

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES SEMINARS

CONTEMPORARY 1: ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCE

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies or Cross-Cultural Studies
C.I.S. Concentration: Africana Studies

Africa and the Other (fall):

Most people in the West know little about Africa. We might have studied Africa for a few weeks in school or glanced occasionally at newspaper headlines about war, genocide, AIDS, or even a safari adventure, but rarely have we actually thought seriously about Africa. Anyone who wants to understand contemporary Africa *needs* to understand the African past. This semester, will examine dominant ideas about colonial Africa and Africans' experiences during colonialism.

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

Prognosticating the Other (spring):

Having examined ourselves in the funhouse mirror of science fiction, our gaze this semester will shift to the heavens and what may be waiting for us “out there.” Call them gods or monsters, angels or aliens, humans have always told stories about those which exist beyond us as a way to further define who we are. These stories reveal our greatest hopes and desires for what the good of mankind could and should be, as well as our deepest fears of what we might be - the inner darkness we might never really overcome. Together, we will analyze what these stories and images reveal about the moments in which they were created, as well as their contemporary and more universal meanings. Readings and films include *War of the Worlds*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Slaughter House 5*, *Roadside Picnic*, *Alien*, and more.

CONTEMPORARY 4: THE CYBORG SELF

Common Area Designation: Social Science

The Human/Machine Dichotomy (fall):

In this seminar, we will explore the figure of the “cyborg”, a concept that attempts to capture the increasingly tenuous boundaries between living organisms and technologies. Social media, cellphones, reproductive technologies, toys, weapons, comic-book characters, video surveillance, and factories will be among our many objects of inquiry. Our aim is to understand how science and technology are inherently social – produced by power struggles, cultural patterns, economic trends, and political urgencies. In turn, these new technologies transform the ways in which we socialize, communicate, and interact with each other as human beings, creating new political horizons. Given the centrality of technoscience to our everyday lives, our analysis will allow us to better understand the rapid pace of change in our contemporary, globalized society.

Virtual and Artificial Humans (spring):

In our continued exploration of the “cyborg,” we will turn our focus to posthuman identities that further blur the distinction between humans and their technological others. Together, we will investigate virtual reality, robotics, gaming, prosthetics, and artificial intelligence – technologies that have serious implications for our self-construction as knowing subjects, as well as ethical implications for our very humanity. We will examine opposing views regarding the safety, desirability, and future potential of these technologies. Some authors consider them to be positive developments that improve humanity, while others are very wary of the dehumanizing, alienating, and even deadly effects that these technologies could represent for us. Using science fiction to explore narratives of possible futures, we will puzzle through the grey areas of a reconfigured humanity that might not look very human at all.

CONTEMPORARY 5: THE IMPORTANCE OF ENEMIES

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies
C.I.S. Concentration: Peace and Conflict Studies

Forging Citizens and Soldiers (fall):

How do leaders compel obedience and inspire patriotism? In this seminar, we will look at the rise of different variants of popular dictatorship in the early twentieth century, particularly the regimes of Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin and the ideologies of fascism and communism. We will examine the sources of support for these leaders and their world views, paying particular attention to the way each of these systems attempted to construct or re-construct a powerful, attractive group identity by targeting certain other groups as outsiders and threats. We will focus on the experience of World War II and explore what drove the involvement of millions of people in total war. Did politics succeed in shaping, or in some cases in transforming, morality? If so, how? What compelled Nazi collaboration? What inspired Soviet loyalty? Together, we will investigate how individuals caught in such a calamitous and violent experience came to see the world around them and how they judged their own actions, both at the time and in retrospect.

“Evil” Empires and “Ho

D

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

the way the threat of atomic warfare spilled into politics and popular culture, as well as the way the Cold War conflict influenced public memory of the Nazi experience and the global battle against fascism.

CONTEMPORARY 6: US AND THEM

Common Area Designation:

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

CORE HUMAN QUESTIONS SEMINARS

CORE 1: ETHICS AND POLITICS OF WORK

Common Area Designation: Philosophical Studies

Ethics: What's in it for Me? (fall):

Each of us needs to work. At the very least, each of us needs to work for a living to meet our basic needs. More interestingly, it seems plausible that each of us needs to work in order to fully develop our potential – to fully become ourselves (whatever that might mean, exactly). But some ways of working make our lives worse, and some ways of working interfere with our ability to “fully become ourselves.” So what do we do about that? In this seminar, we will explore classical ethical theories from Mill, Kant, and Aristotle to try to answer that question, “What is “work” and what can it contribute to our lives?”

Politics: What's in it for Us? (spring):

Society needs people to work. There is an enormous amount of “stuff” that needs to happen for a society to function, and it is plausible that the government should play a role in making sure that all of that stuff is happening – that the right people are working on the right things. In this seminar, we will study the contemporary political theories that grew out of Kant and Aristotle: what do liberalism, libertarianism, conser

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

CORE 4: PLAYING AT WORK IN ART & LITERATURE

Common Area Designation: Arts

The Modernist Response (fall):

At the beginning of the last century, artists rebelled against the atomization of society caused by the Industrial Revolution and urbanization. These artists issued aesthetic manifestos and created transgressive works that played with structure, form, and imagery in a futile howl against a world that they believed was rushing towards its own self-destruction. In this seminar, we will explore modernist art movements-- from symbolism to surrealism in visual arts and theater--that reflects the ever-growing alienation of the individual to work and society. We will explore how various modernist artists represented labor and work, ranging from the soul-deadening existence depicted in Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* to the human automatons in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and the authoritarian fantasies of the Soviets and Nazis.

The Postmodernist Response (spring):

The postmodern aesthetic rose in tandem with the coming of the Information Age. Some argue that television, and later, computers created a false sense of community and connectivity that merely disguised an ever-growing sense of isolation. This semester, we will examine a range of contemporary works of art, performance, and literature that reflects the disconnect caused by living and working in a world where the liminal space between the real and the virtual-- between fact and alternate fact--becomes blurred and indistinguishable. Late modernists such as Rothko and Beckett deconstructed the object past the point of endurance, shattering the boundaries of high culture and opening aesthetics to the post-modern dilemma of indeterminate meaning and decontextualization. We will survey the threads of postmodernism in the works of Pollock, Rothko, Beckett, Handke, Albee, and Warhol.

CORE 5: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ROMAun Ward was rushing tostrnd-

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

Augustine's Confessions, Freud's *Future of an Illusion*, Elie Wiesel's *Souls on Fire*, and Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Together, we will ask questions concerning how different people allow the divine to enter into their consciousness and life, whether we need to let the divine into our lives at all, and whether the divine is, in fact, 'let into'--or rather, erupts into--

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 -

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

Common Area Designation(s): Arts

GLOBAL 3: GLOBAL IMAGERY

The Human Body (fall):

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

themes of exile, conflict, immigration, genocide, and alienation, among others. A sampling of texts will include: post-Civil War novels in Spain by Laforet and Rodoreda, as well as early modern works such as the picaresque novel and texts by Cervantes. Performance and improvisation will have a central role in the course. No previous acting experience is required.

GLOBAL 6: MUSIC, POLITICS, CULTURE

Common Area Designations: Arts or Cross-Cultural Studies

Jazz-Civil Rights- Hip Hop (fall):

This seminar will focus on themes central to the African American experience, and by extension the American experience in music of the 20th and 21st centuries. We will consider the social and political roots of the Blues, and the struggle for racial justice and civil

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

forces behind these visual productions? In this seminar, we will explore these questions together as we examine a wide range of self-portraits throughout art history and across diverse geographic contexts. Through a variety of critical viewing exercises, we will sharpen our observation and writing skills to interpret a fuller meaning of self-portraiture and to understand better how the visual arts contribute to the creation of identity and community in a global context.

Portraying Others (spring):

Portraiture can reveal a great deal about not only the subject, but also the maker and the viewer. This semester, w1AETBT1 0 0 1 433.27 642.

MONTSERRAT SEMINARS
FALL 2017 – SPRING 2018

Common Area Designation(s): Social Science

SELF 6: HEALTH, DECISION-MAKING & SELF

