

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

Winter Term 2020

Instructor: Kee Howe Yong

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Lecture: Tues. 11:30 a.m. – 2:20 p.m.
@CNH 327

Office: CNH 535

Office Hours: Wed. 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. or
by appointment

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 - Jan 7: Introduction to the course.

Students are strongly encourage to not miss the readings and discussions on Week 2. The reading materials on Week 2 will set the course for this class.

Week 2 - Jan 14: 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.

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

Week 3 - Jan 21: The Political Aesthetics of Protest: Spectacles, Carnival

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 2 – "Teargas, Flags and the Harlem Shake: Image of and for Revolution in Tunisia and the Dialectics of the Local in the Global (by Simon Hawkins)

- ✓ 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 - Jan 28:

- 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 - Feb 4: Culture of Fear and Paranoia

Can we conceptualize power (and resistance) in a post-Foucault, post-Agambem, post-Fanon sense?

- 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 - Feb 13: Lessons from Latin America and Elsewhere: “Never Forget, Never Forgive” but the Persistence of the Romantic script.

- Giunta, Andrea. 2012. Politics of Representation: Art and Human Rights. *Emisferica*. 1-14. **(We will all be talking briefly on this and I will show some short footage from the internet)**
- We will be watching a movie called **Cairo 678** (2010)

Week 7 – Feb 18: Mid-term Recess

Week 8 - Feb. 25: Spectrality of the Nation-State (to consider deleting this and replacing it from the most current material on the Pink Tide of Latin America?)

Klima, Alan. 2002. *The Funeral Casino: Mediation, Massacre and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- ✓ Chapter 1: Introduction
- ✓ Chapter 2: The New World
- ✓ Chapter 3: Revolting History

Week 9 - March 3:

Klima, Alan

- ✓ Chapter 6: The Charnel Ground
- ✓ Chapter 7: The Funeral Casino

- Thongchai Winichakul. 2002. "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past: The Ambivalent Memories of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok." In *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, edited by Shigeharo Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 243-283.

Week 10 - March 10:

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 - March 17:

Taussing, Michael. 2003. *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Week 12 - March 24: Democracy and the Presuppositions of Equality (or anti-Identity Politics)

- 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 – March 31:

Chapter 4 - The Zapatistas: From Identity to Equality - **Frank**

- ❖ Students brief discussion of their final essays – fifteen minutes max per student

✚ Wrapping up!

- **Final essay due on April 14, 2020 at my office (from 12 to 4 pm). Students may opt to hand in their essays as early as April 7, 2020.**

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, user names 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.

[latest update August 13, 2019]