

Theories of Reproduction

Spring 2020

FYSEM-UA 755

Thursday 3:30-6:00pm

Instructor: Kimberly Adams

244 Greene St. Office 510

Office Hours: Thursday 12:00 – 2:00 pm

and by appointment

Course Description and Learning Objectives

What does the printing press have to do with condoms? Photography with the human genome project? This course examines theories of reproduction in literary, philosophical, and scientific thought. A necessary condition for biological life and a fundamental mechanism for understanding mass culture, reproduction connects human sexuality to the history of technology and the life sciences to the debates of cultural politics. Over the semester we will draw connections between disparate theories of visual reproduction, audio reproduction, textual reproduction, human reproduction, and historical reproduction. We will examine ideas of birth control and eugenics in the context of memes and photocopies, situating the issues of sexual politics and reproductive rights in a wider cultural history of reproduction, and using alternate theoretical paradigms to reframe contemporary political debates. Students will learn to apply an interdisciplinary approach to the historical construction of biological categories including race, gender, and sexuality.

Readings

All course readings will be available on NYU Classes with the exception of the following books:

- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Vintage Press.
- M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press.
- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dover Thrift Edition.

You do not need to buy these books in the bookstore, but you do need to buy the correct editions.

You are required to bring a copy of the course readings to every class, preferably a hard copy. If you plan to use digital copies, please discuss with me in advance how you will minimize disruption to fellow students.

Attendance

You are permitted two absences for the entire course. More than two absences will count against your final grade. If you must miss class due to illness or religious observance, please let me know *in advance*. In case of illness, your absence will be excused once you have provided me with a doctor's note. True presence involves not only physically being there, but also a strong sense of attention being paid, an absence of electronic devices that disturb others, and a consistent attitude of respect toward your fellow learners. Please take notes by hand, on paper, unless there is a compelling reason for you to do otherwise.

Course Hours

This is a full credit course: the total time allotment for in-class and out-of-class work is approximately 200 hours over the length of a 14-week semester. Students should expect to spend 35 hours in class, attentively listening and actively participating in class discussions. Reading is expected to take approximately 7-8 hours per week, with an additional hour spent preparing discussion questions, for a total of 118 hours. Writing assignments ask approximately 47 hours total: 8 hours on the first assignment; 15 hours on the second; and 24 hours on the final. You should expect to spend as much time revising as you do writing. Actual times will vary for each student; final grades are not determined by the amount of time a student spends on the course.

Assignments

Below is an overview of the assignments for the course. Students will be asked to prepare written discussion questions for each section meeting, in addition to the assignments listed below, to facilitate class discussion. All essays should be typed in Times 12-point font with 1 inch margins, using MLA formatting with internal citation and a Works Cited page. Assignments are due at 5pm on the due date, no exceptions. All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

Assignment 1: Digital Practicum – Due February 24

For this assignment students will use photo editing software to represent a concept from the course reading and write two short reflection pieces, 400-500 words on their chosen concept and 400-500 words on the process of digital reproduction. This essay must cite the texts we read in class!

Assignment 2: Archival Methods – Due March 13

For this assignment students will visit an archive on their own and analyze a historical document or object related to the themes of the course. Students will employ library catalogs and finding aids to find an appropriate item, schedule an archive visit, learn the appropriate procedures for handling archival items and take detailed notes. Using these notes students will write detailed analysis of the object (1500 – 1700 words) which they will post to the class website.

Assignment 3: Final Paper – Due May 15

Students will write an analytical essay for the final paper on a topic of their choosing. This essay will examine a particular theory of reproduction discussed in class, or the relationship between multiple theories. This is not a research paper, but a focused examination of the texts from the syllabus. It must cite course materials and include a properly formatted bibliography. Students will discuss their topic ideas in class, submit a 300 word paper proposal on April 20th, and an outline of their paper on May 4th. Papers will be 2700 to 3000 words, and students will read their papers aloud, conference style, in lieu of a final exam.

Grades

Attendance and participation – 10%

Discussion questions – 20 %

Assignment 1 – 15 %

Assignment 2 – 25 %

Assignment 3 – 30%

Content

In this course we will be reading and talking about challenging issues across the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, nationality, religion, and ethnicity. In the classroom we will approach these issues and each other with intellectual and emotional care and generosity.

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1 – January 30 – Introduction

Philip Larkin, “This Be The Verse.” *Collected Poems*, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2001. (in class handout)

Week 2 – February 6– Reproductive Anatomy

Emily Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles.” *Signs*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1991, pp.485-501.

Andrea Bertotti Metoyer and Regina Rust, “The Egg, Sperm, and Beyond: Gendered Assumptions in Gynecology Textbooks.” *Women’s Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2011, pp.177-205.

Erica Moen, “Pregnancy” *Oh Joy Sex Toy*. web comic. 13 Aug 2013.
<https://www.ohjoysextoy.com/pregnancy/>

Arthur Guyton and John Hall. *Textbook of Medical Physiology*. 13th ed. Elsevier Saunders, 2016. Read: “Physical Anatomy of the Male Sexual Organs,” “Spermatogenesis,” and “Male Sexual Act” 1021-1028; “Physical Anatomy of the Female Sexual Organs” and “Oogenesis and Follicular Development in the Ovaries” 1037-1039; “Female Sexual Act,” “Female Fertility,” and “Hormonal Suppression of Fertility—“The Pill” 1051-1053; “Maturation and Fertilization of the Ovum” 1055-1057.

Week 4 – February 13 – Cultural Reproduction

Richard Dawkins, “Memes: the New Replicators.” *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.189-201.

Siddhartha Mukherjee. “The Missing Science of Heredity.” *The Gene: An Intimate History*, Scribner, 2016. pp. 15-85

Week 3 – February 20 – Mechanical Reproduction

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 217-251.

Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe, “The Migration of the Aura, or How to Explore the Original Through Its Fac Similes” *Switching Codes: Thinking Through Digital Technology in the Humanities and the Arts*. University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp.275-297.

February 24 – Assignment 1 Due

Week 5 – February 27 – Visual Reproduction

Eileen Myles, “Robert Mapplethorpe Picture.” *Chelsea Girls*. Harper Collins, 2015, pp. 221-228.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1981. Read: Part 1 pp.1-60.

Week 6 – March 5 – Reproducing Images

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1981.
Read: Part 2 pp.63-119.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dover Thrift Editions, 1993. Read: Chapters 1-10

Week 7 – March 12 – Textual Reproduction

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dover Thrift Editions, 1993. Read: Chapters 11-20

Leah Price, “The Book as Waste: Henry Mayhew and the Fall of Paper Recycling.” *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*. Princeton University Press, 2012. pp.219-257.

Lisa Gitelman, “Xerographers of the Mind.” *Paper Knowledge*, Duke University Press, 2014. pp. 83-110.

March 13 – Assignment 2 Due**March 19 – No Class – Spring Break****Week 8 – March 26 – Social Reproduction**

Karl Marx, “Simple Reproduction,” *Capital Vol. 1*, The Modern Library, 1906. pp.619-633.

Silvia Federici, “Wages against Housework (1975)” and “Why Sexuality is Work (1975)” *Revolution at Point Zero*, PM Press, 2012, pp. 15-27.

Angela Davis, “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective.” *Women, Race and Class*, Random House, 1981, pp.222-244.

Week 9 – April 2 – Inheriting Dispossession

Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1987, pp. 64-81.

M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*. Wesleyan University Press, 2008. Read: “Sal” 57-76; “Manifest” 185-186; “Notanda” 189-209.

Week 10 – April 9 – Eugenics and Birth Control

Daylanne English, “Introduction” *Unnatural Selections*, University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pp.1-34.

Margaret Sanger, “Birth Control: Margaret Sanger’s Reply to Theodore Roosevelt.” *The Metropolitan Magazine*, Dec. 1917, pp. 66-67; “Birth Control and Racial Betterment.” *The Birth Control Review*, Feb 1919; and “The Eugenic Value of Birth Control Propaganda.” *The Birth Control Review*, Oct. 1921. digitized by [The Margaret Sanger Papers Project](#)

W.E.B. Du Bois, “Negroes and Birth Control.” *The Birth Control Review*, April 1939, and “Opinion.” *The Crisis*, vol. 24, no. 6, 1922, pp.247-353.

Week 11 – April 16 – Reproductive Rights

Angela Davis, “Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights” *Women, Race and Class*, Random House, 1981, pp.353-367.

Boston Women’s Health Collective, “Women and Their Bodies” (1970) (pamphlet version of *Our Bodies Ourselves*), “Women, Medicine and Capitalism” pp. 6-9; “Anatomy and Physiology” pp. 9-15; “Birth Control” pp.59-61; “Abortion” pp. 89-105; “Pregnancy” pp. 106-126.

Watch: Renee Jajima-Pena, *No Más Bebés*. Moon Canyon Films and ITVS, 2015.

April 20 – Final Paper Proposal Due

Week 12 – April 23 – Reproductive Futurism

Lee Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff,” *No Future*, Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 1-31.

Christina Muñoz de la Peña, Lisa Pineda, and Brenda Punskey. “Working with Parents and Children Separated at the Border: Examining the Impact of the Zero Tolerance Policy and beyond.” *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, vol. 12 (2019) pp.153-164.

Robin Wagner-Pacifici, “What Is a Child?” *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE*. University of Chicago Press, 1994. pp. 52-63.

Watch: Jason Osder, *Let the Fire Burn*. Zeitgeist, 2013.

Week 13 – April 30 – Procreative Responsibility

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Vintage Press, 2005

Seana Shiffrin, “Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm” *Legal Theory*, no.5, 1999, pp.117-148.

May 4 – Outline for Final Due

Week 14 – May 7 – Reproductive Freedom

Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild,” *Bloodchild and Other Stories*, Seven Stories Press, 1996, pp.1-33.

Alys Eve Weinbaum “The Afterlife of Slavery and the Problem of Reproductive Freedom,” *Social Text*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (Summer 2013). 49-68

May 15 – Final Paper Due