

English 9003A: Contemporary Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies

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Office: UC 2422

Office hours: Wed 2:30-3:30, Thurs 2:30-3:30, or by appointment (also online)

Room: UC 4401

Course hours: Thurs 3:30-6:30

Course delivery: in person

Description: This course will provide a survey of contemporary theory and its precursors in nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought. It will focus on several distinct though often related critical schools or movements, including Structuralism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, Queer and Trans Theory, Cultural Studies, Post-Colonial Theory, Thing Theory, Eco-Criticism, and Animal Studies. The readings for the course have been chosen to introduce some of the terms and concepts that have become critical touchstones for many scholars in literary and cultural studies, while the assignments will provide students with the opportunity to study theory as an object of analysis in its own right, and to apply its insights to a core group of literary texts and cultural texts. In so doing, we hope to question the assumed distinctions between “primary” and “secondary” literature: to what extent, we will ask, can theory be read as literature, and literature as theory?

The course assumes no specialized knowledge of the field. For some students, it will serve as an introduction to the significant influence that theory has had on the ways in which we read and interpret literature and culture, and for others it will be a chance to renew and deepen their knowledge of particular critics and approaches. Throughout, our goal will be not only to provide students with some of the basic methodological tools that they will need in graduate studies, but to foster a spirit of self-reflexive inquiry into what we read and how we read it.

Grading

60% final essay

15% oral presentation

15% class participation

10% short essay (750 words)

Final Essay: The essay is a research paper of 20 pages on a topic pertaining to the course. A one-paragraph abstract will be due on November 16.

Short Essay: Choose a quote or term from one of the texts of the first weeks and explain how it helps us interpret (or properly resist a too-easy interpretation) of some element of M. NourbeSe Philips’s *Zong!* Be sure to develop the theoretical importance of your term and its literary implications and effects.

Oral presentation: The presentation is a 15 minute overview of the key issues of a chosen text. I want you to generally structure your presentation by highlighting **three**

important concepts or terms from the reading and explicating these terms one by one. Please point to **specific quotes in the text**. Throughout the presentation, you should be raising questions for the class and outlining how you think we can get the most out of this reading.

Statement on Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Graduate Course Health and Wellness: As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

Statement on Student Accessibility Services: Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counseling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction. For more information, see <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>

Western University Land Acknowledgment: Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western University values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Diversity Statement (adapted from Appalachian State University English Department): Education is transformative, and open intellectual inquiry is the foundation of a university education and a democratic society. In the spirit of shared humanity and concern for our community and world, this class celebrates diversity as central to our mission and affirm our solidarity with those individuals and groups most at risk. In line with our departmental goals, we disavow all racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, classism, ableism, and hate speech or actions that attempt to silence, threaten, and degrade others.

As educators, we affirm that language and texts, films and stories help us to understand the experiences of others whose lives are different from ours. We value critical reasoning, evidence-based arguments, self-reflection, and the imagination. Building on these capacities, we hope to inspire empathy, social and environmental justice, and an ethical framework for our actions. We advocate for a diverse campus, community, and nation inclusive of racial minorities, women, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, and people of all religious faiths.

Required Texts:

Vincent Leitch, et. al. eds., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Third Edition* (Norton & Co, 2018)

M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (Wesleyan UP, 2008)

I will provide digital copies of essays marked with an “x” in a Dropbox folder.

September 8 – Introduction

Northrop Frye “The Archetypes of Literature,” Lauren Berlant “Genre Flailing” (x)

September 15 – Structuralism and Formalism

Ferdinand de Saussure “Course in General Linguistics,” Roman Jakobson “Linguistics and Poetics,” Cleanth Brooks “The Well-Wrought Urn,” W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley “The Intentional Fallacy,” Caroline Levine, Preface, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Recommended: Introduction) (x)

September 22 – Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism

J. L. Austin “Performative Utterances,” Paul de Man “Semiotics and Rhetoric,” Jacques Derrida “Signature, Event, Context” (x), Roland Barthes “Reality Effect,” Barbara Johnson “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” Recommended: Jacques Derrida “This Strange Institution Called Literature” (x)

October 6 – Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud “Interpretation of Dreams,” “The Uncanny,” “Fetishism,” Jacques Lacan “The Mirror Stage,” “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,”

Nicholas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom" (x), Recommended: Lisa Ruddick
"Beyond the Fragmented Subject" (x)

October 13 – Feminism

Virginia Woolf "A Room of One's Own," Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar
"The Madwoman in the Attic," Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative
Cinema," Donna Haraway "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"

Due: short essay

October 20 – Queer Theory

Michel Foucault "History of Sexuality," Judith Butler "Gender Trouble," Eve
Sedgwick "Epistemology of the Closet," José Estaban Muñoz, "Introduction," from
Cruising Utopia (x), Jack Halberstam "Trans*" (x)

October 27 – Marxist Historicisms

Karl Marx "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," selections from *Capital*,
Vol. 1, Fredric Jameson "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Peter Stallybrass
"Shakespeare, the Individual, and the Text" (x), Dipesh Chakrabarty "The Climate
of History: Four Theses" (x)

November 3 – **fall break**

November 10 – Cultural Studies

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry"; Roland Barthes
"Photography and Electoral Appeal"; Stuart Hall "Cultural Studies and Its
Theoretical Legacies"; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (x); Jane
Bennett "Vibrant Matter"; Recommended: Bruno Latour "Why Has Critique Run
Out of Steam?"

November 17 – Critical Race Theory

Franz Fanon "Black Skin, White Masks," Toni Morrison "Unspeakable Things
Unspoken," bell hooks "Eating the Other" (x), Christina Sharpe, from *In the Wake*
"The Wake" (x), Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, excerpts from *Is Everyone
Really Equal?* (x)

Due: essay abstract

November 24 – Colonialism, Indigeneity

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (x), Lee
Maracle "Oratory: Coming to Theory" (x), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson "Land

as Pedagogy” (x), Daniel Heath Justice “How Do We Learn to Live Together?” (x), Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, “Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures” (x), Recommended: Ania Loomba “Situating Postcolonial Studies” (x)

December 1 – Affect Theory, Post-Critique, Public Humanities

Sianne Ngai “Ugly Feelings,” Rita Felski “After Suspicion” (x), N. Katherine Hayles “How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine,” Wai Chee Dimock, from *Weak Planet* “Endangered” (x), Kesha N. Blain and Ibram X. Kendi “[How to Avoid a Post-Scholar America](#),” Andrew Stauffer “[Twilight of the Libraries](#)”

December 8 – Environmental Humanities

Timothy Morton “The Ecological Thought,” Rob Nixon “Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,” Stephanie LeMenager “The Humanities after the Anthropocene” (x), Rosi Braidotti “The Posthuman”

Final essay due Dec. 14