

## **GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS:** **Fall 2009**

### **English 269 (Doyle)** **Theorizing the 19th Century**

This seminar takes as its focus the critical texts and theoretical terms that organize our understanding of 19th Century American Studies - sentimental culture, enslavement and escape, fugitivity, abolition, mistrelsy and performance, grief and mourning, haunting and history. Periodically during the quarter (probably three times), our seminar will meet with Professor Molly McGarry's History seminar - and we will share our conversations about these terms (note: the meetings with Professor McGarry's seminar will happen on Mondays in the late afternoon). Please note: this class will not review fiction/poetry from this period, but criticism and theory *about* the period. Students who enroll in this class will be given a summer reading list, which will include some novels and poetry that may inform their writing in their seminar papers.

Authors include: James Baldwin, Walter Benjamin, Lauren Berlant, Daphne Brooks, W.E.B. DuBois, Saidiya Hartmann, Eric Lott, Dana Luciano, Sianne Ngai, Laura Romero, Antonio Viejo and more.

### **English 275 (Tobias)** **Seminar on Media, Technology, and Virtuality**

This seminar examines narratives and exhibitions of "the virtual" in post-cybernetic media and networks. Digital networks mediate globally extensive processes of cultural production, indicating changing dynamics amidst networks of individuals, technologies, cultures, states. The formal specificities of digital cultural forms (such as the graphical interface, interactive narrative, or networked authorship, for example) allow significant shifts in the temporo-spatial dynamics of cultural production and reception, so that digital media works have prompted large-scale re-evaluation of accounts of subjectivity, authorship, agency, textual form, and audience response. At the same time, cultural narratives of the cybernetic media have come to provide an important object of study for contemporary critical studies of narrative, culture, and media generally.

Routinely, these two shifts -- actual historical changes in which digital networks mediate important changes, and cultural narratives of cybernetic cultural production as "virtuality" -- are referenced in terms of "the virtual." But how does the "virtual" of "VR" relate to more rigorously defined notions of "virtuality" as potentiality? Beginning with this question, this seminar will explore the histories and specificities of networked digital media, and provide participants with opportunities to research the ways we situate theories and practices of digital media production within larger cultural fields undergoing changing local and global relationships. Seminar topics may include virtual reality, digital cinema, networked authorship, multilinear narrative, interactive gesture, digital games,

modular and re-configurable media, and other practices and forms specific to the digital media context. Participants will make presentations on seminar topics, and complete a final research paper.

Prior versions of this seminar have included selections from the following list (and this list is subject change):

Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*  
Flusser, *Selected Writings*  
Deleuze, *Bergsonism*  
Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*  
Hayles, *My Mother was a Computer*  
Foster, *The Souls of Cyberfolk*  
Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*  
Haraway, selections, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*  
Ryan, *Cyberspace Textuality*  
Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*  
Wills, David, *Prosthesis*  
Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*  
Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*  
Selections, *The Video Game Theory Reader*  
Selections, *Small Tech: The Culture of Digital Tools*  
Selections, *Variantology*

**English 200 (Lopez)**  
**Introduction to Graduate Study in English**

This seminar will introduce first year doctoral students to the profession of literary studies and provide students with a range of skills so that they may successfully navigate their way through graduate school and into academia. Seminar meetings will focus on matters foundational to successful engagement with graduate work. We will discuss: how to maximize the seminar experience, including how to read both comprehensively and critically, speak pedagogically, and write strategically; how to develop working relationships with faculty; and how to see yourself as contributing to a larger critical mass of scholars. Course readings will include essays that faculty members in the department have designated as “essential reading” in their areas. To further facilitate the seminar’s goals, a number of faculty members in the department will join the seminar to discuss their own research and areas of specialization. We will also actively discuss the process of creating academic writing: taking reading and seminar notes; creating annotated bibliography; conducting research; writing presentation papers (talks); and revising short writing (such as talks) into longer essays. Seminar work will culminate in students presenting their work in a writing workshop and then revising this work into a short paper for presentation at a final mini-colloquia.

## **English 273 (Willis)**

### **Early Modern Witchcraft and its Afterlives**

Course description: This course takes its main title from Stuart Clark's Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe. The first section of the course will be a concentrated effort to understand the 'cultural work' done by occult beliefs in the 16th and 17th centuries--in particular beliefs in demons, spirits, and devils. How did such concepts help playwrights, poets, clergymen, and kings make sense of their world? We will explore such questions through readings in early modern plays, pamphlet literature, demonological tracts and historians' case studies. The human figures of the witch and the sorcerer are central in much of this literature but our focus will also be on the conceptions of occult power and spirit beings associated with them and on the fluid interplay between literal and metaphorical uses of the language of witchcraft. Though the course will primarily focus on early modern materials (including plays such as *Macbeth*, *Dr. Faustus*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*), we will also consider 20th century rewritings of the early modern witch and of related occult beliefs. What new cultural meanings come into play when the 16<sup>th</sup> century witch and her familiars (or the sorcerer and his spirits) are transposed into much different historical contexts and belief systems? Some possible lines of exploration: Freud's rereading of 17th century demonological tracts (such as Malleus Maleficarum and Weyer's De Praestigiis Daemonum); witchcraft on the internet and in contemporary wiccan and neo-pagan belief; images of witches, sorcerers, exorcists, and demons in contemporary theater, film, and popular culture; 20<sup>th</sup> century plays, poetry, and novels such as Caryl Churchill's Vinegar Tom, Polanski's Rosemary's Baby, and the early modern witch in the horror genre. This part of the course will be responsive to student interests and there will be plenty of opportunities for original research.

## **English 274 (Yamamoto)**

### **Feminist Theory: Intersections and Interventions**

This seminar is designed to provide grounding in feminist theories that focus on the intersection of race, nation and the liberal subject, then branch outward. We will begin with a general survey of feminist literary criticism and theory in the 1980s, then turn to the critique lodged by lesbians, women of color, and lesbians of color as a way of understanding the developments in feminist theory since then. We will concentrate on theories that focus around intersectionality and various conceptual interventions that disrupt notions of "the feminist subject." As the quarter proceeds, some questions will accompany our reading: what is the place of pleasure? How are we to understand notions of agency? What is the role of discursivity? The experiential? Futurity? In what relation does "woman" stand to nation and/or to cultural nationalism? What are the productive tensions and continuances between queer and feminist theories? What is the place of gender studies? Why does masculinity, as a conceptual category, matter? And who, elsewhere and in the above, is "we"?

Required text:

Warhol and Herndl, *Feminisms*

Other texts to be determined.

Coursework: regular and substantive participation in discussion, paired oral presentation and response, Blackboard postings, final 20-25 page seminar paper.

### **English 264 (Fabricant)**

#### **The 18<sup>th</sup> Century City and its Discontents**

In this seminar we'll be examining the ways in which the character and growth of London (and to a lesser extent, Dublin), along with the development of various urban institutions and practices (coffee-houses, gambling venues, town criers, Grub Street, the print trade, stock-jobbing), influenced literary production – not merely thematically but also generically, structurally, linguistically, and commercially. Using Raymond Williams' The Country and the City and several more recent studies as points of entry into the critical debates surrounding this subject, we'll consider how 18-century texts were shaped by the impact of capitalism and its geographical, architectural, and cultural reconstructions of the urban centers where most writers lived, worked, published, and distributed their 'goods'. We'll interrogate ideas of modernity and progress with a look at the upscale, 'fashionable' London (and Dublin) along with their ugly underbelly: slums, poverty, crime, prostitution, stench, disease, the menacing crowd (though we might want to ask, 'menacing' to whom?). Questions we'll be raising have to do with the role these phenomena played in the creation and development of specific genres (the novel, satire, city eclogues, periodical literature, personal journals, pornography, etc.) and the ideological as well as artistic and cultural function these types of writings performed in the emergence, over the course of the 'long 18<sup>th</sup> century', of London as the first city of the British Empire, and of Dublin as the second colonial (and colonized) city. Texts we might look at include Ned Ward's The London Spy; Rochester's A Ramble in St. James's Park; Lillo's The London Merchant; Wycherley's The Country Wife; Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year, Moll Flanders, and A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain; Gay's Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London and The Beggar's Opera; essays from The Spectator; Pope's Dunciad; Swift's A Modest Proposal and poems on London and Dublin; Dunton's The Dublin Scuffle; John Cleland's Fanny Hill; Johnson's London; Boswell's London Journal; prostitute narratives from Nightwalkers (Broadview Press); etc.

P.S. Those who would like to focus in their individual research/paper projects on the literature and ideology of the country along with (or in lieu of) the city will have the opportunity to do so. We might even set aside one or two periods to discuss forms of rural capitalism (agricultural enclosures, landscape gardening, country-house tourism, etc.) and their impact on 18<sup>th</sup>-century poetry and fiction.

**English 289 (Ganim)**  
**Premodern Cosmopolitanisms**

For the past two decades, debates over political ethics have centered on the theory of cosmopolitanism. Is it possible to be a citizen of the world? Do human rights and responsibilities for others disregard the borders of nation-states? What form would concrete actions proceeding from these questions take? These debates have appropriately transcended disciplinary boundaries and scholars in the humanities and the law as well as social scientists and activists have taken part. Theories of cosmopolitan at the present find their starting point in the eighteenth century, particularly the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant.

A few thinkers, however, have argued for earlier origins of the cosmopolitan, citing the extraordinary mobility and diversity of the Roman Empire. Antonio Gramsci contrasted his ideal of the rooted intellectual, with the cosmopolitan internationalism in the Middle Ages, specifically the Holy Roman Empire. The Middle Ages, as it were, is always already cosmopolitan, the Church defined itself as transcending regional, ethnic and linguistic divisions. Feudal patterns of governance could transport cultural values (as well as modes of extraction and oppression) across vast, loosely connected areas.

This seminar will consider the possibilities of a premodern cosmopolitanism, by exploring the ethics and politics of some distinct but related genres: travel narratives, such as *Mandeville's Travels* and Ibn Battuta's *Travels*; chronicles of the Crusades; tale collections, such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, which purport to span cultures and periods. We might also consider the representation of a cosmopolitan Middle Ages in such recent films as Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*, Youssef Chahine's *Destiny*, and several others. And, of course, we will read writings by Derrida, Levinas and others on the other.

**English 270 (S. Axelrod)**  
**Unreadable Modernism**

In a well-known story, Gertrude Stein lay in her hospital bed in Nueilly, mildly anesthetized, awaiting the cancer surgery she would not survive. She asked Alice B. Toklas, "What is the answer?" When Toklas remained silent, Stein said, "In that case, what is the question?" At the very last linguistic moment, Stein made a joke of a cosmic unreadability that her role as a modernist pioneer had prepared her to identify.

This seminar will explore modernist illegibility. We will study the arbitrariness and materiality of language, the war of signification present in every word and sentence, and therefore the illegibility of all writing (however disguised). Illegibility produces meanings that are multiple and shifting. It provides access to fantasy

and escape from regulation and supervision. Illegibility makes a text what I have called a *heterotropic* space, an other world of the overdetermined sign, an anti-panopticon where nothing can be seen clearly.

The seminar will focus on literary texts. The poetry and fiction of Gertrude Stein will have pride of place. We will also study fiction by such writers as Djuna Barnes, William Faulkner, and Jean Toomer, and poetry by such poets as Langston Hughes, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Lorine Niedecker, Louis Zukofsky, Melvin Tolson, Else von Freytag-Loringhoven, Native American poets, immigrant poets, and the authors of corridos. We will look at some theory as well, by such writers as Walter Benjamin, Bruno Latour, Marjorie Perloff, Ming-Qian Ma, and Houston Baker.

## **SEMINARS**

### ***Monday***

English 269 (American Literature Since 1900) with Jennifer Doyle  
10:10 am – 1:00 pm

### ***Tuesday***

English 275 (Film & Visual Culture) with James Tobias  
2:10 – 5:00 pm

### ***Wednesday***

English 200 (Introduction to Graduate Study in English) with Tiffany Lopez  
(Required of (and limited to) first qtr. English graduates entering after the B.A.)  
9:10 am – 12:00 noon

English 273 (Cultural Studies) with Deborah Willis  
2:10 – 5:00 pm

English 274 (Feminist Discourses) with Traise Yamamoto  
2:10 – 5:00 pm

English 264 (Restoration and 18<sup>th</sup> Century) with Carole Fabricant

### ***Thursday***

English 289 (Genre:) with John Ganim  
2:10 – 5:00 pm

English 270 (American Lit. since 1900) with Steve Axelrod  
5:10 – 8:00 pm

### ***Friday***

(no seminars)

