

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

Room: P98 Seminar Room 2

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, Gloria Anzaldua, Andrea Long Chu, Hélène Cixous, Silvia Federici, Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Donna Haraway, Saidiya Hartman, bell hooks, Lisa Yun Lee, Paul Preciado, 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 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 2022). 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 highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2022:

All students and instructors/guest speakers must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. If you need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic 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.

You are welcome to make an appointment with me to discuss essay assignments and feedback during my office hours.

You will receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for your seminar work. You are entitled to make an appointment with to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked for an appointment at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Classroom participation: 30%

Midterm Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction

Tues 1 February – Introduction to the course, presentation of the syllabus/ Excerpt from Stuart Hall, *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997)

Thurs 3 February – Lecture by Sander L. Gilman at ICI Berlin within the conference [Violence, Care, Cure: \(Self\)perceptions Within the Medical Encounter](#) (I will provide you with more details about this class)

Week 2 – Subjectivity

Tues 8 February - Michel Foucault, *The Subject and Power* (1982)

Thurs 10 February – Theodor Adorno, *On Subject and Object* (1969)

Week 3 – Subjectivity

Tues 15 February – Theodor Adorno, Excerpts from *Minima Moralia* (1951)

Thurs 17 February – Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988)

Week 4- Dialectics of the Body

Tues 22 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 24 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 – (Dis)embodied Subjectivities

Tues 1 March- Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976)

Thurs 3 March- Donna Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991)

Week 6- (Dis)embodied Subjectivities

Tues 8 March- Holiday

Thurs 10 March- Wendy Chu, Excerpt from *Updating to remain the same* (2017)

Week 7 The Place we speak from

Tues 15 March – Sara Ahmed, Excerpt from *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004)

Thurs 17 March – bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin: As a Space of Radical Openness,” in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990) + *Writing from the Darkness*.

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

Tues 22 March- Gloria Anzaldua, Excerpt from *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting, Identity Spirituality, Reality* (2015)

Thurs 24 March- Gloria Anzaldua, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981)

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

Tues 29 March – Rey Chow, Excerpt from *Not Like a Native Speaker. On Linguaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (2014)

Thurs 31 March - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Excerpt from *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012)

Week 10 Critical Fabulation

Tues 5 April- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Excerpt from *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012)

Thurs 7 April- Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts* (2008)

SPRING BREAK 11-18 April

Week 11 Cartographies of the Body

Tues 19 April- Guest speaker

Thurs 21 April- Paul B. Preciado, Excerpts from *Countersexual Manifesto* (2002)

Week 12 Cartographies of the Body

Tues 26 April- Andrea Long Chu, excerpts from *Females* (2019)

Thurs 28 April- Andrea Long Chu, excerpts from *Females* (2019)

Week 13 Cartographies of the Body

Tues 3 May – Film screening

Thurs 5 May – Rossana Rossanda, Excerpts from *This Body That Inhabits Me* (2022)

Week 14

Tues 10 May – Rossana Rossanda, Excerpts from *This Body That Inhabits Me* (2022)

Thurs 12 May – Recap and final remarks

Mon, May 16 – Fri, May 20, 2021

Completion week

Essay Deadlines

Midterm essay (2000 words), due 23:59 Sunday March 13

Final essay (3000 words), due 23:59 Sunday May 22