English 7004 / Fall 2018
Theoretical Issues in Cultural Studies

Questions of Unreason
in Modern Cultures

Prof. Barrett Watten
CRN 17522 sect. 001/ Th 6:00–8:30 PM / 235 State Hall
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[Revised and corrected version for discussion 1/25/20]

This seminar will bring together several interrelated areas of inquiry: 1) critical and psychoanalytic theories that address the genesis and form of "unreason" in modern culture and public art, including Critical Theory after *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality* and psychoanalytic theory from Freud to Žižek; 2) theories of language and the public sphere from Habermas to ideology criticism; 3) theories of populism, racism, xenophobia, fascism, and gender and class antagonism; 4) popular movements that are relevant to these theoretical approaches, from hyper-nationalism to fascism, populism, and authoritarianism; and 5) works of modernism and the avant-garde that reflect on, diagnose, or exemplify questions of public unreason, from surrealism to the present. The course will address the needs of students of literature and culture after 1870, film, and other areas, and will provide basic literary and cultural theory as well as a framework for advanced topics.

Learning outcomes (department): students completing the course will be able to: 1) write arguments that are coherent, organized, consistent, and of sustained length; 2) demonstrate knowledge of foundational theoretical and critical texts; 3) historicize and contextualize foundational theoretical and critical texts; 4) employ critical methodologies appropriate both to the practice of theorizing and to their disciplines.

Learning outcomes (course): 1) understand and use basic concepts such as modernity, the public sphere, reason and unreason, identity and identification; in relation to works of art from 1870 to the present, including film, and political movements including democracy, fascism, and populism; 2) think through public discourses on race, class, and gender, particularly recent political issues and movements addressing them, using the theoretical and interpretive tools we have developed; 3) engage in articulate, respectful, and committed discussion with peers on these topics.

Syllabus: the syllabus is not a legal contract but a working document, a general proposal for a course of study that will be adjusted due to class needs. In other words, we may spend more time on a given text if we need too; and we will certainly cut and pare down reading from the initial proposal. The readings on the syllabus are usually more than anyone can do, and not everyone will do all the reading for a given class; the instructor and class will discuss what texts to prioritize. There will be a weekly email to the listserv, written every Friday after the class, that will go over where we are and introduce the reading for the next week. Students may want to read ahead in order to finish longer texts.

Readings: roughly 100–150 pages of readings will be assigned per week; students must do the assigned readings before class to write responses, participate in discussion, and build on key concepts. Novels may

require more of a commitment to reading; film texts may be viewed in their entirety before or after class, as we will generally look at excerts.

Course work: roughly one class contribution a week, posted to Canvas by 4:30 PM (no later than 5 PM) the day of the seminar, to be discussed and/or presented to the class, for a total of ten to twelve over the semester; and two short and one long papers, ca. 5-6 and 12–16 pp., addressing work done so far and related to the larger questions of the course. The long paper should intersect with the student's overall project in some way and may lead to a conference paper or dissertation chapter. Class participation will account for a substantial part of the grade.

Class time*:* the class is scheduled for 6:00–8:30 as representing 3 hours of course credit; however, this does not include a 10-15-minute break. Therefore, students should expect class to end at 8:45, and leave open the possibility that it could go longer (with notice) when film texts are screened.

Canvas and class listserv: "Questions of Unreason" <eng7004f18@lists.wayne.edu> is the class listserv. We will use the listserv for communication but post reading responses before class on Canvas.

Readings

PRIMARY TEXTS:

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor, 1998. ISBN 9780385490818. E-book
Ballard, J.G. *High-Rise.* New York: Liveright, 2012. ISBN 97-0871404022. E-book
Baraka, Amiri. *SOS: Poems 1961–2013*. New York: Grove Press, 2014. ISBN 9780802124685. E-book
Bataille, Georges. *Blue of Noon*. Trans. Harry Mathews. London: Penguin, 2012. ISBN 9780141195544. E-book
Buuck, David. *Noise in the Face Of*. New York: Roof Books, 2016. No E-book
Döblin, Alfred. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Trans. Michael Hoffman. New York: NYRB Books, 2018. ISBN 9781681371993. E-book
Göransson, Johannes. *Haute Surveillance*. Grafton, Vt.: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2013. ISBN 9781939460004 No E-book
The Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009. ISBN 9781584350804. No E-book
Mixon-Webster, Jonah. *Stereo(TYPE).* Boise: Ahsanta Press, 2018. ISBN ISBN 9781934103807. No E-book
Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. Chicago: U Chicago Press, 2002. ISBN 9780226805368.[E-book

SECONDARY TEXTS:

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2007. ISBN 9780804736336. E-book
Bray, Mark. *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*. New York: Melville House, 2017. ISBN 978-1612197036. E-book
Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Princip*le. New York: Norton, 1990. ISBN 978-0393007695. E-book
———. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. New York: Norton, 1990. ISBN 9780393007701. E-book
Koonz, Claudia. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP. ISBN 9780674018426. E-book
Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2018. ISBN 9781788731317. E-book

RECOMMENDED:

Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira, and Cas Mudde. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP. ISBN 978-0190234874. E-book

Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974. ISBN 9780807015551. E-book

Passmore, Kevin. *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014. ISBN 9780199685363. E-book

Žižek, Slavoj. *TheŽižek Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. ISBN 9780631212010. No E-book

FILM AND MEDIA:

Bunuel, Luis, and Salvador Dali, dirs. *L'Age d'or* (1930). Kanopy

Coogler, Ryan, dir. *Fruitvale Station* (2013)

Cukor, George, dir. *Gaslight* (1944)

Fassbinder, Rainer Maria, dir. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980)

The Handmaid's Tale, second season (2018). Hulu

Riefenstahl, Leni. *The Triumph of the Will* (1936).

Wheatley, Ben, dir. *High-Rise* (2015). Netflix

All the films are available from Amazon for rent or purchase (except *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, purchase only). Other streaming sources are indicated above. Only book titles everyone will be reading will be on order; wait for class discussion before purchasing. Books are available at Barnes & Noble and on-line providers. Please use the edition the class as a whole will be reading.

Class agenda

UNIT I: CRITICAL THEORY AND UNREASON

Week 1 (August 30): Social rationality and asociality

- Introduction; Jürgen Habermas, from *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; Slavoj Žižek, from *Violence* (pdfs)
- Recommended: Nancy Fraser, ""Rethinking the Public Sphere"; Michael Warner, "Mass Public and Mass Subject" (pdfs)
- *High-Rise* (film, in class)

Week 2 (September 6): Critical Theory in America I

- Tocqueville, from *Democracy in America* (pdf); Theodor Adorno, from *Minima Moralia* (pdf)
- Jacques Rancière, "The Politics of Literature" (pdf); Henri Lefebvre, from *Critique of Everyday Life* (pdf)
- Guest instructor [BW in Germany]

Week 3 (September 13): Critical Theory in America II

- Adorno and Horkheimer, from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Adorno et al., from *The Authoritarian Personality* (pdf)
- Fascism in America: Father Coghlin and Ezra Pound, radio speeches; Donald Warren, from *Radio Priest*; Neil Baldwin, from *Henry Ford and the Jews* (pdfs)

Week 4 (September 20): The Rise of Fascism

- Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*; *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (TV series; one episode in class)
- Klaus Theweleit, from *Male Fantasies* (pdf); Maria Tatar, "Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany" (pdf)

- Guest instructor [BW in China]

UNIT II: FASCISM, POPULISM, AVANT-GARDE

Week 5 (September 27): Fascism

- Koonz, *Nazi Conscience*; *Triumph of the Will* (film)
- Passmore, from *Fascism*

Week 6 (October 4): Avant-garde Anti-fascism

- Bataille, *Blue of Noon*; *L'Age d'or* (film); Breton, *Ode to Fourier* (pdf)
- Bataille and Breton, essays (pdfs); Cecile Whiting, from *Anti-Fascism in American Art* (pdf)

Week 7 (October 11): Psychoanalysis

- Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*
- Marcuse, from *Eros and Civilization* (pdf)

October 16–17: Jennifer Scappettone talk and reading

Week 8 (October 18): Populism

- Laclau, *On Populist Reason;* Kaltwasser and Mudde, from *Populism*

UNIT III: PRESENT ZONES

Week 9 (October 25): Ideology and anticapitalism

- Žižek, from *Žižek Reader* and *Mapping Ideology* (pdfs); Invisible Committee, *Coming Insurrection*
- Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" (pdf)

Week 10 (November 1): Occupy and Antifa

- Bray, *Antifa* and from *Translating Anarchy* (pdf); Collis, from *Dispatches from the Occupation* (pdf)
- Occupy poetry: Buuck, *from Noise in the Face Of*; Juliana Spahr, from *The Night the Wolf Came*; Sarah Larsen, from *All Revolutions Will Be Fabulous*; Brian Ang, from *Communism* (pdfs)
- From Michael Boughn et al., *Resist Much/Obey Little* (pdf)

Week 11 (November 8): Gender dystopia

- *The Handmaid's Tale* (second series); Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

November 14: Johannes Göransson reading

Week 12 (November 15): Social dysphoria

- Göransson, *Haute Surveillance*
- *Gaslight* [film, in class]

Thanksgiving (November 22):

Week 13 (November 29): Black Lives Matter

- Baraka, from *SOS*; Mixon-Webster, *Stereo(TYPE)*
- Coogler, *Fruitvale Station* (in class)

Week 14 (December 6): #MeToo

- YouTube and podcast materials developed by class: Tarana Brawney; Megan Falley and Olivia Gatwood; *Lean Back* and *The Heart*

- Sarah Ahmed, from *The Promise of Happiness*; Sarah Schulman, from *Conflict Is Not Abuse;* Rebecca Solnit, from *Men Explain Things to Me*; Kristen Roupenian, "Cat Person"; Roxanne Gay, from *Not That Bad*: *Discourses from the Rape Culture* (pdfs)

Study day (December 11): optional wrap-up discussion

Final week (December 12–18): final paper (12-16 pp.) due December 18 (tentative)

General policies

Attendance: attendance is assumed for graduate courses except for emergencies and will account for a substantial part of the grade.

Grades*:* grades will be based on four categories, of equal weight: 1) weekly responses and discussions (10 or more); 2) two short papers; 3) a final paper; 4) attendance and participation. In my graduate classes, an A means you are doing work at an advanced, PhD or PhD-preparatory level; an A– means that you are doing work at an advanced level but need to improve in an area; 3) a B+ means that you need to improve in more than one area to raise your work to an advanced level; 4) a B means that you completed the course but not at an advanced level; a B– is a cautionary grade that means you completed the course but not at the appropriate level; 5) a C+/C/C– means, essentially, that you failed to complete the course at the appropriate level but still get course credit.

Incompletes: incompletes are discouraged and will be given only for serious illness or personal catastrophe, not simply to give more time to complete the work. Incompletes that last more than a year, per Wayne State policy, convert to an F and cannot be changed to a passing grade. If you want to take an incomplete for the course, you must request it in writing and negotiate a written contract with me specifying the work to be completed and the timeline for doing so. Incompletes should be avoided at all cost in graduate study.

Plagiarism: plagiarism, defined as the unacknowledged use of another's work, means failure for the course and possible university action.

Auditors: advanced graduate student auditors (i.e., who have completed coursework), as well as visiting scholars, are welcome to attend and participate, with permission.

Office hours: my office is 9204.4 5057 Woodward. The key to the antechamber will be kept at the front desk; please return it after use.

Withdrawal: the withdrawal deadlines are, with refund, **September 12;** without refund, **November 12**.

Disability accomodation: If you have a documented disability that requires accommodations, register with Student Disability Services for coordination of your academic accommodations and make an appointment with me to discuss them during office hours. The Student Disability Services (SDS) office is located at 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library (313-577-1851 or 313-202-4216 for videophone); to learn more, visit www.studentdisability.wayne.edu.
