THEOCRIT 9100 – What Is a Critical Theorist? Methods and Skills

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Room: StvH 3165
Course hours: Tues 12:30-3:30

Description: This course is designed for incoming MA and PhD students, although anyone is welcome to take it. The aim of the course is to study some examples of what it is to be a critical theorist. We will seek to develop more robust definitions of the following: theory, critique, troubling, staying with the trouble, criticism (literary and cultural), problems with critique. We will not cover all possible examples of how one becomes a critical theorist; instead, we focus on some select themes and case studies. Several of the readings will be taken from the comprehensive exam list.

This course will also feature workshops on how to build skills towards becoming a theorist at the Theory Centre. The workshops may be on the following topics: grant writing, TA skills, writing for publication and conferences, preparing to write the thesis, careers in and out of academia. The course will also feature several visits from core and associate faculty who will discuss their work and insights into how Theory students can make the most of the program. Students will also have the opportunity to meet visiting speakers for a more informal session to discuss the academic experiences of working as a theorist. Students will be required to attend a designated number of talks during the semester at the Theory Centre.

Grading
70% final essay
30% class participation

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 18.

Class Participation: Students will need to participate in class conversations, class assignments, class workshops, and attend two talks at the Theory Centre.

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

Please note that use of AI is not permitted in this class.

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. 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: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Norton), $14.
All other texts will be available on Brightspace. Note that "Norton" means *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

Schedule:

Week 1 – September 9
Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" (Norton)
Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For"
Catherine Malabou, *Stop Thief: Anarchism and Philosophy*, "Surveying the Horizon"
Thomas Mullaney and Christopher Rea, *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You*, Introduction, ch. 1

Week 2 – September 16
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction (second edition); "What Is Enlightenment?"
Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" "What Is Critique?" "Interview: The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom"
workshop on grants

due: short reflection piece on the following questions: How do you define theory? What are some goals for this class? What are some goals for your theory degree? (750 words, ungraded)

Week 3 – September 23 – no class

Week 4 – September 30 – no class (Truth and Reconciliation)

Week 5 – October 7
Friedrich Nietzsche, excerpts, *Beyond Good and Evil* (On the Prejudices of Philosophers), *Twilight of the Idols* (Forward, "Reason" in Philosophy, Morality as Anti-Nature)
Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, Part 1, 2, 5
Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, "Platonic Gesture"

Fall Break: October 14
Immanuel Kant, "Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View"
Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *Communist Manifesto*
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Week 6 – October 21
Theodor Adorno, "Why Philosophy?"
Fredric Jameson, "The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology"
Peter Szendy, *Powers of Reading*, 7-34
Visit by Peter Szendy

Week 7 – October 28
Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art"
John Crowe Ransom, "Criticism, Inc." (Norton)
Workshop on publications

Week 8 – November 4 – fall break

Week 9 – November 11
Plato, *Phaedrus*, (excerpt in Norton)
Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" (excerpt in Norton), "Différance"
Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," "The Resistance to Theory"

Week 10 – November 18
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction, Ch 12, 14, Conclusion
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (excerpt in Norton)
Lee Edelman, "The Future Is Kid's Stuff"
Workshop on thesis development
Due: paper abstract

Week 11 – November 25
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (22-35), "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You"
Bruno Latour, "Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" (Norton)
Rita Felski, "After Suspicion"
Workshop on careers in and out of academia

Week 12 – December 2
Edward Said, "Empire, Geography, and Culture," "Themes of Resistance Culture"
Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses"
Achille Mbembe, "Planetary Entanglement"
short roundtables on research

Week 13 – December 9
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy"
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1-29
Cameron Allen McKean, "Beyond People and Food"
short roundtables on research

Final Essay Due: Dec 16

London, ON artist Greg Curnoe's Nihilist Party of Canada (NPC), an absurdist political movement formed in 1963