

CONTEMPORARY THEORY FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

FALL 2009

HREL 50700
Tue/Thur 10:30-11:50am
Swift Hall, room 400

Richard Fox
rfox@uchicago.edu
Office Hours: Tues 1 - 3pm

This course addresses the central theoretical issues and developments informing contemporary scholarship in the History of Religions. The twice-weekly sessions are organized around a core set of primary texts, listed together with additional background materials and a series of questions to guide your reading. The course is designed not so much as a survey, but rather as a practical training in thinking critically about the questions that currently define the field, and that are opening new directions for future inquiry.

Course Requirements

- Complete and careful reading of all course material.
- Regular attendance and active participation in discussion.
- Three short papers, for a total of approximately eighteen to twenty pages (details, as below). The due dates for these papers are listed below in the schedule. Please plan accordingly.
- All work must be submitted on time; no incompletes will be granted for this course, except on grounds of major life disruption.

Writing

Total of 4500 words (i.e., approximately eighteen to twenty double-spaced pages, in Times, twelve-point font)

- 1000 words on the first chapter of Mahmood, *The Politics of piety* (due in my email inbox before the beginning of class on Thursday, Oct 1; details TBA);
- 1500 words, responding to a marked question (with an asterisk*) for one session, to be read aloud for discussion in class (due in my email inbox before the beginning of the class session in question);
- Take-home 'exam' requiring approximately 2000 words in response to an essay prompt to be distributed in our last formal session (due in my email inbox no later than 3pm on Monday, 7 December 2009);

Course Books

Available for purchase at the Seminary Coop Bookstore; all other required texts are available on the Chalk website for the course.

- Barthes, R. (1972) *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980 [1976]) *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of Piety; The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: PUP.
- de Saussure, F. (1983) *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. R. Harris. Chicago & La Salle, Il.: Open Court Publishing Company.

Background and Further Reading

In addition to the materials listed below, you may find the following online resources to be helpful: the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. These resources can be accessed through a Google search and/or by way of the online library catalogue.

- Williams, R. (1983) *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Flamingo.
- Dosse, F. (1998) *The History of Structuralism: The Rising Sign: 1945-1966*. Volume One. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dosse, F. (1997) *The History of Structuralism: The Sign Sets: 1967- Present*. Volume Two. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sturrock, J., ed. (1979) *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*. Oxford: Oxford Univ.Press.
- Cusset, F. (2008) *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Macdonell, D. (1986) *Theories of Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Colebrook, C. (1999) *Philosophy and Poststructuralist Theory: From Kant to Deleuze*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Culler, J. (1982) *On Deconstruction; Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press.
- Harland, R. (1987) *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Poststructuralism*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Young, R. (ed., 1981) *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*. London & Boston: Routledge and Kegan, Paul.
- Palmer, R.E. (1969) *Hermeneutics; Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Ormiston, G.L. & Schrift, A.D., eds. (1990) *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press..
- Ormiston, G.L. & Schrift, A.D., eds. (1990) *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Collingwood, R.G. (1972 [1940]) *An Essay on Metaphysics*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America.
- Winch, P. (1958) *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Harris, M. (2001) *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*. Updated Edition. USA: Rowman Altamira.
- Brenner, C. (1973) *An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Fink, B. (1996) *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton Univ.Press.
- Taylor, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self; The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Henriques, J. et al. (1984) *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*. London: Methuen
- Gandhi, L. (1998) *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Inden, R (n.d.) 'Human Agency and the Social Sciences'. Unpublished essay. Copies available from instructor.
- White, H. (1975) *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Asad, T. (2003) *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press.

- Said, E.W. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- King, R. (1999) *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Clifford, J. & G. Marcus (1986) *Writing Culture; The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press.
- Hartley, J. (2003) *A Short History of Cultural Studies*. London: Sage.
- Morley, D. & K. Chen (eds.) *Stuart Hall; Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. NY: Routledge.
- Turner, G. (1990) *British Cultural Studies: An introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wiggershaus, R. (1995) *The Frankfurt School: Its history, theories, and Political Significance*. M. Robertson (trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Course Introduction: Theory... a Fetish?

Tuesday, 29 September 2009

2. Religion, Politics and the Problem of Agency

Thursday, 1 October 2009

Primary Text:

- Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Preface & Chapter One.

Questions:

- What are the central questions driving Mahmood's program of research? What were her political commitments and aspirations?
- What is secular liberalism and where is it in evidence?
- How does Mahmood explain her decision to work on a 'non-liberal' movement? Is her argument convincing? Why, or why not?
- What does it mean 'to detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics' (p.14)? And why might one wish to do so?*
- Precisely what is agency? And why does it matter for the historical study of religion?
- What is the nature of the relationship between *history* and *religion*?

Essay Prompt:

- What are Mahmood's political and ethnographic projects? How are they related? And why might it matter? (1000 words, no direct quotations)

Further Reading:

- Hirschkind, C. (1997) 'What is political Islam?'. *Middle East Report*. 27(4): 12-4.

- Colebrook, C. (1998) 'Ethics, Positivity, and Gender: Foucault, Aristotle, and the Care of the Self'. *Philosophy Today*. Pages 40-52.
- Inden, R. (1990) *Imagining India*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press. Chapter One.
- Foucault, M. (1997) 'Technologies of the self'. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Volume One. New York etc.: Penguin Books. Pages 223-52.

3. The Idea of a Discursive Tradition

Tuesday, 6 October 2009

Primary Text:

- Asad, T. (1986) 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam'. *Occasional Papers Series*. Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. Georgetown University.

Questions:

- Why might the sort of 'anthropology' described by Asad be pertinent for the historical study of religions?
- Compare and contrast Asad's argument in *The Idea...* with Mahmood's approach to the women's mosque movement (*Politics of Piety*).
- Again, what is agency? How does it figure in the work of Geertz and Gellner? And what did Asad propose as an alternative?
- What does it mean to 'take historically defined discourses seriously' (p.8)?*
- What precisely is a 'discursive tradition' (p.14)?

Further Reading:

- Scott, D. (2006) 'Appendix: The Trouble of Thinking: An Interview with Talal Asad.' In Scott, D. & C. Hirschkind (eds.) *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1981) 'The Order of Discourse'. In Young, R. (ed.) *Untying the Text; A post-structuralist reader*. London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Gellner, E. (1981) *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1968) *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

4. Defining Religion: System, Symbols and Meaning

Thursday, 8 October 2009

Primary Text:

- Geertz, C. (1973) 'Religion as a Cultural System'. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. USA: Fontana Press. Pp.87-125.

Questions:

- What critical work does the concept of 'culture' accomplish for Geertz?

- What are 'symbols'? What is the importance of 'system'? And specifically how do symbols and system figure in the work of interpretation?
- Compare and contrast Geertz's account of ritual and symbolic action with Asad's approach to religion as a 'discursive tradition'.
- How is the present related to the past and future for Geertz? For Asad?
- How are Geertz's presuppositions regarding communication and the interpretability of human action related to his model of religion?*
- Why do you think Geertz's model has been so influential among students of religion? What have been some of the more important consequences?

Further Reading:

- Asad, T. (1993) 'The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category'. *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973) 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture'. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. USA: Fontana Press. Pp.3-30.
- Peacock, H. (2005) 'Geertz's Concept of Culture in Historical Context'. Shweder, R.A. & B. Good (eds.) *Clifford Geertz by his Colleagues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Todorov, T. (1984) *Theories of the Symbol*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

5. The Hermeneutic Ideal of Communication

Tuesday, 13 October 2009

Primary Text:

- Ricoeur, P. (1981) 'What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding'. In J.B. Thompson (ed. & trans.) *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Questions:

- What is the purpose of interpretation? And how might one account for the relationship between differing interpretations?
- What is the difference between interpretation and explanation? And in what respects are they similar?
- Compare Geertz's approach to religion with Ricoeur's model of the text. How are they similar? On what key points do they differ?
- What is the nature of the relationship between Ricoeur's central metaphors (e.g., 'the hermeneutical arc') and his presuppositions regarding the nature of interpretation?*
- For the historical study of religions, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a Ricoeurian 'model of the text'?

Further Reading:

- Ricoeur, P. (1971) 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text'. *Social Research*. 38: 529-62. Reprinted in Rabinow, P. & W.M. Sullivan, eds. (1979) *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press and in his *Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences*.

- Palmer, R.E. (1969) *Hermeneutics; Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Hobart, M. (1982) 'Meaning or Moaning? An Ethnographic Note on a Little-Understood Tribe.' In Parkin, D.J., (ed.) *Semantic Anthropology*. ASA Monographs (22). London: Academic Press. Pages 39-63.
- Ormiston, G.L. & Schrift, A.D., eds. (1990) *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press..

6. On Course: Toward a Critical Re-attunement

Thursday, 15 October 2009

Primary Texts:

- Culler, J. (1986) 'The Man and the Course' & 'Saussure's Theory of Language'. *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Revised Edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Pages 21-64.
- de Saussure, F. Selections from *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. H. Harris. Chicago & La Salle, IL.: Open Court Classics. (Introduction: Chapters 1 & 2; Part One: Chapters 1 to 3; Part Two: Chapters 1 to 6.)

Questions:

- How did Saussure use the following terms: *sign*; *signifier* ('signal'); *signified* ('signification'); *arbitrary nature of the sign*; *la langue*; *parole*; *paradigmatic* ('associative') and *syntagmatic relations*; *synchronic*; *diachronic*.
- Why does the arbitrariness of the sign necessarily entail a distinction between *la langue* and *parole* (see Culler, pp.44-5)?
- Compare and contrast Saussure's model of language with the presuppositions underpinning Geertz's model of 'Religion as a cultural system'.
- According to Saussure, the identity of a given element is determined by its synchronic relation to all other elements within a system of oppositions (i.e., *la langue*). But, if the synchronic and diachronic frames of reference are ultimately incommensurable ('Synchronically speaking, diachronic identities are a distortion...', Culler, p.50; cf. *Course*, Part One: Chapter Three), what implications would follow for Asad's approach to religion as a discursive tradition? And for the history of religions more generally?*
- How would you differentiate between (a) Geertz's understanding of the continuity of cultural systems through time and (b) Saussure's insistence on the incommensurability of synchronic and diachronic frames of reference?

Further Reading:

- Hawkes, T. (1997) *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Routledge.
- Culler, J. (1975) *Structuralist Poetics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Especially Part One, on 'Structuralism and Linguistic Models'.
- Barthes, R. (1964) *Elements of Semiology*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Heevey, S. (1982) 'A Background to Semiotics: Saussure and Peirce'. *Semiotic Perspectives*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

- Vološinov, V.N. (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. (Translated by L. Matejka & I.R. Titunik.) Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press. Especially Part Two.
- Harris, R. (1980) *The Language Makers*. Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976) *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: The Texas Christian University Press. Chapter One.

7. Elementary Structures

Tuesday, 20 October 2009

Primary Texts:

- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969) 'The Principle of Reciprocity.' *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Revised Edition. Boston: Beacon Press. Pages 52-68.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963) 'Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology' and 'The Structural Study of Myth'. *Structural Anthropology*. USA: Basic Books. Pages 31-54 and 206-231.

Questions:

- How are language, myth, kinship and the human mind related to one another?
- Compare Lévi-Strauss' models of myth and kinship with Saussure's structural linguistics.
- What is the nature of the relationship between cultural specificity and human universality? And under what conditions is the latter susceptible to scholarly inquiry?*
- Are conjectures made on the basis of Lévi-Strauss's model of structural analysis falsifiable? Why does, and doesn't, it matter?
- Why is the *systematicity* of mythic structure—e.g., its internal unity, order and closure—so important?
- What did Lévi-Strauss mean in saying that 'myths think men'? How is this maxim related to the structuralist insistence on 'form' over 'content'?

Further Reading:

- Leach, E. (1970) *Claude Lévi-Strauss*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Durkheim, E. and M. Mauss (1963) *Primitive Classification*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mauss, M. (1954) *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Cohen and West. <http://www.archive.org/details/giftformsfunctio00maus>
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963) 'Introduction: History and Anthropology'. *Structural Anthropology*. USA: Basic Books. Pages 1-27.
- Sperber, D. (1989) 'Claude Lévi-Strauss Today'. *On Anthropological Knowledge; Three Essays*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pages 64-93.

8. Myth Today

Thursday, 22 October 2009

Primary Text:

- Barthes, R. (1972 [1957]) 'Myth today' and selections (TBA). *Mythologies*. NY: Hill & Wang.

Questions:

- Compare and contrast Barthes' and Lévi-Strauss' respective appropriations of Saussure.
- What is 'myth'? And why did Barthes call it a 'system of communication'?
- What is the nature of the relationship between Nature, History and criticism?*
- What are the leading myths of our times? And to what extent are they susceptible to analysis in the terms described by Barthes (inoculation, the privation of history, identification etc.)?

Further Reading:

- Culler, J. (2002) *Roland Barthes; A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1979) *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Hawkes, T. (1997) *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Routledge.
- Young, R. (1981) 'Post-structuralism: An Introduction'. *Untying the Text; A Post-structuralist Reader*. Boston, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Harland, R. (1987) *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Poststructuralism*. London and New York: Methuen. Especially, Part One.

9. On Structure and Deconstruction

Tuesday, 27 October 2009

Primary Texts:

- Derrida, J. 'Semiology and Grammatology; Interview with Julia Kristeva.' *Positions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pages 15-36.
- Culler, J. (1979) 'Jacques Derrida'. In Sturrock, J. (ed.) *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi Strauss to Derrida*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Questions:

- How would you situate Derrida's early work in relation to our reading from Ricoeur? Saussure? Lévi-Strauss? And others? What are the key points of contact and disjuncture?
- What is 'deconstruction'? Why might it be misleading to use the term 'deconstruct' as a transitive verb?
- For the historical study of religions, what are some of the specific implications of taking deconstruction seriously?*
- Derrida has frequently been cited as the epitome of 'postmodern' obscurantism? On precisely what grounds might such a position be defended? And how would one go about formulating a counter-argument?

Further Reading:

- Derrida, J. (1997) *Of Grammatology*. Corrected Edition. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press. Especially 'Linguistics and Grammatology', pages 27-73; also see Spivak's 'Translator's Preface'.
- Bennington, G. and J. Derrida (1993) *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gasché, R. (1979) 'Deconstruction as Criticism'. *Glyph*. 6: 177-215.

- Derrida, J. (1978) 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Culler, J. (1982) *On Deconstruction; Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

10. Hey YOU! On the Interpellation of Subjects

Thursday, 29 October 2009

Primary Text:

- Althusser, L. (1971 [1970]) 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. B Brewster (trans.). London: New Left Books. Pages 121-176.

Questions:

- How did Althusser position himself in relation to the broader Marxist tradition? And on what grounds was Gramsci in particular singled out for commendation?
- What are ISAs? How do they work? And what does their analysis contribute to our understanding of social/political life more generally?
- Why might Althusser's analysis of ISAs and interpellation have been useful for media and cultural studies?
- What does it mean to say that *individuals* are always already *subjects*? Against precisely what might this statement have been directed? Why does it matter?*
- How did Althusser explain the relationship between social structure and human agency?

Further Reading:

- Marx, K. (1977) 'The Commodity'. *Capital*. Volume One. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) 'The Study of Philosophy'. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds. & trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart. Pp. 323-77.
- Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London and New York: Verso. Chapter Three.
- Balibar, E. (1995) *The Philosophy of Marx*. London and New York: Verso.
- Macdonell, D. (1986) *Theories of Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell. Especially Chapter 2.

11. The Idea of Practice

Tuesday, 3 November 2009

Primary Text:

- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pages 25-79.

Questions:

- What is a 'practice'? And under what conditions does it become susceptible to analysis?
- Precisely what was Bourdieu's approach to *practice* designed to accomplish? What were the primary challenges as he understood them? And how did he aim to surmount them?

- How does the dichotomy of subjectivism/objectivism map onto our reading to date?
- What is the significance of Bourdieu's differentiation between theoretical and practical forms of knowledge?
- What is the nature of the relationship between *habitus*, *history* and *the body*?
- Compare and contrast Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* with Geertz on religion as both a *model of* and *model for* reality.*
- What are the 'social conditions' under which the historical study of religions proceeds? What is the nature of 'the real relationship between the observer and the observed'? And how are these circumstances related to the field as it presently understands and represents itself?

Further Reading:

- Bourdieu, P. and L.J.D. Wacquant (1992) 'The Chicago Workshop'. In *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jenkins, R. (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu*. Revised Edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1987) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Conclusion.

12. No class — AAR

Thursday, 5 November 2009

13. Forked? Desiring Structure and Agency

Tuesday, 10 November 2009

Primary Text:

- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pages 80-141.

Questions:

- Again, precisely what is a 'practice'? And why, for Bourdieu, is it 'not easy to speak of practice other than negatively' (p.80)?
- What is the nature of *the human subject* according to Bourdieu?
- How is the *time* of analysis (or 'science') related to the *time* of practices? Why might it matter?
- On Bourdieu's account, to what extent are 'agents' capable of comprehending and acting on their own history and practices? And why, if at all, should we care?*

Further Reading:

- Inden, R. (n.d.) 'Human Agency and the Social Sciences'. Unpublished essay. Copies available from instructor.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991) 'Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field.' *Social Research*. 13: 1-45.
- Caloun, C. *et al.*, eds. (1993) *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Special issue of *Ethnography* on 'Pierre Bourdieu in the Field'; 5(4) December 2004; published by Sage, London.

14. On Identity, Difference and the Importance of Being Empty

Thursday, 12 November 2009

Primary Text:

- Laclau, E. (2005) *On Populist Reason*. London and New York: Verso. Preface and Chapter Four.

Questions:

- How did Laclau use the following terms: *hegemony, subject, universality, particularity, identity, equivalence, difference, empty signifier, democracy*.
- How does the interplay between *difference* and *equivalence* play out in the constitution of popular identities? And why is the *empty signifier* necessary?
- Where are the key points of affinity and tension with our reading from Saussure, Althusser and Derrida?
- How does Bourdieu's account of the relationship between *class* and *habitus* stand up to Laclau's argument regarding the nature of collective identities?*
- How might Laclau's argument regarding collective identities be pertinent for the historical study of religions?

Further Reading:

- Gramsci, A. (1971) 'The study of philosophy'. Selections from the prison notebooks. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds. & trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart. Pp. 323-77.
- Critchley, S. & O. Marchart, eds. (2004) *Laclau; A Critical Reader*. London and New York: Routledge. Especially the editors' introduction, Howarth's contribution and Laclau's afterword, 'Glimpsing the future'.
- Butler, J., E. Laclau & S. Žižek (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London and New York: Verso.
- Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London and New York: Verso.

15. The Repressive Hypothesis

Tuesday, 17 November 2009

Primary Text:

- Foucault, M. (1980 [1976]) *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books. Pages 1-75.

Questions:

- What was Foucault's critical project? Why write a 'history of sexuality'?
- What is *the repressive hypothesis*? And where is it evident in contemporary American life?
- Explain the significance of the following terms: *confession and the Christian pastoral; the incitement to discourse, the perverse implantation; and scientia sexualis*.
- What is a relation of power? And how might one think otherwise than power?

- To what extent does the idea of 'sexual freedom' or 'liberation' subvert extant relations of power?
- Compare and contrast Foucault's account of the subject with that of Bourdieu. What are their respective merits for the historical study of religions?*

Further Reading:

- von Sacher-Masoch, L. (2000 [1870]) *Venus in Furs*. New York etc.: Penguin Classics.
- Davidson, A.I. (2001) *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1986) *Foucault*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Halperin, D.M. (2002) *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (1982). *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Brighton: Harvester Press. See especially Foucault's 'Afterword'.

16. Biopower: Subject to Freedom

Thursday, 19 November 2009

Primary Text:

- Foucault, M. (1980 [1976]) *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books. Pages 76-159.

Questions:

- What are the defining characteristics of the juridico-discursive model of power? And, on Foucault's account, what is the nature of its relationship to *biopower*?
- What are the consequences of the argument from biopower for interpreting the dilemma of structure *versus* agency?
- Is Foucault's critique of the subject commensurate with 'right thinking' American liberalism (e.g., human rights, family planning, recognition of the individual)? What are the implications for the academic study of religions?*
- Does the campaign for 'gay marriage' subvert or perpetuate the prevailing heteronormative configuration of sex, economy and domesticity?
- When is freedom? And, for Foucault, why was the ideal of 'sexual liberation' so ironic? Does this potentially have implications for other scholarly pretensions to emancipation?

Further Reading:

- Massad, J. (2002) 'Reorienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World.' *Public Culture*. 14(2): 361-385.
- Willse, C. & D. Spade (2005) 'Freedom in a Regulatory State? Lawrence, Marriage and Biopolitics'. *Widener Law Review*. 11(2): 309-29.
- Florence, M. [Michel Foucault] (1984) 'Foucault' *Dictionnaire des philosophes*. Pages 942-944. <http://foucault.info/foucault/biography.html>
- Foucault, M. (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*. USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

17. Gender: A Repeat Performance

Tuesday, 24 November 2009

Primary Text:

- Butler, J. (1999 [1990]) *Gender trouble; Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York & London: Routledge. Prefaces, Chapter One and Conclusion.

Film:

- *Paris is Burning*.

Questions:

- In what ways did Butler's critique of gendered identities draw on Foucault's history of sexuality? How might we compare her understanding of *the subject* with what we encountered in our reading from Bourdieu? Althusser? Derrida?
- Why might Butler have been critical of the idea of 'women' as the subject of feminism?
- What does it mean to say that 'gender is a kind of impersonation that passes for the real' (1999: xxviii)?
- What is *performativity*? How is it related to the idea of *substance*? And what is the significance of *repetition*?
- Can it be said that drag performances and voguing in the Harlem ballrooms 'produce subversive discontinuity and dissonance among sex, gender, and desire and call into question their alleged relations' (1999: xxx)?*
- Recalling Mahmood, who or what is the subject of freedom?

Further Reading:

- Butler, J. (1993) 'Gender is On Fire'. *Bodies That Matter*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rubin, G. (1975) 'The Traffic in Women: Notes Toward a Political Economy of Sex.' Rapp, R. (ed.) *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press. Pages 157-211.
- Fink, B. (1996) *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Osborne, P. And L. Segal (1993) 'Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler.' *Radical Philosophy*. 67: 32-9.
- Segal, L. (1997) 'Generations of feminism.' *Radical Philosophy*. 83: 6-16.

18. No Class — Thanksgiving

Thursday, 26 November 2009

19. Agency and Alterity

Tuesday, 1 December 2009

Primary Text:

- Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters Two and Three.

Questions:

- What are the aims of the women's mosque movement? And what do critics *within* the movement mean by 'secularism'?
- What is the nature of pedagogy in the mosque movement?
- What is Mahmood's critical project? In what ways does it draw on—and is it critical of—the approaches we have encountered in our reading to date?*
- Where do the key parallels and tensions lie between Mahmood's project and that of Butler in *Gender Trouble*?
- Mahmood asked: 'How did the women of the mosque movement practically work on themselves in order to become the desirous subject of this authoritative [Islamic] discourse?' (pp.112-3) How does she answer this question? And why might she have asked it in the first place?

Further Reading:

- Levinas, E. (1985) *Ethics and Infinity; Conversations with Phillippe Nemo*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press. Especially Chapters Seven and Eight.
- Hobart, M. (n.d.) 'The Subject of "the Subject;" A Working Paper'. Available online at <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/7142/>
- Mahmood, S. (2001) 'Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of *Ṣalāt*.' *American Ethnologist*. 28(4): 827-53.
- Hirschkind, C. (2006) *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Asad, T. (1993) 'Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual.' *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press. Pages 83-124.

20. Pious Gestures

Thursday, 3 December 2009

Primary Text:

- Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters Four, Five and Epilogue.

Questions:

- How did Mahmood differentiate between the ethics of secular liberalism and those of the mosque movement?
- What are the critical and political ideals that Mahmood appears to be advocating? On what grounds might one argue for these ideals? Alternatively, what could mitigate against them?
- How does emancipation figure in Mahmood's project? And to what extent are her various commitments mutually commensurate?*
- What does the book aim to accomplish? Is it successful? And what are the broader implications for the historical study of religions as a field of inquiry?

Further Reading:

- Martin, L.H. et al., eds. (1988) *Technologies of the Self; A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1984) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame: IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Colebrook, C. (2007) 'Feminism and Autonomy: The Crisis of the Self-Authoring Subject.' *Body Society*, 3: 21-41.
- Hollywood, A. (2002) 'Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization.' *History of Religions*, 42(2): 93-115.

**Final Essays Due by Email (rfox@uchicago.edu)
No Later Than 3pm on Monday, 7 December 2009**
