

SOCI 504 - Current Issues in Social Theory: Contemporary Materialisms

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Instructor: Dr. Steve Garlick

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Course Description¹:

Social theorizing has always been informed by different materialisms, and this course examines how materialist theories have persisted and re-emerged in different forms through the linguistic and cultural turns of the late 20th century, with particular concern for how these shifts inform our understandings of key sociological concepts such as power, order, freedom, and social change. The course is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on key 20th-century theorists whose work has implications for materialist theorizing. The second part takes up recent developments in new materialist social theorizing, with particular attention to their relationships to forms of Indigenous theorizing. 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 much contemporary social theorizing; (2) to ensure that students have familiarity with contemporary issues and debates in social theory; 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. In the second half of the term, we move on to examine some of the most influential trends in recent social theorizing associated with posthumanism, complexity, biopolitical capitalism, affect, Indigenous theorizing, 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 at least one class session. Students will write weekly response papers and a final research paper. All coursework is designed to assist students in developing their 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.