Material and Virtual Culture

Sociology 634B1 (Winter Term). Tory B100  Mondays 2:00-4:50pm

Office Hours: Tory 4-13/14, Tuesday 11-noon or by appointment
Rob Shields, Tel.: 780 243 0489 or 780 492 0488  Email: rshields@ualberta.ca

This is a critical interdisciplinary research seminar on theory-building and the materiality and intangibility of culture, bodies and objects. It is directed at students interested in contemporary social and cross-cultural thought of the last 50 years. It encourages analysis the dualism of material and ideal and research on phenomena that combine tangible and intangible aspects or that defy classification into one or the other of these. It particularly considers material culture and social forms that are not 'in our heads' or simply 'subjective' but cannot be accounted in nominalist or positivist ontologies. This is of particular relevance to areas such as design, social institutions, values, culture and cross-cultural interaction, media, environmental quality and online experience. For example:

- Material - Virtual
- Object - Style
- Substance - Form
- Identity - Representation
- Population - Community
- Element - Set
- Presence - Absence
- Assembly - Commons

Contemporary theorists’ offer strategies for approaching complex issues and problems that combine qualitative and quantitative, tangible and intangible aspects. This course considers both the work of key writers and current social issues.

The course is designed to accommodate the interests of graduate students from diverse disciplines and specifically from social sciences. Arts-based and practice-based approaches are welcome. This seminar can be treated as an opportunity to work through conceptual and writing issues for projects or publications that participants may be developing, including papers for publication. The scholarly editing process, peer review, the role of new media, and the dynamics of academic publishing will be discussed as part of the historical and academic context of theory-production.
Prerequisites: Graduate status or permission of the instructor. A background in sociology or in social science is not necessary. An interest in engaging with theoretical texts is essential.

Readings: will be assigned about 2 weeks ahead of each seminar. All assigned readings for seminar presentations are required. The distribution of articles that are part of readings must be organized and coordinated by students.

Texts: Generally available online. To get a sense of participants' background and interests, the course will begin with reading and discussing:

Parrhesia (7): Special Issue On The Work Of Gilbert Simondon
https://www.parrhesiajournal.org/past.html

Other texts may include (see also Bibliography):

Background Reading: Not required but students may wish to consider: Parrhesia (see above)
http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Cogn/CognSkag.htm
Cambridge; London: The MIT Press.
Shields, Rob (2003) Spatial Questions Ch. 1 Introduction (Sage)

Some books developed in this course in previous years:
Schedule of Topics: A detailed Schedule will be developed in the first class.

Meetings: I expect to meet with each student individually to discuss their essay topic in detail. The readings for this course are both extensive and difficult. Expect to do at least 2 presentations (see below): an ‘intervention' and handout on an agreed topic, a presentation on your own work-in-progress for the course (with a hand out). You will be required to comment on other students’ work. Attendance at all seminars is mandatory.

Deliverables and Evaluation
• Written Handout(s) for your seminar presentation(s) Students are responsible for helping organize material for seminar(s) in consultation with the instructor. This may take the form of a brief book review/precis of a relevant text published in the last 12 months.
  Presentations are graded on a written handout
  - approx 2 pages or equivalent in another format (eg. online)
  Due in class at time of assigned seminar 20%

• Project 1: Short Book Review Essay or a written statement to accompany an arts-based or practice-based Project (Project 2): Approx 3 pages double spaced. Either an analytical discussion of the bibliography or the key resources for your proposed Project (below); a description of the wider conjuncture or context of your research, and an argument for its importance or implications,
  Or,
  A book review of a key text or resource (2005 or later) which is central to the project as you see it at the time of writing. Graded on the basis of the analysis of key issues, written bibliography and handout or an online document (e.g. website or blog). These will be discussed in class in January.
  Final version due before February Reading Week 20%

• Project 2: Essay, Arts-based or Practice-based project - must be agreed with the instructor. 10-12 pages single spaced. Draft reviewed in the seminar. Graded on the basis of design, originality, relevance.
  Draft or Demo Due Mar 26 For circulation to and discussion with other students and instructor. Graded on basis of a handout with bibliography (2 pages minimum or format as approved) 20%
  Work in Progress Workshop Apr. 2 10%
  Final Hand-in due Last day of classes should include:
  -Final Paper or arts-based or practice-based Project submitted as:
    -a portfolio of work (eg. Print(s)) or
    -documentation of an event, installation or re-curated exhibition.
    -online material (e.g. HTML, XHTML, Flash or other format as agreed with instructor, e.g. 4 main webpages with images and a minimum of 4 250-word, point form supporting webpages including relevant academic and other sources). 50%
Deadlines: are firm. Essays or projects are due on the last day of term as I will be away. Choose a project that can be completed in stages and submitted on time. Late papers will be penalized 1 grade point. Final Grades will be consistent with GFC graduate marking guidelines.

Required Notes: “Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) 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 studentombudservice: (http://www.ombudservice.ualberta.ca/). Information about the University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures is described in UAPPOL at https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Pages/DispPol.aspx?PID=110.

Academic Honesty: All students should consult the information provided by the Office of Judicial Affairs 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. Students involved in language courses and translation courses should be aware that on-line “translation engines” produce very dubious and unreliable “translations.”
Sample Bibliography of Approaches to the Material and Virtual:


Rudolff, B. (2010). Intangible and tangible heritage: A topology of culture in contexts of faith. Retrieved from [https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-UBICO/frontdoor/index/index/docId/12886](https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-UBICO/frontdoor/index/index/docId/12886)


