Political Science 703, spring 2017

Writing Politics

Mondays 3 – 5:30 in Saunders 624

Michael J. Shapiro

The catalogue description: “Seminar on the politics of writing, grammar, translation, argument, genre, and style with significant content on indigenous issues of oral traditions, alternative modes of writing and argument, and language continuance.”

The specific focus of this version of Political Science 703 is on the way political thinking/philosophy is articulated in popular culture texts, especially films (but also in a variety other visual texts, exemplified in the collection Sensible Politics). Regarding texts as (what Roland Barthes calls) as “methodological fields,” the aim of the course is instruction on how to write effective essays that reference visual texts – intervening in them with theoretical practices in ways that are intelligible for your disciplinary readership and promising as regards scholarly accomplishment. For purposes of illustration, I focus much of the course on the films of Lars Von Trier because they have been creatively (re)thought in a monograph that brings critically-oriented political thinking to readings of his films. However, in addition to following the main readings and cinematic texts in the course students are encouraged to inflect the course in directions that enable your particular interests and to work on the genre of popular culture texts that are your focus. After the initial 4 sessions, course materials will be added once the distribution of interests in the seminar is established.

Books to acquire for the course:

Bonnie Honig and Lori J. Marso eds. Politics, Theory, and Film: Critical Encounters with Lars von Trier

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, What is Philosophy?

James Phillips ed. Cinematic Thinking: Philosophical Approaches to the New Cinema

Meg McLagan and Yates McKee ed. Sensible Politics (Zone books hard cover but many used on Amazon)

Vilem Flusser, Gestures

(purchase the books from online book sellers)

Reading/discussion/viewing schedule: (TBA)

January:
9th Read *What is Philosophy*, pp. vii – 34 and heed this quotation from C. Wright Mills: “When events move very fast and possible worlds swing around them, something happens to the quality of thinking. Some…repeat formulae; some…become reporters. To time observations with thought so as to mate a decent level of abstraction with crucial happenings is a difficult problem. Its solution lies in the using of intellectual residues of social-history, not jettisoning them except in precise confrontation with events” (From his review of Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth: The Structure and Function of National Socialism 1933-1944*. Online at: [http://www.wbenjamin.org/Behemoth.html](http://www.wbenjamin.org/Behemoth.html)).

16th Holiday, no class meeting


30th Miriam Leonard, “I Know What has to happen”… Chapter 15 in Honig and Marso, and Shapiro, “Resisting Resolution: Genre and the Family,” in *For Moral Ambiguity* (available in our Laulima site). Recommended: Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* and Thomas Hardy’s novel *Jude the Obscure* (at a minimum, read a synopsis of it).

**February**


27th Flusser *Gestures* (the sections on “the gesture of filming” and “the gesture of video) plus selections from Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film*.

The rest of the schedule TBA