

# **COURSE ID -- LT120 Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theory**

Seminar Leader: Dr Clio Nicastro

Course Times: Tues and Thurs 9.00--10.30  
Email: c.nicastro@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

## **Course Description**

This course will introduce students to key concepts and methodological approaches from different traditions of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, including feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism, and black studies. The seminar will cover “canonized” as well as less known thinkers: Theodor Adorno, Sara Ahmed, Walter Benjamin, Rosi Braidotti, Andrea Long Chu, Hélène Cixous, Silvia Federici, Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Donna Haraway, Saidiya Hartman, bell hooks, Lisa Yun Lee, Paul Preciado, Hortense Spillers, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Through a close reading of a selection of texts and film excerpts, we will delve into the issue of human subjectivity and its social, institutional, and political arrangement. With this in mind, the seminar will be following three main intertwined headings: 1) We will investigate how socio-political historical processes involved in the constitution of subjectivities are often perceived as “natural” and 2) what can be the role of writing, reading and filming in bolstering or protesting these power relations and narratives. How do the cultures we inhabit inform both how we write and read and how we see and perceive reality? How is language and genre deployed for political or polemical ends?

3) By exploring the positions from which a subject (can/is allowed to?) speak, act, express herself, we will observe how the production of determinate meanings do simultaneously exclude the emergence of others. How do individuals become accomplices to their own subjugation? How do they introject forms of domination?

An important question we will address during the seminar is what it means for a text to be ‘accessible’. We will discuss this issue not only as critical ‘readers’, by comparing the different styles of the authors we will encounter, but also as ‘writers’.

## **Requirements**

### **Class preparation**

Preparing for class involves reading thoughtfully and engaging with the set text for each class, for instance, by thinking through the argument of a particular section and taking notes while reading. Try to formulate and address questions before you come to class: What is the argument being made by the author? What terms recur throughout the text? How does it relate to other texts we have read on the course? If you find a particular section difficult to understand underline unfamiliar terms and try to ask yourself what specifically is unclear (don’t worry if you find the texts difficult or if you are not familiar with all the references; remember it is always possible that the author is being unclear or contradictory).

Students are expected to participate actively in class (\*see below special consideration for spring 2021). The purpose of the class is to come to a better understanding of it through collective discussion. Students are therefore encouraged to ask questions as well as making statements in class. The texts will be uploaded every week on google classroom. Students are asked to bring paper copies of the reading to class and to not use laptops. The use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform your instructor at the beginning of the course.

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. In instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

### **Attendance**

Regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Attendance at ALL classes is expected. Missing more than two 90--minute sessions in a semester will reduce the course grade by up to one grade step (e.g., B+ to B). Late arrival or leaving during class time will count as an absence. Missing more than 30% of all sessions may result in failing the course. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

#### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021:**

All students and instructors/guest speakers must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. If you cannot attend class because of COVID-19 restrictions, online alternatives will be provided, e.g., remote participation and/or asynchronous options. You can always contact me in case you need an individual meeting.

During any online session it is strongly encouraged to have your camera on. If the course will be online, we will try to make up for the physical distance through assignments that facilitate class discussion.

### **Assessment**

The assessment will be made on the basis of two essays and class participation (See 'Grade Breakdown' and 'Essay Deadlines' below).

### **Writing Assignments**

The deadlines for all writing assignments can be found under 'Essay deadlines.'

Essays: The midterm essay (2000 words) responds to a thematic question and should represent your understanding of one aspect of the course reading. The Final essay (3000 words) is expected to be more ambitious and somewhat longer, trying to develop a more comprehensive account of a particular conceptual question or topic you will have encountered during the course and drawing on a wider range of sources.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

The following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays applies to this course: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late.*

Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Classroom participation: 30%

Midterm Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

### **Schedule**

#### **Week 1 – Introduction**

Tues 2 February – Introduction to the course, presentation of the syllabus/ Excerpt from Stuart Hall, *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997)

Thurs 4 February - Excerpt from Stuart Hall, *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997)

#### **Week 2 – Subjectivity**

Tues 9 February - Michel Foucault, *The Subject and Power* (1982)

Thurs 11 February – Theodor Adorno, Excerpt from *Negative Dialectics* (1966)

#### **Week 3 – Subjectivity**

Tues 16 February – Theodor Adorno, Excerpt from *Negative Dialectics* (1966)

Thurs 18 February – Judith Butler, “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” *Gender Trouble* (1990)

#### **Week 4- The place we speak from**

Tues 23 February - Lisa Yun Lee, “Feminist Negative Dialectics: Dialectical Materialism and the “Transfigured Body” in *Dialectics of the Body. Corporeality in the Philosophy of Theodor Adorno* (2005)

Thurs 25 February - Lisa Yun Lee, “Feminist Negative Dialectics: Dialectical Materialism and the “Transfigured Body” in *Dialectics of the Body. Corporeality in the Philosophy of Theodor Adorno* (2005)

#### **Week 5 - The place we speak from**

Tues 2 March- Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledge* (1988)

Thurs 4 March- Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledge* (1988)

#### **Week 6- The place we speak from**

Tues 9 March- Sara Ahmed, Excerpt from *Queer Phenomenology. Orientation, Objects, Others* (2006)

Thurs 11 March- Sara Ahmed, Excerpt from *Queer Phenomenology. Orientation, Objects, Others* (2006)

#### **Week 7 Writing like a woman?**

Tues 16 March – Hélène Cixous *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976)

Thurs 18 March – Andrea Long Chu, Excerpts from *Females* (2019)

#### **Week 8 Representations at the margin: giving voice or producing different forms of knowledge?**

Tues 23- Paul B. Preciado, Excerpts from *Countersexual Manifesto* (2002)

Thurs 25- March- bell hooks bell, “Choosing the Margin: As a Space of Radical Openness,” in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990)

**SPRING BREAK Mon, Mar. 29 - Mon, Apr. 5, 2021**

**Week 9 Representations at the margin: giving voice or producing different forms of knowledge?**

Tues 6 April- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, excerpts from *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1983)

Thurs 8 April- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, excerpts from *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1983)

**Week 10 Representations at the margin: giving voice or producing different forms of knowledge?**

Tues 13 April- Stuart Hall, "The spectacle of the Others", in *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997)

Thurs 15 April- Film Screening

**Week 11**

Tues 20 April- Film Discussion

Thurs 22 April- Guest speaker Dr Rosa Barotsi (Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellow 2020-22 University of Milan)

**Week 12 Representations at the margin: giving voice or producing different forms of knowledge?**

Tues 27 April- Rey Chow, *The Politics of Admittance*

Thurs 29 April- Rey Chow, *The Politics of Admittance*

**Week 13 Critical Fabulation**

Tues 4- May Hortense Spillers, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book* (1987)

Thurs 6- May Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts* (2008)

**Week 14 Rethinking the Future**

Tues 11 May – Rosi Braidotti, Excerpts from *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019)

Thurs 13 May - Holiday

**Mon, May 17 – Fri, May 21, 2021**

Completion week

**Essay Deadlines**

Midterm essay (2000 words), due 23:59 Saturday, March 20

Final essay (3000 words), due 23:59 Friday, May 21