CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

Time: Thursdays 9:00 am-11:50 am
Location: TB 100

Instructor: Dr. Robyn Lee
Email: robyn5@ualberta.ca
Office: Tory 6-9
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:30-12:30 and by appointment

Course Description:

In this course we will treat theory as a verb or an action, asking “what does theory do”? We will ask: Who produces theory? What (and who) is described by theory? What are the material and intellectual conditions for creating, transforming, and sharing theory? Do concepts “belong” to anyone? We will question the relationships between theory and forms of social inequality, exploring the ethical and political implications of theorizing. We will also work at creating concepts of our own.

Friendship will be a theme guiding our investigations, as in the paradoxical framing of the quotation - “O my friends, there is no friend” - that Derrida extensively reflects upon. We will ask what it means to theorize “between friends”, to be a friend to concepts, and what it means to speak for and of the other in ways that are ethically responsible. We will also inquire into the limits and dangers of friendship, considering who and what becomes viewed as a stranger or enemy. We will interrogate practices of exclusion from the production of theory, and what this means for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. As well, we will expand our understanding of friendship beyond human society to theorize relationality and becoming within the context of broader ecologies.

Course Objectives:

• To develop understanding of significant themes and concepts within contemporary social theory
• To trace intellectual developments and influences in contemporary social theory
• To strengthen skills in close reading of theoretical texts
• To enhance research and writing skills
• To gain experience in oral presentation of ideas
REQUIRED TEXTS:


Additional required texts will be available on eClass as pdfs and on reserve in the library.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

**September 7** Introduction to the Course: What is Theory and What Does it Do?

**September 14** Intersectionality
Collins, Patricia Hill. Chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12, In *Black Feminist Thought*, pp. 1-44; 251-290.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**September 21** Becoming/Concepts

**September 28** Text/Author
October 5 Sexuality

October 12 Biopower
*Supplementary Reading:*

October 19 Friends/Strangers
*Supplementary Reading:*

October 26 Technology/Nature
*Supplementary Reading:*

November 2 Affect

November 9 Political Ecology and the ‘Parliament of Things’

November 16 – Reading Week: no class
**November 23** Matter and Meaning  

**November 30** ‘Becoming-With’  

**December 7** – final class: colloquium

**COURSE EVALUATION:**

**15% In-Class Presentation**  
These presentations will focus on drawing out broader implications of the readings we are exploring in class. Do **NOT** merely summarize your selected text. Suggested length: 15-20 minutes. Dates for presentations will be scheduled in the first week of class. These presentations **may** involve a small amount of outside/secondary reading (although this is not necessary); you must provide a bibliography of any additional readings to the class. Possible ways to approach presentations include:
- examine connections between your selected text and other texts/theorists we will read
- explore another reading/theorist referenced in the text, that we are not reading in class (e.g. Barbara Christian’s “The Race for Theory”, discussed by Dian Million)
- discuss how you (or a researcher working in your area) might use the selected theory
- discuss debates/controversies around the selected theory
- discuss how another author has made use of this theory

**15% Class participation**  
As part of your participation in this class you are to submit discussion questions to me via email each week in advance of class. These questions should be one paragraph maximum. I suggest that you include one question that you have a response to (preliminary/starting point is fine) and one question that remains open ended (e.g. something that baffles you…) Your submitted discussion questions will provide a starting point for our in-class discussions. In addition, please come to class with pre-selected sections of the text to focus in our close reading section of the class. I suggest that you look for sections that you think are particularly significant for the overall argument and/or that you don’t understand/want to explore in depth.

**10% Research proposal – due November 9**  
A proposal for your final essay is required. Your proposal must include: a title, description of topic, bibliography and discussion of the selected primary texts and secondary sources, and an
outline of your proposed argument. I will provide feedback and suggestions on the proposals. Suggested length: 4-5 pages, plus bibliography

10% Presentation of draft essay during in-class colloquium (December 7)  
The class colloquium will be modeled after an academic conference. You will have 10 minutes to present your research and there will be time for questions.

10% Discussant feedback/peer review  
Each of you will engage in peer review of each other’s papers in advance of the colloquium. You are expected to carefully read your partner’s draft essay and provide written feedback to your partner, and provide a copy to me. This is to include deep and critical (while still friendly) engagement with your partner’s ideas. You may consider Anne Dufourmantelle’s engagement with Derrida in *Of Hospitality* as a model. Suggested length: 4-5 pages

40% Final essay submission – Due December 14  
Length: 25-30 pages double spaced, 12 point font  
The essay must include a clear and coherent argument developed from close reading of selected theoretical texts. The focus should be on one or a few of the texts we will read in this course, and draw on a small number of additional primary and secondary texts. Essays will be evaluated on the basis of demonstrated comprehension of the texts, originality of ideas expressed, strength of argument, and quality of writing.

### Grading Scale

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<th>Letter</th>
<th>Numerical Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Exceptional work and achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>86–89</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Excellent and displays high comprehension of material</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>82–85</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Great work with good comprehension of material</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>78–81</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Good and better than average comprehension</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>74–77</td>
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<td>Solid understanding of course material</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>70–73</td>
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<td>Satisfactory to good performance</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>66–69</td>
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<td>Satisfactory work</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>54–57</td>
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<td>50–53</td>
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Policy for Late Assignments
Late papers will be marked down 5% percent for each day past the deadline, and will not be accepted after one week past the deadline. Please contact me in advance if you will have difficulty meeting a deadline for health or personal reasons.

Required Notes
“Policy about course outlines can be found in the Evaluation Procedures and Grading System section of the University Calendar.”

Academic Integrity
“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at http://www.governance.ualberta.ca/en/CodesofConductandResidenceCommunityStandards/CodeofStudentBehaviour.aspx) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.”

Learning and working environment
The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring that all students, faculty and staff are able to work and study in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:
• Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
• If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.
For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the Office of the Student Ombuds. Information about the University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures is described in UAPPOL.

Academic Honesty
All students should consult the information provided by Student Conduct and Accountability regarding avoiding cheating and plagiarism in particular and academic dishonesty in general (see the Academic Integrity Undergraduate Handbook and Information for Students). If in doubt about what is permitted in this class, ask the instructor.

An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. See the Academic Discipline Process.

Recording of Lectures
“Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).”

**Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components**

Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days. Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult the Calendar regarding Attendance and Examinations sections of the University Calendar. Be aware that unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the “attendance and participation” component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result.

**In this course**, attendance and participation is graded based on completion of ongoing in-class assignments.

**Student Accessibility Services**

If you have special needs that could affect your performance in this class, please let me know during the first week of the term so that appropriate arrangements can be made. If you are not already registered with Student Accessibility Services, contact their office immediately (1-80 SUB; Email sasrec@ualberta.ca; Email; phone 780-492-3381).