Concepts in Postcolonial Theory: Hybridity and Otherness
G41.2900
Instructors: Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Robert J. C. Young
Tuesdays 6.20-8.20
Room 229, 19UP

Description: This course will conduct a detailed examination of two theoretical concepts that have been central to postcolonial theory, otherness and hybridity, both concerned with identity. ‘Otherness’ is a western philosophical concept that postcolonial theory has primarily sought to critique and repudiate, while hybridity is generally considered an ‘invention’ of postcolonial thought, a radical substitute for hegemonic ideas of cultural identity like racial purity and nationality.

Otherness/alterity: The ‘other’, variously threat, responsibility, alter ego, and enigma to and of the self, has been a major preoccupation of Western thought. In recent times the figure of the other, hitherto silent and effaced, has made claims to speak, indeed to speak back, disrupting the realm of politics in radical ways: thus women, ‘natives’, minorities, deviants, subalterns, now claim to speak as others. Both epistemologically and politically, therefore, the other is central to our contemporary concerns, in the university as well as the larger world. Postcolonial theory has made questions such as the following urgent: what does the ‘other’ mean to these endeavours? Who is the ‘other’, historically and symbolically? Do self and other translate inevitably into ‘us’ and ‘them’? How is the other known: is knowledge of the other (always) a form of colonization, domination, violence, or can it be pursued as disinterested truth? Can the other know/speak itself?

We shall begin with a quick survey of some of the key texts of the western tradition that read—or critique—the self in relation to the other (Hegel, Lacan, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Levinas, Charles Taylor); and follow it up with more detailed attention to the postcolonial work that engages with the questions they pose in examining the politics of representation, race, recognition and identity. Texts will include Fanon, Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Fabian, Taussig, Suleri, Jan Mohammed, and a novel by Indra Sinha, Animal’s People (2007).

Hybridity: The concept of hybridity formulated in the work of Homi K. Bhabha in the 1980s was foundational in the development of Postcolonial Studies but has also been subject to some of the most stringent critiques. In this course, we will reconsider some of the original texts, challenges, and subsequent elaborations of the concept. We will begin with a detailed examination of Bhabha’s work, and then consider its relation to the earlier use of the concept in literature (Naipaul, Rushdie), linguistics (Bakhtin), translation theory (Benjamin), psychology (Winnicott), as well as later developments in sociology (Hall), anthropology (Canelini, Hannerz), and postcolonial theory (Glissant).

We will focus on the two topics separately as well as in their interconnections, by examining a range of theoretical and literary material through which the conceptual frameworks, the meanings, and the uses of the terms have taken shape in postcolonial studies. Participants will be encouraged to pursue individual research that will allow them to elaborate their own specific ways of conceptualising these issues.

Course requirements and grading:
1. Weekly response papers (300 words) for ‘Otherness’ (in weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8): 10%
2. Mid-term essay (on Otherness), 4000 words, due week 8: 40%
3. Final essay (on Hybridity), 4000 words, due week 14: 40%
4. One Class presentation (on Hybridity): weeks 9-14: 10%

Otherness section: weekly schedule (weeks 1-7)

Week 1, September 4: Introduction: Self and other in western philosophy (Hegel); existentialism and ethics (Sartre, de Beauvoir, Levinas, Derrida); psychoanalysis (Lacan); genealogy (Foucault). Connections to postcolonial theory.

Week 2, September 11: Questions of representation (Said, Hartog, Todorov)

Week 3, September 18: Anthropology and the other (Fabian, Taussig, Ghosh, Ramanujam)

Week 4, September 25: Woman, Native, Other (Bhabha, Alloula, Trinh)

Week 5, October 2: Race and Otherness (Fanon, Achebe, Jan Mohammed)

Week 6, October 9: Multiculturalism and minority (Taylor, Mohanty); and Interrogating Alterity (Spivak, Suleri)

*Week 8, October 23: Human, non-human (Sinha, Hartman, Williams)

Bibliography: Otherness (Chapters to be specified)


Sartre, Jean-Paul. From Being and Nothingness.


**Hybridity: Weekly schedule (weeks 8-14)**

*Week 7, October 16: Introduction: hybridity in theory
Week 9, October 30: Hybridity in biology, race—Young
Week 10, November 6: Hybridity in language—Bakhtin
Week 11, November 13: Hybridity in translation—Benjamin
Week 12, November 20: Hybridity in culture—Hall, Bhabha, Rushdie
Week 13, November 27: Hybridity in anthropology—Hannerz, Canclini
Week 14, December 4: Hybridity in Latin America/Caribbean —Freyre, Brathwaite, Glissant.

**Bibliography: Hybridity**


Hall, Stuart (1990), ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Identity: Community, Culture*,
Walcott, Derek (1990), Omeros. London, Faber

Texts:
The following texts are required and will be available at the book-store:


The rest of the material will be made available in course-packs.