



Sociology, School of Social Sciences
HS3001: Contemporary Social Theory
AY 2020-21, Semester 1

Lectures: Tuesday, 11:30am-1:30PM, through Zoom

<https://ntu-sg.zoom.us/j/5935357050>

Meeting ID: 593 535 7050

Passcode: 981107

Tutorials: in-person

Tuesday, LHN-TR+22 (The Arc, Learning Hub)

T1 – 1:30-2:30pm (Victoria Chua Puay Ru)

T2 – 2:30-3:30pm (Victoria Chua Puay Ru)

T3 – 3:30-4:30pm (Prof Monamie)

T4 – 4:30-5:30pm (Prof Monamie) (Zoom)

T5 – 5:30-6:30pm (Victoria Chua Puay Ru)

T5 – 6:30-7:30pm (Victoria Chua Puay Ru)

Instructor: Assistant Professor Monamie Bhadra Haines

Email: monamie.haines@ntu.edu.sg

Office: SHHK-05-30

Office hours: by appointment

Time-sensitive, project-oriented consultations: September 14, November 9, November 10

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0C44AAA62CA2FB6-consultations>

Teaching assistant: Victoria Chua Puay Ru

Email: PUAYRU001@e.ntu.edu.sg

COURSE AIMS

You are taking this course at a critical time in our contemporary history. We are all muddling our way through masks and mucus, e-learning and lockdowns, trying to make sense of the pandemic and how it is shaping our lives. I have designed this course to help us think through some of the issues we are facing. All the theoretical pieces will have a 'newsy' think piece that will be relevant to consider implications for human and non-human lives.

The lens of the coronavirus will provide an overview of theoretical perspectives derived from sociology, anthropology, science and technology studies and political theory to help us

interrogate ourselves, politics and environments. After taking this course, we should be better equipped to reflect on—and ask better questions about—the workings of power, knowledge and resistance in the broader world and within their own lives.

The course is organized into two broad themes. Part I, “Producing Hegemony” interrogates how contemporary thinkers have theorized the workings of power, knowledge and violence in the state and the how the *status quo* comes into being. Yet, in producing “business as usual” the module also explores the unevenness of modernity. Part II, “Contesting Deviance and Dualities” surveys how scholar-activists have theorized power and society from the position of so-called deviant identities, being a woman, Black, queer, disabled, colonized or animal, and investigates how various groups have resisted processes and institutions of hegemony. In doing so, this thematic section also implicitly examines how binaries in classical social theory, black/white, man/woman, nature/culture, ability/disability, feeling/thinking have been troubled and subverted by contemporary social theorists.

The pedagogical philosophy behind this course is the refrain, “the personal is political” whereby one recognizes how problems that seem to be isolated and individual are actually systemic and social, but where one also sees the irreducible creativity in human agency. While we will be trafficking in writings about the powers of the state, corporate entities, social movements, we will also be reflecting on our own “positionality” in society—that is, how we as citizens, subjects and consumers are hailed into being with particular privileges and disadvantages in society. Yet we also remake different realities through our individual actions and agencies. Thus, when we turn to poststructuralism, far from being merely focused on the workings of systemic structures, we will also interrogate the construction of the personal, the self, and our own realities to show the fluid qualities of the structures and societal “givens” we take for granted.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (LOs)

NTU wants to create graduates possessing the following qualities: competence, communication, character, civic-mindedness and creativity. This course aims to contribute towards those goals in the following ways upon completing this class:

- (LO1) *Competence*: This is the primary goal of this course—to recognize, understand the relevance of, engage with and apply different theories of society from a diverse group of thinkers.
- (LO2) *Communication*: You will increase your ability to write with intelligence and accessibility to multiple audiences, from your family members to government officials to other academics, and speak publicly with confidence and liveliness.
- (LO3) *Character*: Working hard to “be the best” should be complemented with critical self-reflection about one’s own social position, as well as developing empathy for others who are different. This course challenges students to develop such skills.
- (LO4) *Civic-mindedness*: Students will learn contemporary social theory to reflect on the natures of power and inequality in the world.
- (LO5) *Creativity*: After gaining a foundation in the social theory scholarship, students will learn how to challenge the scholars we have read by drawing on and differently interpreting ongoing social phenomena in the world.

OTHER CLASS POLICIES

Zoom etiquette: You must keep your video on at all times, and mute your audio. As there are over 100 students, I will not be able to see raised hands, so please interrupt me verbally. Make sure you have ample lighting for us to see faces. Please remember that you can see everyone and everyone can see you, so please act as if you are in a physical classroom. Keep in mind that sharing screens for discussions can expose all your tabs and applications on your laptop.

Lectures: All of my edited slides will be available on NTULearn for you, and I will give those to you before the actual synchronous lecture, so you can follow along. During the lecture I will ask you to take time to watch videos with links provided, and ask you to chat on Zoom. Please try not sell your notes on Carousell, but you are a neoliberal citizen, and I cannot really stop you.

Deadlines and Missed Classes: Unless you have a legitimate and documented excuse for not being able to turn in an assignment on time, deadlines will not be extended and a late assignment will be penalized by half a letter grade per day that it is late. If you miss a class, please obtain notes from a classmate.

Academic integrity: All members of the NTU community are responsible for upholding the values of academic integrity. Students are expected to have fully read current academic policies regarding academic honesty at <http://academicintegrity.ntu.edu.sg> **Please submit your plagiarism pledges with each assignment!**

*****IMPORTANT INFORMATION*****

Online Platforms

- Zoom for lectures (<https://ntu-sg.zoom.us/j/5935357050>; passcode: 981107)
- Bb Collaborate Ultra for weekly discussions, using Google Docs

Weekly Deliverables

1. One comment /reflection, ~100 words, due at 5pm on Mondays before class.
2. One response to another students, comments/reflections will be ~100 words and will be due at 5pm on Wednesday, the day after class.
3. Contribute to in-person tutorial

Semester Deliverables

1. One critical essay of 2-3 pages (**due September 22, 2020**)
2. One 1-hour assessment of ONE question (**11:30-12:30am, November 24, over Zoom**)
3. One group project (**Due November 10**)

Your Semester-Long Groups: **YOU WILL BE IN TWO GROUPS!**

1. Tutorial group of 4-5 people (also for group project, or individual option)
2. Weekly Bb Collaborate Ultra discussion group of 8-9 people (is randomly chosen)

Consultations

- I will hold consultations by appointment only. **If you email me questions, I will likely send audio-recorded responses, although I will try to type out answers**
- Before the semester deliverables are due, I am opening slots for consultation:
 - September 14, 2-5:30pm; November 9, 2-5:30pm; November 10, 12-5:30pm

- Please sign-up here, but do not book multiple slots!
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0C44AAA62CA2FB6-consultations>

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Tutorial reading and participation (10%) (satisfies LO1, LO2, LO3)

Reading assignments should be completed by the time of the lecture. You will not receive a participation grade if I do not see you actively discussing AND taking the lead on speaking /posting. The selections on this syllabus are difficult even for a specialist. Readings will take time and patience. But you need not understand every word written by any given theorist. Ideally, the readings should provoke questioning.

We will meet **in-person** for tutorials. We are going to **experiment** with the following structure:

- You will be split into 4-5 groups.
 - 3-4 groups will represent one of the theorists we have read that week or before
 - One group will represent the “dazed and confused and bored” college student (you could alternatively play a stereotype of your parents).
 - I will play the role of the “know-it-all who knows nothing.”
 - The “college student” group will act as our ‘bookends’: this group is responsible for kicking off discussion, prodding the theory groups when they cannot answer a question, and wrapping up the conversation with what they have learned, if anything. This group will kick us off with a rhetorical question, such as
 - “What is the point of any of this? We are all going to die anyway”
 - “How will this help me get a job?,” or
 - “How does this work in Singapore?,” or
 - “Why the ***bleep*** do we have to know this?
 - Why????
 - The others will rise to the challenge and provide a response they imagine the theorist may take.
- The groups will all contribute to writing out this conversation on a **Google Doc**:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1KnM870ZQnQDbGwkTnt2-DZc5eBTLPKbi?usp=sharing>
- **The tutorial discussions will require you to have read the materials before coming to class. I will not give mini-lectures in tutorials.**

2. Weekly discussion board posts about reading (10%) (satisfies LO1)

On Bb Collaborate Ultra, you have been randomly assigned to a group of 8 or 9 students for the duration of the module. In this group, you will provide weekly reflections and responses for the week's readings. I will assign a grade to the posts as a whole at the end of semester. While I cannot respond personally to each comment, you can be sure that I will read it and respond where I can.

- Your **comments/reflections** will be **~100 words** and will be due at **5pm on Mondays before class.**
- Your comments should respond to any one of the following prompts:
 - Using a personal experience as fodder for further theorization

- Selecting 1-2 quotes you found interesting/annoying/surprising and then explain why
- Find an angle that has not been previously discussed
- Identify a quote or concept in the text you do not understand and explain what you do not understand about it.
- Your **responses** to at least **one other member** of your group will be **~100 words** and **due at 5pm on Wednesday, the day after class.**
- The first person who posts will create the discussion forum for that week.
- For consistency, please write the week number in the title, for example "Week 2: Science, Politics and Modernity"
- Responding to another student's post should try to use at least two of the following methods (at least in spirit, if not a direct citation).
 - **Compliment (e.g. "I like how.." or "I like that..")**
 - **Comment (e.g. "I dis/agree, because...")**
 - **Connection (e.g. "I have also seen/heard/thought/read that...")**
 - **Questions (e.g. "I wonder what/who/why/where/how...")**
- ****In the event that we have to take tutorials online, we will do so through Zoom breakout rooms. I will pre-assign you to groups based on your existing tutorial groups. We will continue to use Google Docs to record the conversation.****

3. Critical Essay (25%) (satisfies LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LO5) due on September 22

You will be responsible for writing a 2-3 pages, single-spaced critical essay with 1-inch margins on ONE of the following two questions.

1. Putting theorists into conversation: Imagine two theorists are having their morning coffee and tea at the beginning of the pandemic and reading the news. What would they talk about?
 - a. Find an article in a major media outlet about the pandemic in 2020
 - b. Select two theorists we have covered so far.
 - c. Choose from two further options:
 - i. In a more creative vein, imagine their conversational dialog over the article, akin to a scene in a play that should still address their ideas.
 - ii. Prepare a more scholarly and formal essay that addresses the differences/similarities in their ideas using the lens of your news piece.

2. Critical positionality: Think about your own life in Singapore and analyse it through the lens of two theoretical frameworks we have covered in the module thus far. You may choose one of the following lenses through which to apply your chosen theorists:
 - a. What are your beliefs? How have institutions, structures and experiences shaped your commitments and worldviews?
 - b. Why do you trust the institutions you do? Why do you (we) trust technocratic expertise to better our lives?
 - c. Are you a neoliberal citizen in Singapore? If so, how and why?

4. Final group project on everyday social theory (30%) due November 10 on week 13

This will be a small group project with the option of individual endeavors, where you will examine the role of social theory in your everyday lives and interests. For your empirical material, you will choose any sociocultural phenomenon of interest to you, such as the environment and climate change, pandemics, technology, education, human-animal relationships, medicine, marketing, family, religion, music, movies, sports or art. You can consider these topics within the national context of Singapore, but also on regional or global scales. You will analyse your chosen subject through any one of the critical lenses we will have covered, including: gender, race or disability, biopolitics and governmentality, various forms of capital, postcolonialism and subalterneity, science and technology studies, colonization and decoloniality, the politics of affect and assemblages. This project will have three components:

- (1) a 3-4 page written document of your analysis (15%),
- (2) a final, digitally pre-recorded presentation that has visual components, which can include slides, photos, short films, performance or other imaginative effort that showcases your creativity (15%);
- (3) a peer-review of one another.

5. Final Assessment (1 hour, online) (25%) (satisfies LO1-5) November 23, 2020

You will take a cumulative final assessment online through Zoom, that will consist of two essay questions, where I will take statements and quotes from the media, such as *The Straits Times*, and you will analyse it using the work of two theorists—one of my choosing, and one of yours.

COURSE ORGANIZATION PART I: PRODUCING HEGEMONY

Some readings may change, so please make sure you do not delete emails from me!

WEEK 1 | Aug 11 Introduction to class

Lecture: The stakes of this course. Why social theory?

WEEK 2 | Aug 18 Science, Politics and (Post)Modernity

Readings for lecture:

Lemert, Charles C. (2005) "Postmodernism Is Not What You Think." In *Postmodernism Is Not What You Think: Why Globalization Threatens Modernity*, 3-53. (50 pages)

Jasanoff, Sheila and Hilton R. Simmet. (2017) "No Funeral Bells: Public Reason in a 'Post-Truth' Age." *Social Studies of Science*. 47(5): 751-766. (15 pages)

Maggie Koerth. (April 6 2020). "Science Has No Clear Answers On The Coronavirus. Face Masks Are No Exception." *FiveThirtyEight*. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/science-has-no-clear-answers-on-the-coronavirus-face-masks-are-no-exception/>

Suggested readings:

Yountae, An (2020). "A decolonial theory of religion." *Contending Modernities*.

<https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/a-decolonial-theory-of-religion/>

WEEK 3 | Aug 25 Theorising ideology

Readings for lecture:

- Antonio Gramsci. "(i) History of the Subaltern Classes; (ii) The Concept of "Ideology"; (iii) Cultural Themes: Ideological Material" *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Althusser, Louis. (1971) "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*. New York: Verso.
- Jerrine Tan. (2020). "What Singapore Can Tell the World About Personal Liberty." *Wired*.
https://www.wired.com/story/what-singapore-can-tell-the-world-about-personal-liberty/?fbclid=IwAR1RH13pRh3PnpuzTuHrp8pUsviepZE_br8y3rBgrgB6ZUCOb3-oirGtOKA

WEEK 4 | Sep 1 Culture, Technology and State Power

Readings for lecture:

- Pierre Bourdieu (1991). "Lecture of 21 February 1991."
- Foucault, Michel. (1975). "Docile Bodies." *Discipline and Punish*.
- Winner, Langdon. (1986) "[Do artifacts have politics?](#)" *The Whale and the Reactor*. London: University of Chicago

Tutorial: Surveillance as case study

WEEK 5 | Sep 8 Governmentality and Subjectivity

Readings for lecture:

- Foucault, Michel. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Scott, James C. (1999) *Seeing Like a State*. (Read Introduction and Chapter 1: "Nature and Space")
- Matthew G. Hannah, Jan Simon Hutta and Christoph Schemann. (2020). "Thinking Through Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control."
Covid-19 Responses With Foucault – An Initial Overview." *Antipode Online*
<https://antipodeonline.org/2020/05/05/thinking-through-covid-19-responses-with-foucault/>

Suggested Reading for amusement:

- Eggers, David. (2020). "Flattening the Truth on Coronavirus." *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/03/opinion/dave-eggers-coronavirus-questions.html?fbclid=IwAR0rI4kYUSeRbfBqYr9foPI6v46LJB68YWFwBqqu-kgeJ6kI3b7729S0VpU>

WEEK 6 | Sep 15 Students Union Day (No class) (Consultation slots available Sept 14, 2-5:30pm)

WEEK 7 | Sep 22 Globalization, Neoliberalism and the Individual

Readings for lecture:

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Introduction.

Brown, Wendy (2015) *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. (Read Chapter 1: "Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism's Remaking of State and Subject.")

Ben Fine & Alfredo Saad-Filho & Kate Bayliss & Mary Robertson, 2016. "Thirteen Things You Need to Know about Neoliberalism," Working papers wpaper155, Financialisation, Economy, Society & Sustainable Development (FESSUD) Project.

Evgeny Morozov. (April 15, 2020). "The tech 'solutions' for coronavirus take the surveillance state to the next level." *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/15/tech-coronavirus-surveillance-state-digital-disrupt>

Watch at home

Black Mirror "Nosedive"

(**Warning** there is some profanity in this show. Please see me if this is concerning to you)

Critical Essay Due

Sep 29 RECESS WEEK

PART II: CONTESTING DEVIANCE and DUALITIES

WEEK 8 | Oct 6 Structuralism and Post-structuralism

Readings for lecture:

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, edited by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

WEEK 9 | Oct 13 Postcolonialism

Gayatri Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Schatz, Adam. "'Orientalism,' Then and Now." *The New York Review of Books*.

<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/05/20/orientalism-then-and-now/>

Skim through: responses in <https://disaster-sts-network.org/content/what-insights-postcolonial-studies-seem-especially-relevant-contemporary-cultural-analysis>

WEEK 10 | Oct 20 Understanding (non-exceptional) American racism

Readings for lecture:

Frantz Fanon, *The lived experience of the Black Man*.

Dubois, W.E.B. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chapter 1 and 2.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>

Suggested Reading:

Davis, Mike and Wiener, Jon. (April 15, 2020). "Erased from utopia: the hidden history of LA's black and brown resistance." *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/us->

[news/2020/apr/15/los-angeles-black-brown-activism-](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/apr/15/los-angeles-black-brown-activism-1960s?fbclid=IwAR0zAcJX3pCQaxbGKI3iPxdE64IKbAVba3cRZ1hWciw5WrUuayyywCCqCw)

[1960s?fbclid=IwAR0zAcJX3pCQaxbGKI3iPxdE64IKbAVba3cRZ1hWciw5WrUuayyywCCqCw](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/apr/15/los-angeles-black-brown-activism-1960s?fbclid=IwAR0zAcJX3pCQaxbGKI3iPxdE64IKbAVba3cRZ1hWciw5WrUuayyywCCqCw)

Hodes, James Mendez (2019). "Orcs, Britons, and the Martial Race Myth, Part I: A Species Built for Racial Terror." <https://jamesmendezhodes.com/blog/2019/1/13/orcs-britons-and-the-martial-race-myth-part-i-a-species-built-for-racial-terror>

Hodes, James Mendez (2019). "Orcs, Britons, And The Martial Race Myth, Part II: They're Not Human." <https://jamesmendezhodes.com/blog/2019/6/30/orcs-britons-and-the-martial-race-myth-part-ii-theyre-not-human>

The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/coronavirus-masks-racism-african-americans.html>

WEEK 11 | Oct 27 Theorising "Double-Consciousness) through the Black-White binary

Readings for lecture:

Achille Mbembé (translated by Libby Meintjes) (2003) Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1): 11-40.

<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/03/02/achille-mbembe-necropolitics/>

Hall, Stuart. (1990) "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Framework*. 36: 68-81.

Olivarius, Kathryn. (2020). "The Dangerous History of Immunoprivilege." *New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/opinion/coronavirus-immunity-passports.html>

WEEK 12 | Nov 3 Theorising "the Subject" through the man-woman binary

Simone de Beauvoir. (1949). *The Second Sex*. Excerpts pp 23-30.

Judith Butler (1993) *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. 307-320.

Khin Khin Mra. (2020). "Fighting on two fronts: the women facing conflict and COVID-19 in

Rakhine state." *New Mandala* <https://www.newmandala.org/fighting-on-two-fronts-the-women-facing-conflict-and-covid-19-in-rakhine-state/>

Suggested readings:

To see Judith Butler's opinions on COVID-19, read her brief discussion, "Capitalism has its limits": <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4603-capitalism-has-its-limits>

Msimang, Sisonke. (2017) "All your faves are problematic." *Africa is a Country*.

[https://africasacountry.com/2017/04/all-your-faves-are-problematic-a-brief-history-of-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-stanning-and-the-trap-of-](https://africasacountry.com/2017/04/all-your-faves-are-problematic-a-brief-history-of-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-stanning-and-the-trap-of-blackgirlmagic?fbclid=IwAR15YKQmno1j_bFBuVvGOp13aRJwGUCUAinLSuLD37zqRQ7JNJOfvhH2i9k)

[blackgirlmagic?fbclid=IwAR15YKQmno1j_bFBuVvGOp13aRJwGUCUAinLSuLD37zqRQ7JNJOfvhH2i9k](https://africasacountry.com/2017/04/all-your-faves-are-problematic-a-brief-history-of-blackgirlmagic?fbclid=IwAR15YKQmno1j_bFBuVvGOp13aRJwGUCUAinLSuLD37zqRQ7JNJOfvhH2i9k)

WEEK 13 | Nov 10 Conclusion: Possibilities for Decolonisation?

Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (London: Routledge, 1991),

(Read Ch. 9 "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective")

Olivier, Bert. (2015). "What is a 'rhizome' in Deleuze and Guattari's thinking?" *Thought Leader*.
<https://thoughtleader.co.za/bertolivier/2015/06/15/what-is-a-rhizome-in-deleuze-and-guattaris-thinking/>

Kate Brown (2020). "The Pandemic is Not a Natural Disaster." *New Yorker*.
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/the-pandemic-is-not-a-natural-disaster>

Roy Scranton, (2016). "The Interrupter." Excerpt from *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*.
<https://dark-mountain.net/the-interrupter/>

(Consultation slots Nov 9, 2-5:30pm, and Nov 10, 12-5pm)

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0C44AAA62CA2FB6-consultations>

****Group Project Due****

WEEK 14 | Nov 23

Final Assessment (in real time from 11:30-12:30 through Zoom, and submission by Turnitin.)