The ‘Other’: Identity and Representation

Instructor: Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (rs191)
Time: MW 4.55-6.10
Classroom: SILV_520
Recitations: Smaran Dayal (sd3188); Raigopal Saikumar (rs5607)

Description:
Texts and Ideas: Texts and Ideas introduces students to the ideals of liberal education and the central role of humanistic study in the liberal arts and fosters appreciation of the importance of humanistic learning for society at large. Students become acquainted with some of the literary and philosophical works that have been most influential in shaping the contemporary world and with significant instances in which the ideas in these works have been debated, developed, appropriated, or rejected. The object of program is intellectual history, broadly construed. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, Texts and Ideas is designed to extend students’ education beyond the focused studies of their major, preparing them for their future life as thoughtful individuals and active members of society.

The ‘Other’: Variously enigma, responsibility and alter ego of the self, or threat to it, the ‘other’ has been a major preoccupation of Western thought. In literature, art, politics, philosophy, psychology, ethics and the various social sciences, as well as in everyday practices, the self-other binary has been central to the shaping of identity and the practices of representation. The exploration of the figure of the ‘other’ is therefore essential for understanding how social relations are shaped, and how knowledge is produced and contested.

Questions such as these recur in the texts we will read: Who is regarded as the ‘other’? How is the other known? Why is the other so often regarded negatively, as an object of fear, scorn, loathing, or curiosity? Must knowledge of the other always be a form of colonization, domination and violence, or can it be pursued as disinterested truth? Must self and other necessarily devolve into an ‘us’ and ‘them’? Can the other know/speak itself?

In response to the last question, we note that in recent times the figure of the other, hitherto silent and effaced, has made claims to speak, indeed to speak back, disrupting the realms of knowledge and the social in radical ways. Thus women, ‘natives’, minorities, ‘deviants’, strangers or subalterns claim to speak as others. This is a development to which we will pay particular attention in this course.

Throughout the course we will engage questions of identity and representation in terms of differences of race, class, gender, sexuality and species. Examining a range of theoretical and literary texts which have shaped the conceptual frameworks, the meanings and the uses of the terms ‘self’ and ‘other’ will give us a sense of their centrality to both philosophical thought and social attitudes through history. Equally we will be alert to developments that signal the slow but steady and progressive deconstruction of this structure.

Goals of the course:
- The course will provide an introduction to the concepts of self and other, and recognition and representation.
- It will encourage you to identify the processes of ‘othering’ in the media, in politics, and in art, cinema, literature and other forms of cultural production.
• It will involve reading and analyzing a wide variety of texts across the disciplines that have been influential in shaping the contemporary world.

• It will trace the ways that the ideas in these works have been debated, developed, appropriated, or rejected.

• It will introduce you to the modes and methods of humanistic inquiry via a variety of disciplinary approaches, literary, historical, and philosophic.

• It will guide you into writing both short responses and longer essays that engage with the ideas you have encountered.

**Academic Integrity:**
Please read carefully and abide by the Statement of Academic Integrity provided by the College Core Curriculum (attached).

**Attendance:**
Students are expected to attend all class meetings, including all lectures and all recitations. Students may be excused for documented medical or personal emergency and will receive reasonable accommodation for the observance of religious holidays. In these cases, they should contact their instructors in advance or, in cases of emergency, as soon as is practicable. Students are responsible for making up any material or assignments they miss.

**Class Participation:**
As a student in the College Core Curriculum, you will get the most from your Core courses if you attend class consistently, come to class thoughtfully prepared and ready to participate, engage actively in classroom activities, and contribute to making the best educational experience you can for yourself and your classmates. Please read the guidelines prepared by the College Core Curriculum Committee (attached) to understand the expectations of faculty and recitation instructors for the assessment of students’ class participation.

**Grading Guidelines:**
Please consult the attached grading guidelines provided by the College Core Curriculum committee.

**Course requirements and grading:**
The break-up given below tells you how the final grade will be arrived at and the weight given to each of the different kinds of assignments:

• Attendance, class participation: 20% (this will include periodic short in-class quizzes)

• Written assignments: 40% (you will be required to write short papers, 2 to 5 pages long, in the course of the semester).

• Mid-term exam: 20% (Please note the date on your class schedule: October 29)

• Final exam: 20% (date TBA, during finals week)

**Schedule of assignments and exams:** (in addition to impromptu in-class quizzes)
- September 10: assignment #1 due
- September 24: assignment #2 due
- October 1: assignment #3 due
- October 15: assignment #4 due
- October 29: Mid-term exam
- November 12: assignment #5 due
- November 26: assignment #6 due
- December 3: assignment #7 due
- Finals week, date TBA: Final exam
Required Texts (Available at NYU Bookstore):

Reading list (required): (These shorter texts—essays, poems, chapters from books, speeches etc.—will be made available to students)


Michalopoulou, Amanda. ‘Divided Times: How Literature helps us to understand the “Other’’, The Guardian, December 2, 2016


Taylor, Astra. Dir. The Examined Life (documentary). Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor in conversation at: https://youtu.be/k0HZApkF6qE


Outline of the course:

Introduction
1. Master-slave; class and social relations
2. ‘Race’ and Colonialism
3. Gender and sexuality
5. Difference, disability, and the non-human

Conclusion: Ethics, Politics and Literature

Class schedule:

September 5: Introduction
• Toni Morrison, The Origin of Others. Chapter 2 ‘Being or Becoming the Stranger’

Unit I: Master-slave; social class (5 classes)

September 10:
• Hegel, G. W. F. from Phenomenology of Spirit, Section on ‘Lordship and Bondage’

Assignment #1 due

September 12:
• Marx and Engels, from Communist Manifesto, Chapter 1, ‘Bourgeois and Proletarians’, pp.14-21

September 17:
• Zora Neale Hurston, Barracoon
September 19:
  •  *Barracoon*, cont’d

September 24:
  •  Fraser and Gordon, ‘Dependency’

**Assignment #2 due**

*Unit II: ‘Race’ and Colonialism (5 classes)*

September 26:
  •  Frantz Fanon, from *Black Skin White Masks*: Chapter 5, ‘The Fact of Blackness’; Chapter 7, ‘The Negro and Recognition’

October 1:
  •  Audre Lorde, ‘Age, Race, Class and Sex: Redefining Difference’
  •  Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* [Sections I-IV, pp. 5-66]

**Assignment #3 due**

October 3:
  •  Rankine, *Citizen*, cont’d [Sections V-VII, pp. 69-162]

[*October 8: Fall recess. No classes]*

October 9: [Tuesday, Legislative day. Monday schedule]
  •  Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Part I)

October 10:
  •  Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, cont’d (Part II)
  •  Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’

*Unit III: Gender and Sexuality (4 classes)*

October 15:
  •  Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ‘Introduction’

**Assignment #4 due**

October 17:
  •  Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’

October 22:
  •  Sojourner Truth, ‘Ain’t I a Woman’
  •  Katherine Mansfield, ‘A Cup of Tea’
  •  Sylvia Plath, ‘Mirror’
  •  Maya Angelou, ‘Phenomenal Woman’

October 24:
  •  Jack Halberstam, *Trans*, Chapter 1 ‘What’s in a name?’

**October 29: Mid-term Exam**

*Unit IV: Orientalism; ‘Strangers,’ ‘foreigners,’ refugees, immigrants (4 classes)*

October 31:
• Assia Djebar, from Women of Algiers in their Apartment, ‘Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound’ (Parts I and III, pp. 133-142, 149-151).

November 5:
• Judith Butler, from Precarious Life, Chapter 2, ‘Violence, Mourning, Politics’

November 7:
• Derrida, ‘Cosmopolitanism’ from On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness

November 12:
• Amitav Ghosh, ‘The Imam and the Indian’
• Gloria Anzaldúa's La Frontera, Chapter 7, 77-91

Assignment #5 due

Unit V: Difference, disability and the non-human (5 classes)

November 14:
• Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Part I)

November 19:
• Frankenstein, cont’d (Part II)

*November 21: Thanksgiving holiday. No classes.

November 26:
• Bernard Pomerance, Elephant Man

Assignment #6 due

November 28:
• Elephant Man, cont’d

December 3:
• Lennard Davis, ‘Constructing Normalcy’

Assignment #7 due

December 5:
• Jonathan Franzen, ‘The Radical Otherness of Birds’
• John Berger, from About Looking, ‘Why Look at Animals’?

Conclusion: Ethics, Politics, Literature

December 10:
• Emmanuel Levinas, from Is it Righteous to Be? ‘In the Name of the Other’ (188-194); ‘The Trace of the Other’

December 12:
• Toni Morrison, from The Origin of Others, Chapter 5, ‘Narrating the Other’.
• Amanda Michalopoulou, ‘Divided Times: How Literature helps us to understand the “Other”’

*Final exam: finals week, date TBA