

SOCI 504/CSPT 500

Current Issues in Social Theory: Contemporary Materialisms

Instructor: Dr. Steve Garlick

Course Description¹:

Social theory has always been informed by various forms of materialism. This course focuses on recent developments in social theory, with particular attention to how materialist theories have persisted and re-emerged in different forms through the linguistic and cultural turns of the late 20th century, and with particular concern for how these shifts inform our understandings of power relations and social inequalities. The course offers students the opportunity to engage with some of the most important and influential social theories and theorists of recent decades.

Course Objectives:

The course has three main objectives: (1) to ensure that students have a solid understanding of important theorists whose work informs contemporary social theory; (2) to ensure that students have familiarity with contemporary theoretical issues and debates, especially in relation to new materialist theories; and (3) to develop students' abilities to theorize in relation to their own areas of research interest.

Topics Covered:

We will begin with the Frankfurt School of critical theory, which in certain respects anticipates aspects of recent new materialist theories. We then work our way through the writings of a number of key late-twentieth-century thinkers (Fanon, Bourdieu, Foucault, Butler, & Collins) whose work is both influential today and of consequence for materialist theorizing. Finally, we move on to examine some of the most influential materialist trends in recent social theory associated with posthumanism, complexity, affect, actor-network-theory, indigenous thought, and feminist new materialisms.

Course Organization and Coursework

This is a seminar-style course. Students will each present and lead the discussion of the readings in one class session. Students will write weekly papers and a final research-based paper. All coursework is designed to assist students in developing their own abilities to engage in theorizing.

Required Resources: All required course readings will be made available via CourseSpaces.

¹ This online outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students before the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.