

The Politics of Desire: Engaging the "Present" through Various Domains of the Sociopolitical, Economical, and the Aesthetics

Fall Term 2021

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Course Description and Objectives

This interdisciplinary course explores the politics of desire during turbulent times in the current global neoliberal economic onslaught, witnessed by the proliferation of politics and protestations in various places that promise change in contexts that resist it. Taking "desire" as an open conceptual domain that brings together the affective and the (ir)rational, the philosophical and the psychological, the personal and the public, the present and the future, or in Reinhard Kosseleck's grim but still felicitous phrase, desires that "are now futures past," this course will explore the construction of human conditions of what people want, what they imagine as beneficial, and what they strive for through the fields of politics, economy, philosophical, and the aesthetic. We will analyze and deconstruct the illusionary homogenized politics of desire as manufactured by the state and transnational institutions; and the heterogeneous politics of desire as mediated through quotidian expressions and other grass root social movements represented or unrepresented in the so-called public sphere. A major concern of this course is the relationships among political power, the production of subject(ivities), and the potential, if any, horizons of imaginative future. In other words, how is the imagination our ultimate sustainable resources and hopes?

Course Policy

All readings must be completed before the week in which the given topic(s) is being discussed. Class attendance and active participation is part of the grade. Students who are absent more than two times will have a point taken off their final grade. Latecomers may, at the discretion of the instructor, incur an official absence. Students must accept the responsibility to respect the ethical standards in meeting their academic assignments and are encouraged to be active co-producers of knowledge. Students will hand in four one-page summary, a midterm and final essay. Essay questions will be distributed in advance.

Weekly discussions

Students should be prepared to participate in class discussion every class period. In addition, each student will be responsible for presenting on selected chapters from the assigned ethnography, book chapters, or articles and leading subsequent class discussion during the semester. Presentations must outline the main arguments in the text, provide some supporting examples for these arguments from the text, and evaluate those arguments in terms of supporting or opposed scholarship.

Course Evaluation – Overview

| | |
|----------------------------------------|-----|
| Attendance, participation, discussions | 40% |
| Final paper | 60% |

Instructor responsibilities

To present class material in clearly understandable language, to assist students in thinking critically about concepts and ideas, to respect student opinion and value each student's

contributions equally, and to give feedback on student progress early and often, to be accessible during office hours to discuss about student's potential topics for the final paper.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 – Sept 8: Introduction to the course. The first week of the term will be an online class. I shall set up a Zoom for this.

Students are strongly encouraged to not miss the readings and discussions on Week 2. Don't worry if you are having difficulty understanding the full extent of the two chapters we will be reading from Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*. We will be going through it during Week 2 and a deep understanding of these two oft-cited chapters will set the tone for this class.

Week 2 – Sept 15: What is History? What is Historiography": Historical Materialism in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

- ✓ Benjamin, Walter. 1968 [1955]. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 217-252.
- ✓ Benjamin, Walter. 1968 [1955]. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 253-264.

Week 3 – Sept 22: The Political Aesthetics of Protest: Spectacles, Carnival

- ✓ Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press - read *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 295-320.

Text: Werbner Pnina, Martin Webb and Kathryn Spellman-Poots (eds). 2014. *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- ✓ Chapter 3 – "Singing the Revolt in Tahrir Square: Euphoria, Utopia and Revolution (by Dalia Wahdan)
- ✓ Chapter 11 – "Vernacular Culture and Grassroots Activism: Non-violence Protest and Progressive Ethos at the 2011 Wisconsin Labour Rallies (by Christine Garlough)

Week 4 – Sept 29: *How to do things with words*, the title of John L. Austin book on his thesis on *Total Speech Act*.

- Allen, Lori. 2008. Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal During the Second Palestinian Intifada. *Cultural Anthropology* 23(3): 453-487.
- Allen, Lori. 2009. Martyr Bodies in the Media: Human Rights, Aesthetics, and the Politics of Immediation in the Palestinian Intifada. *American Ethnologist* 36(1): 161-180.

- Mittermaier, Amira. 2014. Bread, Freedom, Social Justice: The Egyptian Uprising and a Sufi Khidma. *Cultural Anthropology* 29(1): 54-79.

Week 5 – Oct 6: Culture of Fear and Paranoia

Can we conceptualize power (and resistance) in a post-Foucault, post-Agambem, post-Fanonian sense? Has the language of the Romantic genre lost its saliency in the historical present?

- Asad, Talal. 2012. Fear and the Ruptured State: Reflections on Egypt after Mubarak. *Social Research: An International Quarterly* Vol. 79(2): 271-298.
- Cheah, Pheng. 2008. Crises of Money. *Positions* 16(1):189-219.
- Scott, David. 1999. Fanonian Futures? In *Refashioning Futures: Criticism and Postcoloniality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 190-220.

Week 6 – Oct 13: Mid-term Recess:

Week 7 – Oct 20: When the “pink tide” of left-leaning governments first rose to power on the back of anti-neoliberal protests across Latin America in the late 1990s and early 2000s, has the initial reaction from the Left that was euphoric back then unsustainable?

- ❖ Giunta, Andrea. 2012. Politics of Representation: Art and Human Rights. *Emisferica*. 1-14. **(I will show some short footage from the internet)**
- ✚ We will also be watching a documentary by Oliver Stone called *South of the Border* (2009) that celebrate and romanticize the Pink Tide.

Week 8 – Oct 27: With the collapse of the Pink Tide all over Latin America in recent years, what can we learn from its demise? What does that tell us about the silences surrounding its demise by left-leaning scholars, especially within the Marxist camp. It also begs the questions if they have been analyzing the rise of the Pink Tide wrongly, especially in framing the entire movement within the conceptual framework of the nation-state. In other words, we are dealing with the rising literature that is sometimes called, “Ethnography of the nation-state” and, paradoxically, “What comes after the nation-state?”

Text: Gómez-Barris, Macarena. 2019. *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Americas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- ✓ Introduction: Beyond the Pink Tide.
- ✓ Chapter 1: Sounds Radicals.
- ✓ Chapter 2: How *Cuir* is Queer Recognition?: A Manifesto from the Sexual Underground.

Week 9 – Nov 3:

- ✓ Chapter 3: Art in the Shadow of Border Capitalism: Migration, Militarism, and Trans-Feminist Critique.
- ✓ Chapter 4: An Archive of Starlight: Remapping Pantagonia Through Indigenous Memories.
- ✓ Conclusion: Roque Waves.

Week 10 – Nov 10: One of the founders of the Frankfurt School once remarked, “Whoever doesn’t want to talk about capitalism shouldn’t talk about fascism.” What does he mean?

Text: Skidmore, Monique. 2004. *Karaoke Fascism: Burma and the Politics of Fear*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- ✓ Chapter 2: Bombs, Barricades, and the Urban Battlefield
- ✓ Chapter 3: Darker Than Midnight: Fear, Vulnerability, and Terror-Making
- ✓ Chapter 5: The Veneer of Modernity
- ✓ Chapter 6: The Veneer of Conformity

Week 11 – Nov 17: Something on Michael Taussig and Vincent Crapanzano and why not?

- Taussig, Michael. 1977. The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry: Devil's Labor and the Baptism of Money. In *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19(2): 130-155.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 2003. Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis. *Cultural Anthropology* 18(1): 3-32.

We might also be watching the movie called *Embrace of the Serpent*, which somehow has this sort of illuminations, in a Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism sense, and of Taussig’s book, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*.

Week 12 – Nov 24: Democracy is a word without definition, or too many definitions: Democracy and the Presuppositions of Equality (on anti-Identity Politics)

Text: May, Todd. 2010. *Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière: Equality in Action*. Edinburgh University Press

- ✓ Chapter 1 - Thinking Politics with Jacques Rancière

- ✓ Chapter 2 – Equality Among the Refugees: Montreal’s Sans Status Algerian Movement
- ✓ Chapter 3 - Subjectification in the First Palestinian Intifada

Week 13 – Dec 1:

- ✓ Chapter 4 - The Zapatistas: From Identity to Equality
- ❖ Students’ presentations of their final essays

Final essay due on Dec 8, 2021 as a Microsoft Word document via email in the following format: your lastname-720-finalessay.docx

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

| MARK | GRADE |
|-------------|--------------|
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-90 | A |
| 80-84 | A- |
| 77-79 | B+ |
| 73-76 | B |
| 70-72 | B- |
| 67-69 | C+ |
| 63-66 | C |
| 60-62 | C- |
| 57-59 | D+ |
| 53-56 | D |
| 50-52 | D- |
| 0-49 | F |

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to

Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances (RISO)

The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student’s religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Please review the [RISO information for students in the Faculty of Social Sciences](#) about how to request accommodation.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class;
2. Return of materials to students during office hours;
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail;
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

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