Theocrit 9201

Cyber War Theory

Instructor: Dr. Nick Dyer-Witheford

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:30, FNB 4045

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Seminar: Tuesday, 9:30 -12:30, STVH 3165

Course Description:

Cyberwar is all the rage today. Stories of Russian election hacking, Chinese networked espionage, jihadi virtual recruitment, and Pentagon contracts in Silicon Valley abound, mostly told by spooks, hypesters, politicians and journalists. This course, however, examines the idea of cyberwar as the site of an encounter between two bodies of critical theory, one dealing with “cyber”— the realm of the digital, the other with “war”—the domain of organized violence. It defines cyberwar in a broad sense, not just as military hacking, but as a phenomenon with constitutive adjacencies to and overlaps with cyber-crime and cyber-activism, surveillance, terrorism, drones and autonomous weaponry. From this vantage point, we will study Marxist, Lacanian, Derridean, and Deleuzian accounts of cyberwar, and the prescient work of war theorists such as Virilio and Kittler; the relation of cyberwar to classical theories of war and international relations, from Clausewitz to Schmitt; and the rapidly emergent field of feminist and postcolonial cyberwar studies. The seminar will thus offer a far ranging examination of critical thought on the current wave of digital militarism. It will be geared to the interests of seminar participants in a way helpful both in the writing of comprehensive exams, theses and dissertations and/or in political practice.

Topic & Readings Schedule:

This schedule of seminar topics and readings is provisional; it will be redesigned and reiterated, if necessary several times, dependent on the interests and priorities of the seminar. Readings will be available on the seminar OWL site.


January 28 War Speed: Virilio and Kittler. Virilio, Speed and Politics and The Information Bomb; Kittler, “Cold War Networks” and “Alan Turing, the Artificial Intelligence of World War Two”, in The Truth of the Technological World. Winthrop-Young, “De Bellis Germanicus: Kittler, the Third Reich and German Wars.”


February 18 Reading Week No Class

February 25 Deconstruction Machines & Perception Attacks: Jocques Deconstruction Machines Chapters 1 and 2; Massumi, “Perception Attack”; Dyer-Witheford & Matviyenko, Chapter 2, “Cyberwar’ Subjects.”


March 31 Conclusions. Readings TBA dependent on directions taken by the seminar.

Evaluation

In class presentation plus written summary (5-10pp): 25%. A list of presentation topics will be circulated, but seminar participants are encouraged to propose their own, in discussion with the instructor. The aim of the presentation is to lead the seminar into an open and accessible discussion of the chosen topic, and its wider implications for the themes of the course.

Major research paper (20-30pp): 60%. The topic of the paper is to be determined in discussion between the student and the instructor. Papers that relate seminar themes to participants’ own specific scholarly specializations in the field of theory and criticism are welcome. Students are advised to develop a term paper outline by around mid-term and discuss it with the instructor. The final paper is due on April 10. Late papers forfeit 10% per day. Any deadline extensions require proper academic accommodation.

Seminar participation: 15%. This portion of the grade is for attendance, preparation and constructive participation in seminar discussions.

Academic Offenses: Scholastic offences are taken seriously. 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/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)