

Pol 475/2075 POSTMODERN AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

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Office Hour: by appointment

Wednesday 2:15-4:00 / Birge Carnegie #24 or by Zoom.

Office hours are an opportunity for you to ask questions, discuss interesting course concepts, or to ask for academic advice.

Accessibility Needs (www.accessibility.utoronto.ca)

If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) as soon as possible.

It is not uncommon for university students to experience a range of health and mental health issues that may result in barriers to achieving their academic goals. The University of Toronto offers a wide range of services that may be of assistance. You are encouraged to seek out these resources early and often.

On Campus: Your college Registrar's Office, and / or Dean of Students' Office

Student Life - <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca>

Health and Wellness Centre - <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>

Off-Campus: Good2Talk - a post-secondary (24/7) helpline (1-866-925-5454).

Course Modality

This is an "in-person" class.

What to do if you're feeling unwell

1. Report your sickness to your course instructor.
2. Go home
3. If desired, Email U of T's Occupational Health Nurse (ehs.occhealth@utoronto.ca) who will conduct assessment and contact tracing, and will provide further direction

Course Description

This course concerns the development of postmodern thought and its passage into the posthuman.

The course will take the format of a weekly seminar discussion. Readings have been kept short being mainly essays or chapters from a work and will serve as an introduction to the theorists. Please come prepared to discuss the concepts raised in the texts. As this is a seminar, I will request depending on enrolment one or two members of the class to help lead discussion each week. A sign up list will be distributed in our second class.

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 1,500 words on a text from the list below or one of your choosing if discussed with me. The review is due October 3. You may also be asked to present, briefly in 5 minutes, your review to the class. The presentation will not form part of the mark. The review amounts to 30% 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. The paper is due Monday, November 14 amounting to 50% of your final mark. You will be asked to present your paper to the seminar on either November 21, 28 or December 5. It will form 10% of the mark. The presentation of your essay topic should be a maximum 15 minutes in length including time for questions. The seminar presentations schedule will be set after the fall break.
3. Class participation 10%.

Late penalties are 5% per school day. **Submission of work by e mail only preferably in Word or PDF.**
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 40% for the first paper and 60% for the second. In this case as well, work is to be submitted by e mail.

Term Essay Topics

1. The self is no longer that of enlightenment thought. It is now become a cyborg. Comment.
2. Political economy has gone from production to consumption, from the real to the hyper real and the virtual. Comment.
3. Speed has altered our conception of vision. What is its effect on the political?
4. Democracy, in the face of racism and colonialism, cannot work if all do not have a voice. Comment.
5. No longer a question of being but of becoming. Comment
6. What can art teach us about the political?
7. Or a topic of your choosing. Please discuss it first with me.

Readings

The Readings

The number of writers concerned with postmodernism is large. The readings highlighted here may be replaced or supplemented by others by agreement with the class. The selections may also be found on the internet.

Baudrillard, Jean, “The Precession of Simulacra”, in Simulacra and Simulation, Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press 2016.

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). and Guattari, The Three Ecologies, Ldn., Athalone Press, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques, “Counterfeit Money” in Given Time, Chicago, 1992.

Fanon, Frantz, “The Negro and Language”, Black Skin, White Masks, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2008.

Michel Foucault, “Las Meninas” in The Order of Things, N. Y. Vintage, 1970.

Haraway, D, “Cyborg Manifesto” in Simians, Cyborgs and Women, Routledge:1996.

Spivak, Gayatri, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in C> Nelson & L. Grosberg (eds), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, Macmillan, 1988 or Spivak’s work by this title.

Serres, Michel, "Turner translates Carnot" in Hermes, Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1982.

Virilio, Paul, "The Vision Machine" in The Vision Machine, New York: Semiotext(e), 1994.

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

Schedule of the Seminars

SEPTEMBER 12

TOPIC; Introduction and 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, the primacy of science to knowledge and myth, the significance of the text and author.

SEPTEMBER 19

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.

SEPTEMBER 26 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.

OCTOBER 3 TOPIC Foucault and Painting

We will discuss the opening chapter of Michel Foucault's The Order of Things devoted to Velasquez's the Las Meninas both as an interpretation of the famous painting and of Foucault's epistemology.

OCTOBER 10 Thanksgiving

OCTOBER 17

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.

OCTOBER 24

TOPIC; Science, Reason & Art

Serres looks at the postmodern world through the modern premodern. In the essay we will look at, he shows the relation of art, technology and science in the revolution of thermal dynamics.

OCTOBER 31

TOPIC: Virtual Machines

Deleuze with Guattari 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.

TOPIC: Ecosophy

Guattari’s penultimate writing takes on the challenge of ecology in his short essay by that title in The Three Ecologies.

NOVEMBER 7 Reading Break

NOVEMBER 14

TOPIC: Colonialism and Racism

Fanon explores the colonial relation which led him to support liberation movements aimed at independence. Trained as a psychiatrist, he set out in his analysis of Black skins and White masks both the political and psychological aspects of racism and of colonialism in The Wretched of the Earth. We will look at the first essay on language and race in Black Skins.

TOPIC: Spivak’s critique of colonialism and the racism that is ubiquitous in our history and society is accompanied by a powerful plea to allow and empower the voices of people who have been suppressed.

TOPIC; NOVEMBER 21

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 we will look at is of an analysis found in Given Time of Baudelaire’s ‘Counterfeit Money’ that he reproduces at the end of Given Time. This view of time as outside of the calculus of reason leads to Derrida’s thought around politics and friendship.

NOVEMBER 28 and DECEMBER 5

Presentations of Essays

DECEMBER 5 Last Class

Extended Reading List on request