

Pol2037Y/Pol 475Y POSTMODERN AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

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Office Hours: Fall Term: Tuesday 9:30-11:00
Spring Term: Monday 2:15-3:30 or by appointment

Course Description

This course concerns the development of postmodern thought and its passage into the posthuman. The course begins with a brief discussion of a number of themes in Western philosophy that underlie postmodernism, in particular, Georges Bataille's understanding of social exchange. This is extended into Jean Baudrillard's reworking of symbolic exchange. A complement to this analysis is Paul Virilio's understanding of the effects of the technology of speed on the social. Next, we look at a discussion of capitalism and 'virtual' systems in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Following Deleuze we will study Alain Baidou who rejects Deleuze's philosophy opting for a philosophy based on an ontology of truth. This underlies Baidou's commitment to communism. Coupled with the 'rhizomatic' concept of Guattari and Deleuze we enter a discussion of the posthuman through Catherine Hayles' reflection on the media's relation to thought. The course will also examine an alternate view of science, myth and philosophy in the work of Michel Serres. Moving from cybernetics of the manifesto by Donna Haraway to her extension of relations to the world of others including our companion species. This view will be discussed with Agamben's view of life between the human and the animal.

The course will take the format of a weekly seminar discussion. Students should come prepared having read the short readings to discuss the concepts raised in the text.

Course Objectives

The study of social and political ideas express is the academic goal of the course. The course is also intended to satisfy partially the following competencies: in Critical and Creative Thinking by reflective examination of ideas and judgments, Communication skills in presenting written and oral arguments, Information Literacy by effective use of the library and other sources of information and Social and Ethical Responsibility by engaging in a critical reflection on your views and the views of others.

Evaluation

The evaluation will consist of:

1. A review of approximately 1,500 words of one of the course readings, either selected from the short reading list or another work of interest to you. The review should give a brief critical assessment of the chief idea(s) developed in the work. The review is due October 3. You will also be asked to present, briefly, the work you reviewed to the class when we discuss the topic. The review amounts to 20% of the course mark.
2. A term research paper of approximately 3,500 words if you are a graduate student or 2,500 words if you are an undergraduate student due in class Monday, February 6 amounting to 50% of your final mark.

3. Seminar presentation to the class on the topic of your research paper, or other topic of your choice related to the course, amounting to 20% of your final mark. In the seminar preceding the presentation a brief verbal or written summary of the topic with any recommended readings should be given out to the class. The presentation of your essay topic, or other choice, should be a maximum 30 minutes in length including a question and answer period that you will be responsible for conducting. The seminar presentations should be set after the winter break.
4. Overall participation in the seminar discussion 10% of the final mark.

Individuals who are auditing the course will be asked to present a review and participate in class discussion. Late penalties are 5% per school day. Submission of work by e mail is only by prior permission.

Note: In the event of a disruption to the class or to any member of the class owing to a health or other disruption where we cannot meet the marking scheme will be adjusted to 30% for the first paper and 70% for the second. In this case, work may be submitted by e mail.

Readings

The Primary Texts

The number of writers concerned with postmodernism is large. The texts highlighted here may be replaced or supplemented by others by agreement with the class. However, I thought we should start out with relatively short introductory works. For those who have some familiarity with the material (especially if you are a graduate student) please consider the texts in the supplementary list. The selections may vary for each specific seminar.

- Agamben, Giorgio, [The Open: Man and Animal](#), Stanford, 2004.
 Baidou, Alain, [Second Manifesto for Philosophy](#), Polity: 2011
 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, "Introduction : Rhizome" or "The Treatise on Nomadology" in [A Thousand Plateaus](#), Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1987. The selections are also found in the out of print [Nomadology](#) and [On the Line](#), New York: Semiotext(e).
 Baudrillard, Jean, [Impossible Exchange](#), N.Y.: Verso, 2001.
 Derrida, Jacques, [Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money](#), Chicago, 1992.
 Hayles, N. Katherine, [How We Become Posthuman](#), Chicago, 1999.
 Haraway, Donna, [The Companion Species Manifesto](#), Prickely Paradigm Press, 2003.
 Serres, Michel, [The Natural Contract](#), Ann Arbor: University Michigan Press, 1998.
 Virilio, Paul, [The University of Disaster](#), Polity Press, 2010.

Other Primary Texts

I list a number of other selections that you might choose either to do a brief review and presentation to the class or if the other selections do not interest you. As the texts vary in length I can suggest either shorter or longer selections depending on your interest and time.

- Agamben, Giorgio, [State of Exception](#), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
 ----, [Homo Sacer](#), Stanford: Stanford University Press., 1998.
 ----, [Potentialities](#), Stanford, 1999.
 Badiou, Alan, [Being and Event](#), Continuum, 2005.
 ----, [The Century](#), Polity, 2007.
 ----, [Conditions](#), Continuum, 2008.
 Bataille, Georges, [The Accursed Share](#), Vol. 1, Zone Books, 1988.
 Bataille, Georges, [The Theory of Religion](#), Zone Books.
 Baudrillard, Jean, [In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities](#), N. Y: Semiotext(e), 1983.
 Baudrillard, Jean, [Seduction](#), New World Perspectives, 1990.
 Baudrillard, Jean, [The Illusion of the End](#), Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1994.
 Baudrillard, Jean, [Symbolic Exchange and Death](#), Ldn: Sage, 1995.
 Deleuze, Gilles, [Difference and Repetition](#), Columbia, 1994.
 Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Félix, [Anti-Oedipus](#), Viking, 1982.

- Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Félix, What is Philosophy, N.Y.: Columbia, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques, Politics of Friendship, Ldn.: Verso, 1997.
- , Spectres of Marx,
- , Roques, Stanford, 2005
- Haraway, Donna, When Species Meet, U of Minnesota Press: 2007.
- , Simians, Cyborgs and Women, Routledge:1996.
- Harvey, David, The Condition of Postmodernity, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- Hayles, N. K., How We Became Posthuman, Chicago, 1999.
- , Writing Machines, MIT Press: 2002.
- , My Mother Was a Computer, Chicago: U of Chicago, 2005.
- Heidegger, Martin, The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, Indiana, 1995.
- Hutcheon, Linda, The Politics of Postmodernism, London: Routledge, 1989.
- Jameson, Fredric, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in Postmodernism, Durham: Duke, 1991, pp. 1-54.
- Kojève, Alexandre, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, N.Y.: Basic, 1969.
- Kroker, Arthur & Weinstein, M., Data Trash, New York: Saint Martin's, 1994.
- Kroker, A&M, Hacking the Future, New York: Saint Martin's, 1996.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, Totality and Infinity, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Liotard, Jean-François, Postmodern Explained, Minn.: U. of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Liotard, J.F., Libidinal Economy, Bloomington: Indiana, 1993.
- Mauss, M., The Gift, N.Y.: Norton, 1990.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc, The Inoperative Community, Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- , Being Singular Plural, Stanford, 2000.
- , The Experience of Freedom, Stanford: Stanford University Press., 1993.
- Rancière, Jacques, The Philosopher and His Poor, Duke: 2004.
- , On the Shores of Politics, Verso, 2007.
- Serres, M., The Parasite, John Hopkins, 1982.
- Serres, M., Hermes: Literature, Science and Philosophy, part one, John Hopkins, 1982.
- Virilio, Paul, Speed and Politics, New York: Semiotext(e), 1986.
- Virilio, Paul., The Vision Machine, New York: Semiotext(e), 1994.

Dockerty, Thomas, A Postmodern Reader, Columbia University Press :N.Y., 1993 is a useful work for those who would like a selection of postmodern authors in a one volume format. Dockerty's bibliography is also useful. Similarly Nicholson, L. ed., Feminism/Postmodernism, Ldn., Routledge, 1990 provides an interesting selection of articles.

Schedule of the Seminars

SEPTEMBER 12

TOPIC; Sources

The standard view of the 'origins' of postmodernism is located in the enlightenment and the re-reading of the logo-centric basis of the Western philosophical tradition. This involves the transformation of a number of paradigms: the political economy of the Smithian model, the Kantian critical philosophy, the Sade/Rousseau 'social contract', Hegel's master/slave relation, as read primarily by Kojève, the primacy of science to knowledge and myth, the significance of the text and author, Mauss's symbolic exchange of the gift and the Nietzschean transgressive 'will to power'.

Reading: Select one of the general treatments of postmodernism if you are new to the area such as Jameson, Harvey, Megill, Kroker & Cook, Wakefield, Hutcheon, McGowan or Thomas Dockerty.

SEPTEMBER 19

TOPIC; Excess: Violence and Sacrifice

Postmodernism is at once nostalgic in its discourse yet violent. Theories of transgression and cuts underlie much of the rejection of the hegemony of totalizing theories. The social emerges from this early discourse against and with Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. Of central influence in this respect was

Georges Bataille. The 'accursed share' with its origins in the 'lost America' of sacrifice and violence leads to Bataille's the 'summit' of 'evil'. Expressed differently this is the rewriting the economy as general economy of expenditure based on the excess of Mauss's 'gift' as the source of the social. We will begin with a brief glance at Bataille's text.

Reading: Bataille, Georges, The Accursed Share, Vol. 1 or Mauss, M., The Gift.

SEPTEMBER 26 & OCTOBER 3

TOPIC; Simulated and Virtual Systems: The Transparency of the Social in Baudrillard

The social has existed as a concept usually constructed in representational terms connected with other concepts such as class, people, group or mass. Baudrillard attacked the social as an object in particular through the reworking of the basis of exchange from its understanding in political economy of the object to its reformulation in the symbolic simulated redefining of what we mean by the social and political, especially in a democracy. Baudrillard's later work traced the 'fatal strategies' underlying the transparency of the political and the moral critique of the transparency of 'evil' in virtual systems.

Additional Readings: Baudrillard, Jean, Symbolic Exchange and Death, is his contribution to the debate that involved Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, Lacan and many others. For a short 'fun' read his In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities.

OCTOBER 10 Thanksgiving

OCTOBER 17 & OCTOBER 24

TOPIC; Speed and Politics

Virilio analyzes the relations amongst technology, ethics and the social and shows how conceptions of time and space are altered in the postmodern world. Beginning with a classic study of the fortifications of the Atlantic during the Second World War Virilio argues the transformation of the control of space from the view of the velocity of the image. Virilio shows how the surveillance of modern technology affects behavior altering the political and the locus of power in a society captured in the speed of light and the nostalgia for the lost dimensions. The vision machine creates the increasing blindness of the social.

Additional Readings: Speed and Politics a short work and then Open Sky.

NOVEMBER 7 Reading Break

OCTOBER 31 & NOVEMBER 14

TOPIC; Derrida on Time and Exchange

We will examine one aspect of Derrida's thought where he takes a notion of Bataille's general and restricted economy to a new reading on 'exchange', 'value' and life and death. The example of a reworking of the social as evidenced in the exchange of 'counterfeit money' that he ends Given Time. This view of time as outside of the calculus of reason leads to Derrida's thought around politics and friendship. We will also look briefly at Rogues one of his later works where Derrida looks to states that themselves outside the calculus in an attempt to theorize the 'democracy to come'.

Additional Reading: Rogues.

NOVEMBER 7

Reading Break

NOVEMBER 21 & NOVEMBER 28 & DECEMBER 5

TOPIC; Virtual Machines

A similar rethinking is underway with Deleuze. He rereads Nietzsche's master slave relation to resolve through difference the forces of the reworked 'will to power'. Later with Guattari they conceptualize a different way of viewing social relations not in the traditional hierarchy of power but in 'rhizomes' drawn by a genealogy of desire. This concept will be applied to politics and the field of relations produced by various 'machines'. At the center of a non transcendental philosophy is the real as a virtual and as a possible mode of the actual -- thus a philosophy of the network of machinic relations. Deleuze, like Serres, grounds this philosophy in the 'science' of Western philosophy through a recoding of Leibniz.

Additional Readings: Their last shared work What is Philosophy.

JANUARY 9 & JANUARY 16

TOPIC: The Thought of Alan Baidou

Baidou, whose important works Being and Event and Logic of Worlds have recently been published in translation, are an attempt a 'return' to Platonic ontology. A pure theory of truth is found in the matheme that Baidou develops out of a reconsideration of set theory. Baidou's 'subtractive' theory of being, set against Hegel and his read of Deleuze, allows a reestablishment of politics in the action that 'names' the event of a new 'subject'. This subject will become that of communism. Baidou summarized his current thinking in The Second Manifesto.

Additional Reading: The essays in The Century.

JANUARY 23 & JANUARY 30

TOPIC: Hayles from Possessive Individualism to the Posthuman

The liberal tradition according to the Canadian theorist C.B. Macpherson rests on a concept of the individual as possessive. This implies an autonomy that mutates though with cybernetics epitomized by the Turing Test. Enter then the world of the relation of digital and analogue media that reverse the liberal individual in a growing world of emergent life. Hayles then an extension of Marshal McLuhan and Arthur and Marilouise Kroker.

Additional Readings: My Mother Was a Computer.

FEBRUARY 6 & FEBRUARY 13

TOPIC: Science, Reason & Myth

Not all theories of the postmodern locate the break with the modern in the crisis of enlightenment reason. A number of writers locate the crisis in the concept of the will that emerges from the Christian tradition or in the case of Serres who looks at the postmodern world through the premodern. Serres shows how the 'five senses' of the individual change with the philosophical 'technology' establishing culture captured through the myth of Hermes. The social becomes communication via the 'parasite' founding the 'natural contract' on the 'third' of triangular relations. Thus a 'new' contract theory based on the environment and social relations.

Additional Reading: Serres, M., Hermes: Literature, Science and Philosophy, part one, or The Parasite.

READING WEEK FEBRUARY 20

FEBRUARY 27 and MARCH 6

Class Presentations

MARCH 13 & MARCH 20

TOPIC: Bio Politics, "The Coming Community"

Agamben, taking in part from the Michel Foucault the concept of bio politics, (though in a rather different way) sets out in his celebrated work Homo Sacer how the sovereign creates spaces where the law is not applied leading to tragic consequences to individuals reduced to 'bare life'. This opens up the interval between human and animal life with its consequences for the 'coming community'.

Additional Readings: Homo Sacer.

MARCH 27 & APRIL 3

TOPIC: Haraway from Cyborgs to the Dogs!

Haraway in a famous essay introduces the world of the cyborg tied as it is to an analysis of the gender relations of world that turns women into creatures. From this Haraway extends her analysis to include how in the posthuman world we enter into relations with fellow creatures as our 'humanity' becomes a species humanity.

Additional Readings: Simians, Cyborgs and Women.

Last Class: Review and Conclusion

Extended Reading List electronic copy only or on demand.

READING LIST

- Adorno, Theodore, Aesthetic Theory, Ldn: Routledge, 1984.
- , Negative Dialectics, Seabury Press, 1973.
- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M., The Dialectic of Enlightenment, Continuum Press, 1986.
- Agamben, Giorgio, The Man Without Content, Stanford: Stanford University Press., 1999.
- , The End of the Poem, Stanford: Stanford University Press., 1999.
- , Homo Sacer, Stanford: Stanford University Press., 1998.
- , State of Exception, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- , The Open, Stanford: Stanford University Press., 2004.
- , Potentialities, Stanford: Stanford University Press., 1999.
- , The Kingdom and the Glory, Stanford University Press, 2011.
- , The Highest Poverty, Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Arac, J. Postmodernism and Politics, Minnesota: University Press, 1986.
- Aronson, Ronald, Sartre's Second Critique, Chicago, 1987.
- Bachelard, Gaston, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, Beacon, 1964.
- Barthes, Roland, The Pleasure of the Text, Hill and Wang, 1975.
- , New Critical Essays, Hill and Wang, 1980.
- , Elements of Semiology, Hill and Wang, 1967.
- , Empire of Signs, Hill and Wang, 1982.
- , The Responsibility of Forms, Hill and Wang, 1985.
- , The Fashion System, Hill and Wang, 1983.
- , A Lover's Discourse, Hill and Wang, 1978.
- , Camera Lucida, Hill and Wang, 1981.
- , Image, Music, Text, Hill and Wang, 1977.
- , The Eiffel Tower, Hill and Wang, 1979.
- , Sade, Fourier, Loyola, Hill and Wang, 1976.
- , Mythologies, Paladin, 1973.
- , Writing Degree Zero, Cape Editions, 1967.
- , Critical Essays, Northwestern, 1972.
- Baidou, Alain, Deleuze, Paris: Hachette, 1997. (This work is now in English).
- , L'être et l'événement, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988. Translated by Oliver Feltham as Being and Event, N.Y.: Continuum, 2005.
- , Peut-on penser la politique?, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985.
- , Theoretical Writings, N.Y.: Continuum, 2004.
- , Ethics, N.Y.: Verso, 2001.
- , Infinite Thought, N.Y.: Continuum, 2004.
- , Manifesto for Philosophy, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- , Logiques des mondes, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006. Logics of Worlds, Continuum, 2009.
- , Plato's Republic, N.Y.: Columbia, 2012.
- , Saint Paul, Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Bataille, Georges, The Accursed Share, (3 vol.), Zone Books, 1991.
- , Story of the Eye, Penguin, 1979.
- , Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, Minnesota: University Press, 1985.
- , Eroticism, City Lights, 1986.
- , The Theory of Religion, Zone Books, 1989.
- , On Nietzsche, Paragon, 1992.
- , The Trial of Giles de Rais, Amok, 1991.
- , My Mother, Madame Edwarda, The Dead Man, Marion Boyars, 1989.
- , Literature and Evil, Marion Boyars, 1985.
- , Blue of Noon, Marion Boyars, 1979.
- , L'Abbé C, Marion Boyars, 1988.
- , Inner Experience, Suny, 1988.
- , Guilty, Lapis, 1988.
- , The Impossible, City Lights, 1991.

- , Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art, Oeuvres complètes, IX, Gallimard, 1979.
- , Manet, Oeuvres complètes, IX, Gallimard, 1979.
- , The Tears of Eros, City Lights, 1989.
- Baudrillard, Jean, Seduction, New World Perspectives, 1990
- , In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, Semiotext(e)
- , The Mirror of Production, Telos Press, 1973.
- , For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, Telos: St. Louis, 1981.
- , Fatal Strategies, Semiotext(e), 1990.
- , Simulations, Semiotext(e), 1983.
- , La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu, Paris: Galilee, 1991.
- , La Transparence du mal, Paris: Galilee, 1990.
- , Symbolic Exchange and Death, London: Sage. 199?.)
- , The Ecstasy of Communication, Semiotext(e), 1987.
- , The Illusion of the End, Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1994.
- , The Perfect Crime, New York: Verso, 1996.
- , Le paroxysite indifférent, Paris: Grasset, 1997.
- , Impossible Exchange, N.Y.: Verso, 2001.
- , L'esprit du terrorisme, Paris: Galilee, 2002.
- , Screened Out, N.Y.: Verso, 2002.
- , Passwords, N.Y.: Verso, 2003.
- , Power Inferno, Paris, Galilé, 2002.
- , The Conspiracy of Art, Semiotext(e): N.Y., 2005.
- , The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact, Berg: N.Y., 2005.
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- , Death Sentence, Station Hill, 1978.
- , The Step Not Beyond, Suny, 1992.
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- Boundas & Olkowski, Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy, Ldn.: Routledge, 1994.
- Bourdieu, P. Distinction, Cambridge: Harvard, 1984.
- Braidotti, Rosi, The Posthuman, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- Bressand, A. & Distler, C., La planète relationnelle, Paris: Flammarion, 1995.
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- Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble, N.Y.: Routledge, 1990.
- Caillois, Roger, The Necessity of the Mind, Venice, Ca.: Lapis, 1990.
- Callinicos, A., Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique, Polity, 1989.
- Camus, Albert , The Rebel, Vintage, N.Y.
- , Caligula and Three Other Plays, Vintage Paperback
- , The Fall, Vintage, N.Y.
- Canguilhem Georges, The Normal and the Pathological, Zone, 1989.
- Cixous, Hélène & Clément, C., The Newly Born Woman, Minnesota, 1986.
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- Connolly, William, The Politics of Ambiguity, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. (See also the exchange with Charles Taylor in *Political Theory* (May 1984) and (August 1985)).
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- Cusset, François, French Theory, Paris:: La Découverte, 2003.
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- , The Critical Philosophy of Kant, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- , Nietzsche and Philosophy, University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- , Coldness and Cruelty, Zone, 1991.
- , Kant's Critical Philosophy, Minnesota, 1984.
- , Bergsonism, Zone, 1988.
- , Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, Zone, 1990.
- , Cinema 1 & 2, Minnesota, 1991.
- , The Fold; Leibniz and the Baroque, Minnesota, 1993.

- , Difference and Repetition, Columbia: N,Y, 1994.
- , Critique et Clinique, Les Editions de Minuit: Paris, 1993.
- , Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation, Paris: Editions de la différence.
- , L'île deserte et autres textes, Paris: Les editions de Minuit, 2002.
- Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Félix, Anti-Oedipus, Viking, 1982.
- , A Thousand Plateaus, Minnesota, 1987.
- , Kafka, Minnesota, 1986.
- , Nomadology: The War Machine, Semiotext(e), 1986.
- , On the Line, Semiotext(e), 1983.
- , What is Philosophy, Columbia: N,Y, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques, Dissemination, Chicago, 1981.
- , Margins of Philosophy, Chicago, 1982.
- , Writing and Difference, Chicago, 1978.
- , Of Grammatology, John Hopkins, 1974.
- , The Post Card, Chicago, 1987.
- , Positions, Chicago, 1981.
- , The Truth in Painting, Chicago, 1987.
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- , Eyes of the University, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- , Who's Afraid of Philosophy, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- , On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy, Stanford: Stanford, 2005.
- , Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas, Stanford: Stanford, 1999.
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- Finkielkraut, Alain, In the Name of Humanity, N.Y.: Columbia, 2000.
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- , The Foucault Reader, N.Y.: Pantheon, 1982.
- , Language, Counter Memory and Practice, Ithaca: Cornel, 1977.
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- , Madness and Civilization, N.Y. : Vintage, 1965.
- , Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, Cornell University Press.
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- , The Archaeology of Knowledge, N. Y. Vintage, 1972
- , The Birth of the Clinic, N. Y. Vintage, 1975.
- , Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, N. Y. Vintage.
- , Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, N. Y.: The New Press, 1997.
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- , Inventions of Difference, On Jacques Derrida, Cambridge, Harvard, 1994.
- Gilligan, Carol, In a Different Voice, Cambridge: Harvard, 1982.
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- Grosz, E., Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction, Ldn: Routledge, 1990.
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- , Baidou: A Subject to Truth, 2003
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