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Winter 2017

### Course Syllabus (W17 Online) COLI 211M: "Superhero Film and Contemporary Culture"

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Binghamton University Department of Comparative Literature  
Winter 2017 Online Course Syllabus—COLI 211M-02: “Superhero Film and Contemporary Culture”  
Course Period: December 19, 2016 – January 13, 2017  
Christopher L Southward, Instructor; [csouthw1@binghamton.edu](mailto:csouthw1@binghamton.edu)

**Credit Distribution Fulfillments:**

This 3-week, 4-credit course fulfills the SUNY Binghamton General Education “Composition” and “Humanities” requirements. The University’s guidelines regarding these categories are as follows: **Category 1: Language and Communication:** *Composition* (C) courses are courses in any of the departments or divisions of the University. They require a process of revision and a minimum of 20 pages of expository prose. At least 50 percent of the course grade is based on student writing.

**Category 4: Aesthetics and Humanities:** *Humanities* (H) courses enhance students’ understanding of human experience through the study of literature or philosophy.

Source: <http://www.binghamton.edu/human-development/current-students/general-education.html>

**Course Description:**

What might the current popularity and ubiquity of superhero film say about contemporary culture? We’ll explore three core ideas in response to this question: (1) that the superhero genre reflects a moment in our species’ history of reconciling the human being-technology relation, which we shall view as a complex system constituted by our productive relations to material and ideological tools and their ensembles, the needs and aspirations that determine how we conceptualize and activate these relations, and the technically rationalized social reality that is their result, (2) that this ongoing process of reconciliation evinces, at once, the inherently technical character of human being and human character of technology in the context of their inextricable relationality, and (3) that the superhero genre responds to our real conditions of existence in terms of the virtual and thus opens us to new possibilities for our species’ ways of being in the world. We’ll consider these ideas specifically in relation to notions and practices of body and self, the machine and machinic consciousness, cybernetics, surveillance, and social modes of production, reproduction, control, and resistance.

**Objectives and Expected Learning Outcomes:**

We aim to bring our selected texts into interaction in such ways as to provoke thought and to imagine and articulate, through high-quality scholarly writing, meaningful responses to our guiding question. By the end of the semester, each student is expected to have developed such comfortable proficiency with recurrent themes and concepts as to enable them to make critical responses to the notion of the superhero and its place in contemporary culture(s).

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

**Weekly Journal (40% of final grade):**

Each student is required to submit, weekly, 4-6 double-spaced pages of notes taken in response to the assigned readings and viewings of the *Flash* series. The idea here is to take notes *while reading and watching*, so that your journal is just that—a daily record of your observations. Your Friday submissions should contain all your writings for the week, including an MLA-formatted bibliography of works cited. In each daily entry, focus on at least one substantial passage from each assigned text and one scene from each episode of *Flash*, choosing passages and scenes that *mean something specific to you* regarding your thinking about the guiding questions of the course. Contextualize your passages by writing a short paragraph in response to each, explaining how you understand them and noting how you see the concepts treated within them working in your final research project. You may find your work more productive where you focus on passages and concepts that initially pose problems to understanding, and I will provide feedback to your responses to aid this process. Keep in mind that the more work you do *daily*, the more manageable will your final project be.

*Additionally*, read at least one news or journal article for each of your three assigned weekly journal submissions (for example, from *The New York Times* science section or a journal of science, psychology, culture, philosophy, art, etc.) and duplicate the thinking process described above. Always properly cite your source material, and please do not simply type up or copy and paste passages from the readings and submit this as your journal, as I will not accept this as your work. **Journal submissions are due by upload to the “WEEKLY JOURNAL” folder on Blackboard at 11:59pm each Friday.**

**Final Project: Research Prospectus (60% of final grade):**

Each student is required to write a double-spaced, 8-10-page prospectus in response to your note-keeping, musings, and insights of the semester. The goal here is to develop a working thesis and supporting arguments in relation to: (1) our core questions for the course, outlined above under “Course Description,” and (2) questions and observations you made in your weekly journals in response to the readings and the *Flash* series. Please show an effort at dealing coherently with recurrent concepts and themes handled during the semester in an exploratory but scholarly manner. **The Final Project will be due by upload to the to the “FINAL PROJECT” folder at 11:59 pm on January 16, 2017.**

**Note on Late and Non-submissions of Work:**

Late submissions without prior approval from instructor will not be accepted and will receive no credit.

**Formatting:**

All work is to be written double-spaced, using 11- or 12-point Times New Roman or Calibri font, 1-inch margins, and Modern Language Association (MLA) citation conventions. Please include your name and page numbers in the lower right hand corner of each page of your documents.

**Expectations and Responsibilities:**

Binghamton University grading standards require students to spend at least 58 (fifty-eight) hours per week on course-related work for 4-credit courses meeting fully online during the 3-week Winter session: <https://www.binghamton.edu/academics/provost/documents/syllabus-credit-hours-0314.pdf>

**Note on Course Accessibility:**

The instructor gladly works with students to accommodate special learning needs. Please inform the instructor, by email or signed letter from the University Office of Services for Students with Disabilities, of any learning accommodations you require by the Course Add/Drop deadline.

**Writing Assistance:**

Students in need of writing assistance are encouraged to consult with an advisor at the University Writing Center, which is located at **LN2411**.

**Note on Academic Integrity:**

Plagiarism consists in the unacknowledged use of another person’s work. Students enrolled in this course are required and expected to do their own work, and instances of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism, will be punished in accordance with University policy. Students found to have engaged in plagiarism in this course will receive an F for the assignment(s) in question. The University's policy on academic integrity is listed at the following link under the heading, “Rules Governing Academic Life”: [http://buweb.binghamton.edu/bulletin/program.asp?program\\_id=103](http://buweb.binghamton.edu/bulletin/program.asp?program_id=103).

**Required Visual Texts:**

*Flash*, Season 1, DC Comics, 2014

**Note on the series:** Season 1 of the *Flash* series is available for streaming on Netflix.com, and students are required to gain access to this independently.

**Readings:**

The instructor reserves the right to make minor changes to the reading schedule as deemed appropriate, and always with the aim of optimizing their utility. Apart from the chapter from Etienne Soriau's *Different Modes of Existence*, all scheduled readings are required and will be available for download on Blackboard/MyCourses. The instructor will provide the class a complete bibliography of the assigned readings for use in citations.

**Week 1 (December 19-23, 2016):****M 12/19:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 1-2

Read: Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology";  
Gilbert Simondon, "Introduction," *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*

**T 12/20:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 3-4

Read: Gilbert Simondon, Pt. 1, "The Genesis and Evolution of Technical Objects," in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*

**\*W 12/21:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 5-6

Read: Norbert Wiener, Ch. 1, "Cybernetics in History," *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*

**\*December 21: Course Add/Drop Deadline**

**R 12/22:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 7-8

Read: Norbert Wiener, Ch. 10, "Some Communication Machines and their Future," in *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*

**\*F 12/23:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 9-10

Read: Jean Epstein, "Mechanical Philosophy," in *The Intelligence of a Machine*

**\*Weekly Journal due at 11:59pm; Winter Break: December 24, 2016 – January 1, 2017**

**Week 2 (January 2-6, 2017):****M 01/02:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 11-12

Read: Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*

**T 01/03:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 13-14

Read: Gilbert Simondon, "On Techno-aesthetics"

**W 01/04:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 15-16

Read: Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control"

**R 01/05:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 17-18

Read: Jean Baudrillard, "The Murder of the Sign," in *The Intelligence of Evil, or The Lucidity Pact*

**\*F 01/06:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 19-20

Read: Jean Baudrillard, "The Mental Diaspora of the Networks," in *The Intelligence of Evil, or The Lucidity Pact*

**\*Weekly Journal due at 11:59pm**

**Week 3 (January 9-13, 2017):**

**M 01/09:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episodes 21-22

Read: Herbert Marcuse, "From Ontology to Technology: Fundamental Tendencies of Industrial Society"; "Philosophical Reflections on Science and Technology," in *Unpublished Papers, Vol. V: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Emancipation*  
Nishida Kitarō, "Human Being," pp. 145-165, in *Ontology of Production*, Trans. Wm. Haver

**T 01/10:**

Watch: *Flash*, Season 1, Episode 23

Read: Nishida Kitarō, Haver, "Human Being," pp. 166-185;  
Etienne Soriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, Ch. 4, "Of Surexistence" (Optional: marked-up)

**W 01/11:**

Read: Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 15, "Machinery and Large-scale Industry," §§1-4, "The Development of Machinery" through "The Most Immediate Effects of Machine Production on the Worker"

**R 01/12:**

Read: Karl Marx, *ibid.*, §§5-8, "The Struggle between Worker and Machine through "Revolutionary Impact of Large-scale Industry on Manufacture, Handicrafts, and Domestic Industry"

**\*F 01/13:**

Karl Marx, *ibid.*, §§9-10, "Health and Education Clauses" through "Large-scale Industry and Agriculture"

**\*Weekly Journal due at 11:59pm**

**\*M 01/16:**

**\*Final Project due at 11:59pm**