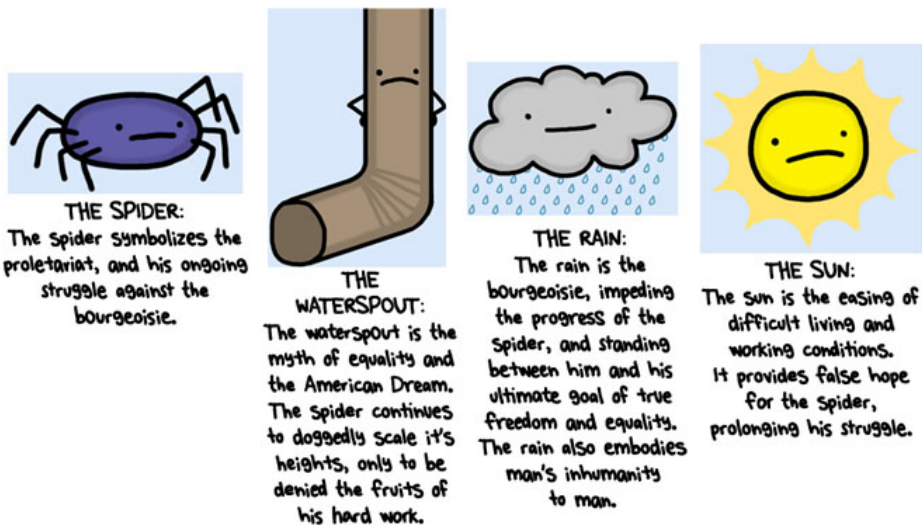


Social & Cultural Theories:
How to (Pretend You Can) Explain Everything that Ever Happened
Prof. Laurel Shire -- HIS 9819B/ AMS 9000B
Western University, Winter 2017
Wednesdays, 1:30-4:30pm in LWH 2270C

This course is designed to introduce graduate students in History and American Studies to some of the philosophical and theoretical ideas that have shaped the field of cultural studies. As scholars seek to explain and interpret society and culture (including history, literature, media) they take for granted that some things matter more than others, but they often disagree about what those things are: social hierarchy, cultural symbols, language, emotions, money, military power, violence, individuals or groups, identity, desire, difference, politics, governments, everyday people, spiritual and scientific claims to Truth. Understanding these debates, the advantages and disadvantages of these decisions and assumptions, will serve you both as an analytical reader (what assumptions does an author make? What will be invisible because of that?) and as a researcher (what assumptions am I making? Why? Should I adjust my approach? If I do, what new interpretations will become available?)

The Itsy Bitsy Spider: An Analysis.



In general, theory is useful for two reasons:

1 - Thinking "outside the box" of existing scholarship -- it allows you to approach any cultural object, historical moment, event or era with many different sets of tools, opening up new approaches and avenues for research and interpretation. Since the goal of graduate scholarship is to make an original contribution to knowledge, a working

knowledge of social and cultural theories offers you multiple potential ways in which you might do that.

2 - Imagine that the world was/is/could be different (and better?) in the future.

Theorists of cultural and society are often fundamentally motivated to make the world a better place. If we understand the past, and therefore the present, more accurately, perhaps we can shape the future into something closer to our ideal. Again, of course, what counts as “better” depends on who you ask and when you ask them.

Finally, this course is designed to be fun. We have the luxury of thinking, deeply and together, about how and why societies, cultures, and people have become what they are today and how they are becoming and will become something different in the future. Your brain will get a workout; endorphins will be released.

You are required to write a 2-3 page reaction essay every other week (groups 1 and 2). This paper should summarize major arguments and implications of the assigned readings from the previous and current weeks. Where appropriate, you are encouraged to use these reaction papers to think about how each theoretical approach might be useful to your own MA or PhD project.

Once during the semester, you will bring in a cultural object for discussion (contemporary or historical) that illustrates something from the reading. You are each assigned a week below in which to do this. Bring your object (or a link to it) and be prepared to explain its connection to the reading(s). Together, we will all work through the analysis.

At the end of the semester, you will write a 20-25 page essay. Using two of the theoretical approaches we have studied, you will write a comparative analysis of an historical topic or cultural object of your choice. If, for example, your topic is “slavery” or the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, then you would write an analysis of slavery or of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from two different theoretical perspectives (choosing those that make the most sense to apply). How would Marx and Foucault frame and interpret slavery differently? How would Jameson and Bourdieu analyze and interpret *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*? What would each of those analyses yield, and what would each tend to obscure? This essay is due on Friday, April 28, 2017 by 5pm to lshire@uwo.ca.

Course Components:

Participation in class discussion (expected and required):	25%
6 Biweekly Reaction Papers:	30%

Cultural Object for Discussion:	10%
Final Paper	35%

Week 1. Introductions, Purpose, Ideas

This will be the basis of our discussion on Jan. 11 – come prepared to discuss these readings:

History students read:

- William Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (2005)

American Studies students read:

- Antje Dallmann, Eva Boesenberg, and Martin Klepper, eds., *Approaches to American Cultural Studies* (2016), 135-251
- Richard Johnson, "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" *Social Text* 16 (1986/87): 38-80
- Joel Pfister, "The Americanization of Cultural Studies," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 4 (1991): 199-229.

Be prepared to explain what you read to the rest of the seminar.

Week 2. Reactions due from Group 1 (before class to lshire@uwo.ca).

- G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), "The Master-Slave Dialectic"
- Freud *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (Norton, 1989) fetishism
- Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (Norton, 1977) "The Mirror Stage..." "The Agency of the Letter..." and "The Signification of the Phallus..."

Week 3. Reactions due from Group 2 (before class to lshire@uwo.ca).

- Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), selections
- Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" (1973)
- Louis Althusser "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970)
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904/1930), selections

Week 4. Group 1

- Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1982); Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" (1975)
- Raymond Williams, "Culture" from *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976)
- Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity" (1992), in Hall, Stuart; Held, David; McGrew, Anthony, *Modernity and Its Futures*, 274–316

Week 5. Group 2

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957)

Week 6. Group 1

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1975)

Week 7. Group 2

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993)

Week 8. Group 1

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), Introductions to Volumes I and II; Part I - Chapters 2-3; Part II - Ch. 4, Part IV - Conclusion
- Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), Parts I and III
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (1990), Preface and Chapter 3
- Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (2011), "Introduction," "Transposing Differences," and an essay of your choice

Week 9. Group 2

- Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* and "Concerning Violence" from *The Wretched of the Earth*
- Paul Gilroy, "Race and the Right to be Human"

Week 10. Group 1

- Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory," *American Historical Review* (April, 1997).
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1991/2006), Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-3, 9-11
- Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Introduction, Chs. 1-2, 6, 12
- Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987): "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Week 11. Group 2

- Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: We Other Victorians, Right of Death and Power Over Life*
- Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984)
- Selections from Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* and *Diving into the Wreck*; Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider*; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Week 12.

- Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (2007)