THE MEDIUM OF CULTURE

Hist 72800, Prof. D. Herzog, Fall 2015

Class Tuesdays 2-4
Office Hours Tuesdays 10-12 and by appointment. Room 5114.05 tel. 212-817-8468
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This class is an experiment in educating ourselves about important developments in theoretically informed writing in history and allied disciplines, focused on puzzles of causation, interpretation, and uses of evidence. The five core topics we will explore, historically and conceptually (knowledge, faith, desire, violence, madness) are ones which have strong resonance in our present, even as assumptions about their meanings and functions have changed dramatically across eras and locations. All five challenge us to think more critically and carefully about the relations between individuals’ values and behaviors and social structures and polities – and the role of culture in mediating all of these. Because of its special expertise in theorizing culture, the discipline from which we will borrow the most is anthropology. But we will also read many historians, as well as philosophers, sociologists, literary critics, and journalists. One goal will be for you to acquire competence in reading a great variety of theoretically informed work, but another will be to understand the practical usefulness of this variety of cultural theory for the diverse historical research projects you are yourselves engaged in. Critical thinking about gender and sexuality will be integrated throughout.

Requirements include: thorough reading of the assigned materials, two critical questions about each assigned text sent to instructor and classmates in advance of class every time, thoughtful and active participation in class discussions, two short summary analyses of weekly readings also sent to instructor and classmates in advance of class (we will divide up the reading list on the first day), and one longer final paper exploring the relevance of and putting to use some aspect(s) of cultural theory for your own work. Questions and summaries must be emailed to the class by 8 a.m. on Tuesday.

Required readings are all on e-reserve at the Mina Rees Library.

Learning Goals:
Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:
*Read texts more critically and effectively than when the semester began
*Identify and summarize difficult key ideas in texts in an accessible and persuasive manner, verbally and in writing
*Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the evolution of cultural theory-informed work in history, anthropology, and related disciplines from the 1980s to the present, including various applications of Marxist, deconstructionist, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic approaches
*Recognize both the historically and culturally variable nature of categories of knowledge and the consequential impact of those ideas despite their variability
*Identify key innovations in conceptualizing the historically changing relationships between individuals’ values and behaviors and social structures and polities, as well as innovations in conceptualizing the roles of nonhuman actors and the role of contingency in history
*Explain effectively the adaptability and applicability of critical concepts developed by cultural theory-informed historians and anthropologists to the study of such issues as violence, religion, disease, emotions, economics, and empire, whether in commenting on history or on the present*

**Schedule:**

Sep. 1 Introduction to the class

**Knowledge**

Sep. 8 Theories of History/Histories of the Present
*Bruno Latour, “Crisis,” in We Have Never Been Modern (1993), pp. 1-12

Sep. 15-Sep. 22 Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. No classes. HOWEVER, we meet Sep. 25!

**FRIDAY Sep. 25 Categories/Causation**
*Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 76-100

Sep. 29 Spectacle/Scandal/Affect
*Cindy Patton, “Fear of AIDS: The Erotics of Innocence and Ingenuity,” *American Imago* 49, no. 3 (Fall 1992)
Faith

Oct. 6 What is Religion for?
*Richard Rubenstein, “The Dean and the Chosen People” (1966), in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications

Oct. 13 Creating Orientalism
*Tomoko Masuzawa, “Introduction” and “Buddhism, a World Religion,” The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (2005)

Desire

Oct. 20 Subjectivities
*Herbert Marcuse, “The Conquest of Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation,” One Dimensional Man (1964), only pp. 71-83
*Judith Coffin, “Beauvoir, Kinsey, and Mid-Century Sex,” French Politics, Culture and Society 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010), pp. 18-37
Oct. 27 Intimacies

Nov. 3 Sexual Politics

Violence

Nov. 10 In the Midst of Violence
*Roddey Reid, “The American Culture of Public Bullying,” Black Renaissance Noire 9, nos. 2-3 (Fall-Winter 2009-10), pp. 174-87

Nov. 17 In the Aftermath of Violence
*Talal Asad, “Introduction” and “Suicide Terrorism,” On Suicide Bombing, pp. 1-5, 39-64


**Madness**

Nov. 24 Mental Health in Global Context


*Kim Hopper, “Outcomes Elsewhere: Course of Psychosis in ‘Other Cultures’” in Craig Morgan et al., *Society and Psychosis* (2008), pp. 198-216


*Ben Kafka, paper delivered at the session on “Reassessing the Influence of Classic Theory on Historical Practice: Freud,” American Historical Association meeting, January 4, 2015.

*Dec. 1 “The Little Disturbances of Man”


*Dec. 8 Work on Final Papers

*Dec. 15 Final papers due*