

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

**Kee Howe Yong**

**Office Hours: Tues. 4:00 – 5:00 or by appt.**

**Email: [yongk@mcmaster.ca](mailto:yongk@mcmaster.ca)**

**Tuesday 12:30 – 3:20 @ CNH307**

**Office: CNH 535 xtd. 23907**

**Course Descriptions 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?

**Requirements:**

All reading is required and must be completed before the week in which a given topic(s) is being discussed. Class participation requires your bodily presence in class and intellectual engagement with the material. My evaluation of your participation will take into account how well you complete formal tasks such as turning in discussion questions, leading discussion or presenting a reading as assigned, and your willingness to participate in class discussion in general.

Participations and discussions	40%
Final Paper	60%

**Class discussions:** Each student will be expected to prepare analytical questions and to discuss and summarize the reading in order to prepare for class discussions. In addition, students will take turn each week for leading class discussion, outlining the main arguments of the text(s), provide some supporting examples for these arguments from the text(s), and evaluate those arguments in terms of supporting or opposed scholarship.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and 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 kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, Appendix 3, <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g., the submission of work that is not one’s own for which other credit has been obtained. (*Insert specific course information, e.g., style guide*)
2. Improper collaboration in group work. (*Insert specific course information*)
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

(*If applicable*) In this course we will be using a software package designed to reveal plagiarism. Students will be required to submit their work electronically and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

#### **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.

Email Forwarding in MUGSI:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html>

\*Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link

#### **Course Schedule:**

**Week One - Jan 8: Introduction to the course**

**Week Two - Jan 15: 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 Three - Jan 22: 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 Four - Jan 29:**

- 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 Five - Feb 5: 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 Six - Feb 12: 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 Seven – Feb 19 – Mid-term Recess**

**Week Eight - Feb. 26: 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 Nine - March 5:**

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 Ten - March 12:**

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 Eleven - March 19:**

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

**Week Twelve - March 26: 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 Thirteen - April 2:**

- Chapter 4 - The Zapatistas: From Identity to Equality
- Chapter 5 – Institutions of Equality
- Chapter 6 – Democratic Politics Now

**Week Fourteen – April 9:**

- ❖ Students brief discussion of their final essays – ten minutes max per student
- ❖ Wrapping up!

➤ **Final essay due on April 16, 2018 at my office (from 12 to 4 pm)**

*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 16, 2018*