

5. March 25, 2015

Media representations: the circuit of culture

6. April 1, 2015 - MID-TERM EXAM – WRITTEN TEST IN CLASS

7. April 8, 2015 –

Talk show: popular politics and its implications
originally published online 26 January 2011 DOI: 10.1177/1749975510379965

8. April 15, 2015 NO CLASS – STUDY TIME 😊

9. April 22, 2015

The soap opera and sitcom: power, social roles and social control
(Narrative and genre, genre and formula, narrative strategies in serial texts & social representations)


10. April 29, 2015

The genre of contest and its social function: quiz and sports
11. May 6, 2015

Hibridity - Reality TV: reality vs. Fiction, Big Brother, mocudrama

12. May 13, 2015

Audiences and consumption practices, fan culture, the social uses of entertainment

• choose 2 texts
13. May 20, 2015 NO CLASS, STUDY & WRITING TIME FOR YOUR FINAL ESSAYS 😊


Production aspects of popular culture: the culture industry perspective

Seminar class research project, 2014/15

Croatian television series "Crno bijeli svijet" (Black and while world), a serial drama about the 1980’s set in Zagreb
2.3. 2015 – first broadcast, HRT 1, Monday-Thursday 20.00-21.00 (reruns next day in the afternoon) for 3 weeks. Watching mandatory!

We will analyze the series in regard to the aspects of production, content and representations, using narrative and genre theory.

Specific tasks for group work will be distributed at each seminar meeting.