



Sociology UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

SOC6101H – Contemporary Theory - Winter 2023

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Course Website: q.utoronto.ca

Course Description (W/ Goals and Outcomes)

This course focuses on both 20th and 21st c. classics of social theory that have particular resonance in the present along with recent breakthrough statements in the most vibrant areas of contemporary theory. The course will take a particular focus on Marxism, psychoanalysis, postcolonial theory and other critical approaches to theory. After taking this course, students will have a better understanding of the most cited and talked about works of theory in the contemporary Continental tradition along with a deeper understanding of their influences, genealogies, tensions, and contradictions. Students will not only come out of this course with a better understanding of the theories and debates in contemporary sociology in a global perspective but also with an inter- and post-disciplinary approach to theory through which they can engage across the social sciences and humanities across the globe.

There is much precedent in Canadian sociology for looking to critical theory for theoretical inspiration instead of to the more parochial theoretical conversation within sociology in the United States. Canadian Francophone social theory was initially inspired by Marx, Lenin and Mao but also Gramsci, Althusser, and Poulantzas. But beyond this, Canadian sociology has historically blurred distinctions between social theory and Continental philosophy (See Dumas 1987; Laurin 2006). Looking more to the European tradition instead of the American better befits our local Canadian context as part of the British and French Empires. While US influence is ever-present in Canada, we also have the inheritances of both the UK tradition and the French tradition, along with our own traditions such as the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist traditions in Canadian francophone sociology, and the central place of Political Economy in Canadian anglophone sociology, both of which have a long history of being oriented towards Europe and shaped by continental philosophy.

But because these theoretical traditions are central to the way social thought has been articulated in the British and French Empires beyond Canada, these theories and their traditions have resonance well beyond Europe and North America and are similarly central to theoretical conversation and debates in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, particularly in places that are former British and French colonies.

Session Topics & Readings

I understand that because this is a required course, not all of you enrolled are would-be theorists. Even for those of you who intend to become theorists you may not be interested in taking a deep dive into every one of these theorists' work every single week. To accommodate a range of ability and interest, each week there are three options for what to read in preparation for that week's discussion. If you are just interested in doing the minimum read the first option which will be limited to the most important essay or book chapter by that theorist. For those of you with moderate interest read the first plus the second options which will allow you to get a bit further into concepts and ideas of that theorist. However, for those of you interested in specializing in theory I suggest you attempt the first, second and third options which will give you a very deep, intense dive into that theorist, their work, along with some of the important secondary literature on that theorist.

On the course website, I have uploaded reading guides that I have created for each of the theorists. These guides detail the theorist's influences, those they have influenced, a list of key terms you should be comfortable with after reading their book or essay, and some reading comprehension questions based on the option 1 and option 2 readings. If you can answer the reading comprehension questions, you can be confident you're prepared for in-class discussion where we will focus our conversation more on an analysis of the ideas presented in the text. I assume that if you are going for option 3 readings you neither need nor want a reading guide.

Required Books:

Althusser, Louis (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy* New York: Monthly Review Press.
Berardi, Bifo (2021). *The Third Unconscious* London: Verso.
Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari ([1972]). *Anti-Oedipus*
Fanon, Frantz (1965 [1959]). *A Dying Colonialism* New York: Grove Press.
Federici, Silvia (2019). *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* PM Press.
Gramsci, Antonio (1971). *The Prison Notebooks* New York: International Publishers.
The Invisible Committee (2017). *Now* Pasadena: Semiotext(e).
Lacan, Jacques (2004 [1966]). *Écrits: A Selection* New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
Purnell, Derecka (2021). *Becoming Abolitionists* New York: Astra House.

Supplemental Books:

Althusser, Louis (2010 [1965]). *For Marx* London: Verso.
Althusser, Louis, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey and Jacques Rancière (2015 [1965]). *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition* London: Verso.
Badiou, Alain (2020). *Lacan* New York: Columbia University Press.
Marriott, David S. (2021). *Lacan Noir: Lacan and Afro-Pessimism* Palgrave Macmillan.
Mbembe, Achille (2020). *Brutalisme* Paris: La Découverte.

Parr, Adrian Ed. (2010). *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Plys, Kristin and Charles Lemert (2022). *Capitalism and its Uncertain Future* New York: Routledge.

Supplemental articles + book chapters:

Balibar, Étienne (1994). "Althusser's Object" *Social Text* 39(Summer): 157-188.

Braidotti, Rossi (1996). "Nomadism with a difference: Deleuze's legacy in a feminist perspective" *Man and World* 29: 305-314.

Confavreaux, Joseph (2020). "Decolonial anxieties in a postcolonial world: an interview with Achille Mbembe" *Postcolonial Studies* 25(1): 128-135.

Hall, Stuart (2016). "Ideology and Ideological Struggle" in Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg Eds. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* Durham: Duke University Press.

Richards, Sinan (2021). "The Logician of Madness: Fanon's Lacan" *Paragraph* 44(2): 214-237.

Wallerstein, Immanuel (1979). "Fanon and the revolutionary class" in *The Capitalist World-Economy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 250-268.

Wallerstein, Immanuel (2009). "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century" *New Left Review* 57: (May-June): 117-125.

Zizek, Slavoj (2014). "The Wound of Eurocentrism" in *Trouble in Paradise* Brooklyn: Meville House. pp. 183-195

Course Requirements

COMPONENT (E S S A Y , T E S T , PRESENTATION)	DESCRIPTION (PAGE-LENGTH, TIME REQUIREMENTS, CONTENT)	DATE DUE (DD/MM/YY)	RELATIVE WEIGHT
1. Two short essays or one long essay	15-20 page literature review of the theories covered in class	27/02/23 and 13/04/23	40%
2. Participation	Attendance and participation in class discussions	Ongoing	60%

There are multiple options for assessments in this course depending on your learning style and working habits. Course participants may choose **(1)** to write two shorter essays, one due at the mid-term and the other due at the end of term, or **(2)** one longer essay due at the end of the term.

Course participants choosing **Option (1)** will write a 8-10 page essay after Week 6 that puts Marxism (Gramsci and Althusser), Psychoanalysis (Lacan and Fanon), and

Deleuze & Guattari in conversation, examining how each theorist builds on the work of previous theorists in both critical and complimentary ways.

The second essay of 8-10 pages due after the end of term will either (A) put theorists from weeks 7-11 in conversation with each other detailing their influences in Gramsci, Althusser, Lacan, Fanon, and Deleuze & Guattari while comparing and contrasting their approaches to theory building. OR (B) course participants can choose a theory book published in the past 5 years that was not included on the syllabus and situate that book in the context of theorists we have read in class.

Course participants choosing **Option (2)** will write a 15-20 page essay that either (A) puts every one of the theorists we have read in conversation examining how each theorist builds on previous theorists in both a critical and complimentary way, OR (B) Read a contemporary theory book of your choosing, written in the past five years, and not included on the syllabus. Then, incorporate that book into a discussion of the theorists we have read in this course examining their commonalities and distinctions.

The paper(s) should be double spaced, 12pt times new roman font, with standard margins. For those doing the two short essays option the first essay will be due **27th February 2023** and the second will be due on **13th April 2023**. For those choosing option 2 the essay will be due on **13th April 2023**.

The late penalty is 10% marks per 24 hours late. Work will not be accepted more than 7 days after the deadline without an extension. The essay(s) are 40% of your mark. For course participants choosing option 1, each essay will be worth 20% for a total of 40% marks.

In order to stay on track with this final assessment regardless of which option you choose, I recommend that you take notes each week or write up a brief summary of the readings to aid you in writing your papers. You are certainly welcome to ask questions of me and/or our teaching assistant, Umaima, about the readings (in class, office hours, via email and other opportunities) but we will not be marking your notes or summaries.

The remainder of your mark will be assessed based on class attendance and participation in weeks 2-11. For class during weeks 1 and 12 attendance is optional. Attendance and participation in the conversation is worth 6% per class for a total of 60% over the course of the term.

Evaluation (including Penalty for Lateness Clause)

For both undergraduate and graduate courses, instructors are not obliged to accept late work, except where there are legitimate, documented reasons beyond a student's control. In such cases, a late penalty is normally not appropriate.

The late penalty in this course is 10% marks per 24 hours late. Work will not be accepted more than 7 days after the deadline without an approved extension.

Academic Integrity Clause

Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean's office for adjudication. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties. Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See this link for tips for how to use sources well: (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>).

According to Section B.I.1.(e) of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters it is an offence "*to submit, without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.*"

By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university's rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>) and *Code of Student Conduct* (<http://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/codeofstudentconduct.htm>) which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Accessibility Services

It is the University of Toronto's goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. In creating such a community, the University aims to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. Please see the University of Toronto Governing Council "Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities" at <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppnov012004.pdf>.

In working toward this goal, the University will strive to provide support for, and

facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community. We take seriously our obligation to make this course as welcoming and accessible as feasible for students with diverse needs. We also understand that disabilities can change over time and will do our best to accommodate you.

Students seeking support must have an intake interview with a disability advisor to discuss their individual needs. In many instances it is easier to arrange certain accommodations with more advance notice, so we strongly encourage you to act as quickly as possible. To schedule a registration appointment with a disability advisor, please visit Accessibility Services at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>, call at 416-978-8060, or email at: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. The office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor, Suite 400.

Additional student resources for distressed or emergency situations can be located at distressedstudent.utoronto.ca; Health & Wellness Centre, 416-978-8030, <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>, or Student Crisis Response, 416-946-7111.

Equity and Diversity Statement

Equity and Diversity

The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated.

Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at <http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca>.

Course Schedule and Class Lecture Details

9th January

WEEK 1: Introduction to Contemporary Theory

Marxism

16th January

WEEK 2: Antonio Gramsci (1971). *The Prison Notebooks* New York: International Publishers.

Option 1 (beginner): If you can't stand Gramsci just read "State and Society"

Option 2 (intermediate): If you want a bit more Gramsci than the bare minimum also read part of "The Intellectuals" (pp. 5-14); and part of "Notes on Italian History" (pp. 52-90 make sure not to miss footnotes #5 + #49)

Option 3 (advanced): If you're loving Gramsci read the whole book and/or Kristin Plys and Charles Lemert (2022). "Finance and Capitalism" in *Capitalism and its Uncertain Future* New York: Routledge.

23rd January

WEEK 3: Louis Althusser (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Louis Althusser (2010 [1965]). *For Marx* London: Verso.

Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey and Jacques Rancière (2015 [1965]). *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition* London: Verso.

Option 1 (beginner): If you can't stand Althusser just read "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy*

Option 2 (intermediate): If you want a bit more Althusser than the bare minimum also read

"Contradiction and Overdetermination" in *For Marx*;

"Marxism is not a Historicism", "The Epistemological Propositions of *Capital* (Marx, Engels)", "The Object of Political Economy" and "Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution" in *Reading Capital*

Option 3 (advanced): If you're loving Althusser also read "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon" and the appendix in *Lenin and Philosophy*, all of "Part 4: The Object of Capital" in *Reading Capital* and/or

Étienne Balibar (1994). "Althusser's Object" *Social Text* 39(Summer): 157-188.

Stuart Hall (2016). "Ideology and Ideological Struggle" in Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg Eds. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* Durham: Duke University Press.

Psychoanalysis

30th January

WEEK 4: Jacques Lacan (2004 [1966]). *Écrits: A Selection* New York: W.W. Norton and Co.

Option 1 (beginner): If you can't stand Lacan just read "Mirror Stage" and "Subversion of the Subject"

Option 2 (intermediate): If you want a bit more Lacan than the bare minimum also read "The Function and Field of Speech", "The Freudian Thing" and "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious"

Option 3 (advanced): If you're absolutely loving Lacan read the whole book and flag these for future reading:

Alain Badiou (2020). *Lacan* New York: Columbia University Press.

David S. Marriott (2021). *Lacan Noir: Lacan and Afro-Pessimism* Palgrave Macmillan.

6th February

WEEK 5: Frantz Fanon (1965 [1959]). *A Dying Colonialism* New York: Grove Press.

Option 1 (beginner): If you can't stand Fanon just read "This is the Voice of Algeria"

Option 2 (intermediate): If you want a bit more Fanon than the bare minimum also read "Preface", "Algeria Unveiled" and "Conclusion"

If you're specializing in sociology of the family also read "The Algerian Family"

If you're specializing in medical sociology/sociology of health also read "Medicine and Colonialism"

Option 3 (advanced): If you're absolutely loving Fanon read the whole book and/or

Immanuel Wallerstein (1979). "Fanon and the revolutionary class" in *The Capitalist World-Economy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 250–268.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2009). "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century" *New Left Review* 57: (May–June): 117–125.

Kristin Plys and Charles Lemert (2022). "The Modern World and Capitalism, 1500-1991" in *Capitalism and its Uncertain Future* New York: Routledge.

Sinan Richards (2021). "The Logician of Madness: Fanon's Lacan" *Paragraph* 44(2): 214-237.

Zizek, Slavoj (2014). "The Wound of Eurocentrism" in *Trouble in Paradise* Brooklyn: Meville House. pp. 183-195

Deleuze & Guattari

13th February

WEEK 6: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ([1972]). *Anti-Oedipus*

Option 1 (beginner): If you can't stand D&G just read "The Urstaat" and "The Civilized Capitalist Machine"

Option 2 (intermediate): If you want a bit more D&G than the bare minimum also read "Desiring Production", "The Body Without Organs", "Capitalist Representation" and "Psychoanalysis and Capitalism"

Option 3 (advanced): If you're absolutely loving D&G read the entire book and/or Rossi Braidotti (1996). "Nomadism with a difference: Deleuze's legacy in a feminist perspective" *Man and World* 29: 305–314.

Kristin Plys and Charles Lemert (2022). "Assemblage Theory: The New Necessary Analytics of Global Capitalism" in *Capitalism and its Uncertain Future* New York: Routledge.

Flag this for future reference (or as a reading guide):

Adrian Parr Ed. (2010). *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

New Critiques of Capital

27th February

WEEK 7: The Invisible Committee (2017). *Now* Pasadena: Semiotext(e). pp.159

You can listen to *Now* as an audiobook for free here:

<https://resonanceaudiodistro.org/2020/01/23/now-audiozine/>

Option 1 (beginner): If you're pressed for time, prioritize, "For the Ones to Come"

Option 2 (intermediate): Try to read the entire book. It's short, and a quick read or listen

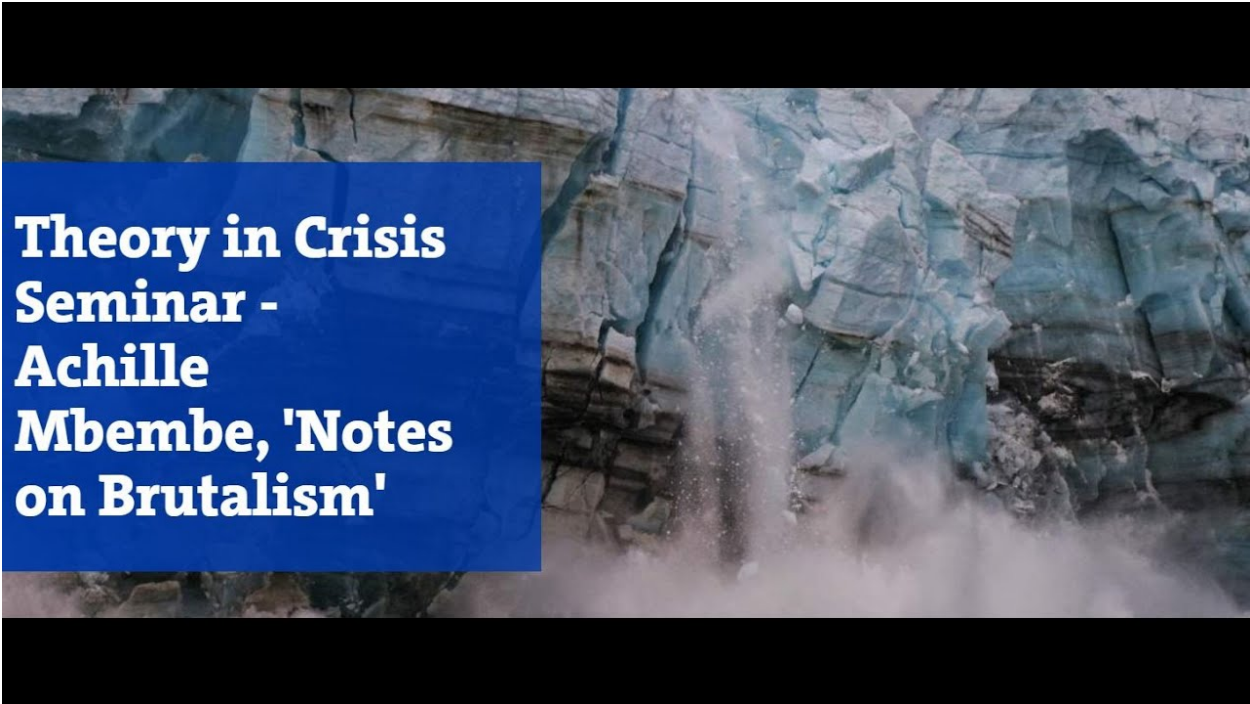
Postcolonial Capitalism

6th March

WEEK 9: Mbembe, Achille (2020). *Brutalisme* Paris: La Découverte.

Option 1 (beginner): watch 'Notes on Brutalism' Theory in Crisis Seminar, University of London.

And read: Confavreaux, Joseph (2020). "Decolonial anxieties in a postcolonial world: an interview with Achille Mbembe" *Postcolonial Studies* 25(1): 128-135.



Theory in Crisis Seminar - Achille Mbembe, 'Notes on Brutalism'

Option 2 (intermediate): For those with French proficiency also read the first chapter of *Brutalisme*, “*La domination universelle*”

Option 3 (advanced): Read as much as you can of *Brutalisme*

Abolition and Capitalism

13th March

WEEK 10: Derecka Purnell (2021). *Becoming Abolitionists* New York: Astra House. pp. 288

Option 1: If pressed for time, read “Resistance and Reform” and “Justice for the Living”

Option 2: If you’re particularly interested in gender, read “Sex, Love, and Violence”, if you’re interested in combatting ableism read, “Dehumanization, Disability, and Resistance” and if you’re interested in climate justice, read, “We Only Want Earth”

Option 3: If you’re loving Purnell, read the entire book

Theorizing the Body

20th March

WEEK 11: Silvia Federici (2019). *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* Oakland: PM Press. pp. 128

Option 1 (beginner): If pressed for time just read, “With Philosophy, Psychology, and Terror: Transforming Bodies into Labor Power”

Option 2 (intermediate): If you want a bit more, also read “The Body, Capitalism and the Reproduction of Labor Power”, “‘Body Politics’ in the Feminist Revolt”, “The Body in Today’s Reproductive Crisis”, “On the Body, Gender and Performance” , “Remaking our Bodies Remaking the World” , “Origins and Development of Sexual Work in the United States and Britain”

Option 3 (advanced): If you’re loving Federici, read the whole book and/or Plys, Kristin and Charles Lemert (2022). “Women’s Unpaid Labor and Primitive Accumulation” in *Capitalism and its Uncertain Future* New York: Routledge. pp. 67-73

Capitalism, Mental Health, and Theorizing the Pandemic

27th March

WEEK 8: Bifo Berardi (2021). *The Third Unconscious* London: Verso. pp. 159

Option 1 (beginner): If you’re pressed for time read: “XXX”, “Sad is Eros”, “Pleasure and Desire”, “Exhaustion”, “American Insurrection and Preventative Psychotherapy”

Option 2 (intermediate): read the whole book, its a short one!

Option 3 (advanced): venture down the YouTube rabbit hole and watch some Bifo interviews and lectures. It will be fun! I like this one as a start:



3rd April

WEEK 12: wrap up discussion

Copyright Statement

Course materials prepared by the instructor are considered by the University to be an instructor's intellectual property covered by the *Copyright Act*, RSC 1985, c C-42. These materials are made available to you for your own study purposes, and cannot be shared outside of the class or "published" in any way. Lectures, whether in person or online, cannot be recorded without the instructor's permission. Posting course materials or any recordings you may make to other websites without the express permission of the instructor will constitute copyright infringement.