Online seminars in popular culture - starting January 2021

Discussion published by Meghan Vicks on Friday, December 18, 2020

Dear all,

I would like to put on your radar a few online seminar-style courses that may be of interest to subscribers of H-PCAACA. These are just a few of the courses hosted by a new nonprofit initiative, Borderlines Open School for Advanced Cross-Cultural Studies (more about this below).

**Why Lovecraft? Why now?** (January 4–February 1, 2021, Mondays 7–9pm ET, 4 online class sessions over a period of 5 weeks). Taught by Rebekah Sheldon.

In this course we will focus on the New Weird, a group of 21st-century authors who are rewriting Lovecraft’s oeuvre and taking his images in dramatically new directions. For some of these writers, especially women authors and writers of color, Lovecraft’s ideas have sunk too far into the groundwork of American culture to simply cancel him. These writers tend to use shifts in narrative perspective to expose the colonial logic that informs Lovecraft’s tales and to give voice to characters that Lovecraft refuses, ignores, or makes into signs of degenerate evil. For other writers of the New Weird, it is the cosmic indifference of the Weird, its sense for the strange animacy of nonhuman life, that makes the genre worth revisiting. These writers find in the Weird an appropriate aesthetic strategy for intuiting the new realities of the Anthropocene. Beginning with the first episode of *Lovecraft Country* and several definitions of the weird, occult, uncanny, and eerie, this course will focus on two novellas that exemplify the range of the New Weird: Victor LaValle’s novella *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016) and Jeff VanderMeer’s novella *The Strange Bird* (2017). Read more here: https://borderlinesopenschool.org/courses/p/whylovecraft

**Parable of the Sower and American Apocalypse** (January 5–26, 2021, Tuesdays 6:30–8:30pm PT, 4 online class sessions over a period of 4 weeks). Taught by Sean Grattan.

This course will focus primarily on Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) as an example of an apocalyptic text that not only sings its own dark times, but sings to ours as well. In this terrifyingly prescient novel, Butler describes the immiserating effects of catastrophic climate change, racial and economic inequality, genetic mutation, and political demagoguery. Our reading of *Parable of the Sower* will be supplemented with secondary readings on apocalyptic literature by authors like Roy Scranton and Kim Stanley Robinson to give students grounding in the field. Read more here: https://borderlinesopenschool.org/courses/p/sowerparable


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When the street protests of the Civil Rights Era met the backlash of the 1970s “new right” conservative policies, independent filmmakers picked up cameras to document structural inequality in more intimate and personal spaces. Armed with lighter and less-expensive equipment and minimal crews, filmmakers represented their causes and communities on the big screen through grassroots and guerrilla filmmaking. In this course, we will watch and study four films that epitomize this era: *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (dir. William Greaves, 1971, 75 min.), *Killer of Sheep* (dir. Charles Burnett, 1977, 83 min.), *Wanda* (dir. Barbara Loden, 1970, 105 min.), and *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982, 117 min.). These films have left a mark on contemporary culture, engaging issues that continue to be of pressing concern in matters of social justice, technology, and environmental conservation. Read more here: https://borderlinesopenschool.org/courses/p/postcivilrightserafilm

**Borderlines Open School for Advanced Cross-Cultural Studies** aims to offer the general public, students, teachers, and professors alike affordable opportunities for engaging with and developing advanced and creative scholarship outside of the usual university system, as well as to ethically pay and support all of their instructors, recognizing their intellectual and pedagogical labor as valuable work that matters. To learn more about this new initiative, please see our FAQs.

All best,

Meghan Vicks