

Western University / Centre for Study of Theory and Criticism
THEOCRIT 9148: Earth Aesthetics in the Information Age

MEETINGS: contact theory@uwo.ca for more information

Instructor: Dr. Russell Duvernoy, PhD

Contact: rduverno@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 to 3:30 PM or by appointment. (Office is Faculty Building 304, King's University College).

Course Description: The seminar studies the role of aesthetic theory, practice, and experience in the context of two pressing urgencies: the planetary ecological crisis and the yet to be understood implications of digital technology and the age of information. One of its guiding inspirations is the work of Édouard Glissant, who observes in *Poetics of Relation* that the global imposition of a single market is equally a crisis of imagination and aesthetics insofar as it relies on a single abstract and disembodied standard of sensibility and value. We might equally charge information theory, *depending on how this is understood*, with a similar leveling of diversity into a single homogenous matrix. Is this a necessary feature of the turn to information, or can information be understood in a manner that might include diverse embodiments, affects, and experiences without reducing them? How might a poetics and aesthetics of place dialogue with the turn to information to complicate its more reductive forms?

The course is interdisciplinary and pluralistic in spirit and methodology, drawing on texts and approaches from canonical and contemporary theorists from a variety of cultural and intellectual lineages. It should appeal to students with interests in ecology, eco-criticism, comparative philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of creativity, and philosophy of religion broadly construed.

Learning Objectives:

1. To better understand the metaphysical and epistemic context of the “information turn” in the mid-20th century and be able to connect this context to contemporary discussions of ecology and meaning.
2. To better understand the historical and conceptual issues of aesthetic theory, thinking in particular about the relationship between art practice and metaphysics of nature and land.
3. To consider the relationship between aesthetic experience, creative practice, and ethical action around issues of ecology and land.
4. To consider how an aesthetics of place is or is not compatible with the reality of digital and technical mediation.

Expectations, Procedures, and Methods of Evaluation: The course will be run in a seminar style. Students are expected to complete all class readings closely and carefully

before the class session in which they are discussed and should be prepared for rigorous discussion of prominent themes and questions. Class sessions will be in a dialogical lecture style with ample space for discussion.

Assignments and methods of evaluation are as follows:

One Presentation (30%): Students prepare a detailed presentation on a week of their choice. This presentation should develop its own interpretation on themes and material from that week, and then serve to make these intelligible and coherent to seminar participants. Presentations should be designed to provoke discussion and debate. Further details on OWL.

Participation and Attendance (10%): Students are expected to attend and actively participate in all class sessions unless there is an unavoidable conflict communicated before the session in question.

Final Paper including Proposal: (60%: 20% Proposal, 40% paper): Students write a significant research paper (roughly 7000 words inclusive) on a topic of their choice. This includes a written proposal. Further details on OWL.

Course Materials: We are reading significant portions of the three following texts which are not available electronically through the library system. All additional readings will be made available electronically, whether through links to a library e-copy or pdf on OWL.

Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. 1997. University of Michigan Press. ISBN: 978-0-472-06629-2.

Amanda Boetzkes. *The Ethics of Earth Art*. 2010. University of Minnesota Press. ISBN: 978-0816665891

Yuk Hui. *Art and Cosmotechnics*. 2021. E-flux (University of Minnesota Press). ISBN: 978-1517909543

Statement on Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Syllabus: This schedule may change during the semester to reflect course progress and student interests. Any changes will be announced in class and on OWL.

Week One: M Sept 9: INTRODUCTION and MOTIVATION OF COURSE THEMES and PROBLEMS

Readings: Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, “Imaginary” (p.1), “The Open Boat” (5-9). In class I will discuss how we will treat this text. It is recommended that students read it in its

entirety, but official reading assignments will focus on specific sections and passages in relation to our themes that week.

Week Two: M Sept 16: AESTHETICS and PLANETARY CHANGE

Readings: *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant, p. 32-5, "Relation", "The Relative and Chaos", "Distancing, Determined" (p. 131-159)
 "The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category" Dipesh Chakrabarty
Recommended: "Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics" Yuriko Saito

Week Three: M Sept 23: PHILOSOPHY and INFORMATION, ONE

Readings: Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, "Concerning a Baroque Abroad in the World", "Concerning the Poem's Information" (p. 77-88);
 "Introduction" and "The Shannon Knot" by Erich Hayot (from *Information: A Reader*)
 "Contesting for the Body of Information" by N. Katherine Hayles

Week Four: M Sept 30: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, no class.

Theme: EARTH and AESTHETICS

Readings: *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant, "That That", "Relinked, (Relayed), Related" (p. 159-179)
 Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art*, "Introduction" and chp 1-2 "Spiral Jetty and the Recovery of the Elemental"
 Rodolfo Kusch, "Seminal Thinking" from *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*

Week Five: M Oct 7: KANT and the SUBJECTIVE TURN

Readings: Kant, selections from *Critique of Judgement* and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*

Reading Week Oct 12 to Oct 20

Week Six: M Oct 21: AESTHETICS and PHENOMENOLOGY

Readings: Heidegger "The Origin of the Work of Art"
 Merleau-Ponty "The Intertwining-The Chiasm" from *The Visible and Invisible*

Week Seven: M Oct 28: AESTHETICS and FEELING

Readings: Susanne K. Langer, selections from *Feeling and Form* and TBA
 Mikel Dufrenne, selections from *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*
 "Percept, Affect, and Concept" Deleuze and Guattari

Week Eight: M Nov 4: AESTHETICS and PLACE

Readings: Watsuji Tetsurō, selections from *Fūdo (Climate: A Philosophical Study)*
 Augustin Berque, "Human Mediance" from *Poetics of the Earth*
 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, "The Black Beach" (p. 121-130), "The Burning Beach" (p. 205-209)

Week Nine: M Nov 11: INFORMATION, AESTHETICS, ECOLOGY

Readings: Jason Hoelscher, *Art as Information Ecology*, selections
Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics*, "Introduction" and "Chapter One"

Week Ten: M Nov 18: PHILOSOPHY and INFORMATION, TWO

Readings: Michel Serrres, "The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, and Thermodynamics"
Bateson from *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* / "Form Substance and Difference"
"The Eclipse of Thinking" Sean J. McGrath

Week Eleven: M Nov 25: TECHNOLOGY, AESTHETICS, EARTH

Readings: Heidegger selections from "The Question Concerning Technology"
Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics*, "Chapter Three: Art and Automation"
Boetzkes, Chapter 3 "Ecotechnology and the Receptive Surface"
Recommended: Steven Vogel, "Thinking Like a Mall"
Simondon, "On Techno-Aesthetics"

Final Paper Proposals Due by Friday Nov. 29th at midnight.

Week Twelve: M Dec 2: ART, ETHICS, and ATTENTION

THIS WEEK'S TOPIC IS PROVISIONAL

Readings: Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, "Transparency and Opacity" (p. 111-120), "For Opacity" (p. 189-194)
Jan Zwicky, "Auden as Philosopher: How Poets Think" *Once upon a time in the West*
Fanny Howe, "Bewilderment" from *The Wedding Dress*
Agnes Martin, selections from *Writings*: "The Still and Silent in Art",
"The Untroubled Mind"

Final Exam Period Dec. 9 to Dec. 22:

Final Papers Due during Finals at Date TBA