

SEMINAR ON REPETITION
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ENGC/ARTH 646A – FALL 2005
Tuesdays 2:35-5:25, Arts W5

Jonathan Sterne

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Office hours: T 12-2 and by appointment (I prefer to work by appointment)

Prospectus:

How do we analyze the changing same? How do we think about repetition as a problem that cuts across disciplines, objects and approaches? Repetitive music, repetitive algorithms, repetitive movements of unconscious bodies and consciously automated machines; repetitive history that appears as farce: all of these phenomena raise questions about the nature of time, the organization of movement, and the relationship of time and movement to experience, subjectivity, power and meaning. As scholars have grown accustomed to the valorization of “difference”, the question of repetition, or rethinking “sameness” has come to the fore. To use a word from Michel Foucault, this seminar is designed to offer a “transversal” consideration of repetition in culture, technology, and everyday life.

How do we analyze the changing same? How do we think about repetition as a problem that cuts across disciplines, objects and approaches? I began to think about repetition in the context of the loop – a basic, repeating music phrase played back on a computer. Since there is no field of “repetition studies,” these are as good points of entry as any: we will take repeating mechanical, musical and bodily movement as our point of departure and move out to consider repetition in culture, technology and everyday life. From theories of subjectivity rooted in repetition to theories of mass production rooted in the copying of copies, to the enchanted world of ritual and the disenchanting world of boredom, we will re-trace repetition.

Class time will feature weekly lectures and discussions, and occasional creative or experimental in-class projects. Students will write major papers, help lead discussion, participate in class and online, and present their project proposals to classmates on the 1st of November.

REQUIREMENTS

Etiquette:

1. Full and complete attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading. I expect the very best you can give.

2. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstance. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

Product:

I. Participation in Class Discussions

I expect everyone to participate regularly in class discussion. You should come every week prepared to discuss the readings.

Requirements for class discussion are as follows: good faith, attention to the readings, and relevance to the course. Avoid “seek and destroy” sessions. If you have something critical to say, be ready to explain how the piece could be improved. If you disagree with the premise of the piece, then read for what motivates the argument.

If necessary, I will keep a speakers list and call on people.

II. Discussion Facilitation

Each week, at least two students will help facilitate discussion. Both discussion leaders should spend extra time on the readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth. You will be partially responsible for making sure discussion stays on track and moves in a productive direction. I may ask you to open up class discussion or rely on you if it is a slow day. I would also appreciate, by the Monday morning before class, any suggestions you might have for texts to bring in or angles to bring to class discussion. You are also welcome to post a few thoughts regarding the readings on the class listserv. However, I don't require anything formal like a presentation, an object, or a list of questions. Really, the only goal is to keep discussion going and to make it interesting for your classmates. You will have a chance to sign up for your preferred week(s) early in the semester.

III. Semester Project

All semester projects will result in

- **a 5-6 page proposal due at the beginning of class on the 1st of November and**
- **a formal scholarly paper of at least 20 pages due by 3:00pm on 6 December in the mailbox on my door (W280 Arts).**

Though it is unreasonable of me to expect a paper of “publishable quality” at the end of a seminar, I do expect a polished paper that reflects sustained thought and careful revision. It should also use a recognized scholarly reference system. I recommend Chicago Style with footnotes, but will accept MLA, APA, Chicago parenthetical,

Harvard, or any other style. The format of the presentation for 1 November will be discussed in class, but you will be asked to present your plan for the semester paper to your colleagues on that day.

Option 1: Revision Paper

Revision is not a skill often taught in graduate school, but it should be. This is your chance to take a piece of writing (somehow relevant to the course) that you've already begun and revise it toward a concrete end (for instance, for publication in a journal), using materials from the course to refine your thinking about your project and develop your analysis. Keep in mind that the purpose of this option is to facilitate extended reflection upon research you have already undertaken; it is not to facilitate further research.

Proposals for this option should include a discussion of the project as it currently stands; why you want to rewrite it for this course; a substantive plan for further revision – especially in terms of how you want to make your argument, your vision of the paper's intellectual or political task; and a discussion of other work that you need to do in order to be able to rewrite the paper (such as additional outside reading or revisiting source materials). You should also append a copy of the current version of the paper to the proposal.

Option 2: Application Paper

For this paper, you will synthesize a methodological or theoretical approach from a few of the readings assigned for the course and do your own repetition study of a phenomenon out in the world. This paper may include some original research, but it is not intended to be a massive research undertaking.

Proposals for this option should include a discussion of the proposed theoretical or methodological framework and your chosen object of study. If research is required, you should explain what it is and how you will finish it by the end of the term. Ideally, proposals will also discuss early hypotheses or “try out” an aspect of your approach.

Option 3: Synthesis Paper

This option is modeled on the PhD comprehensive examination process for Communication Studies. The final paper will make use of the course bibliography and (if necessary) a few select additional readings to answer one or two questions in a 20-page paper. The exact wording of the questions will be arrived at in consultation with me.

Proposals for this option come in two parts: a single page will offer one or more sample versions of the question and any additional sources you think you will need to consult. The remaining 5 pages should begin discussing two or more (but not many

more) texts from the course in light of the question (or set of questions) you posed on the first page.

Grading:

You have the right to submit your written work in French. If you plan to do so, please contact me so I can make arrangements for evaluation, as I am not fluent in French. All verbal presentations must be in English.

If your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, I may ask you to do it again.

Late papers may not receive written comments and will earn a reduced grade. Activities for which you must be present (helping to lead discussion) cannot be made up. If you know you will be absent on a day for which you are obligated, trade with one of your colleagues.

Final grades may be reduced for unsatisfactory performance in any of the categories listed under “requirements” or “etiquette.”

I do not give incompletes except in truly extraordinary personal circumstances that can be documented.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Auditors:

Auditors are welcome to participate in the course on the following conditions:

- They request (and I grant) permission to audit the course.
- They follow the same rules of etiquette as enrolled students. That means attending all classes and arriving each week ready to discuss the readings.

About the Readings:

One required book and a packet of required course readings will be available.

Readings are fewer than 150 pages per week, many weeks significantly fewer. However, they vary in levels of difficulty, and students new to “theory” should expect to spend some significant time working through the more difficult texts. If you are having trouble with the readings, please let me know immediately.

READINGS READINGS

Introduction

6 September: Some Stories About The Repetition Seminar

Materialities

13 September: Repetitive Labor (or, Work Sucks!)

Marx, Karl. "The Factory" and "The Struggle Between Worker and Machine." In *Capital, Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy*, 544-564. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "The Postwar Years." In *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, 192-216. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Latour, Bruno. "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer." *Social Problems* 35, no. 1 (1988): 298-310.

Ross, Andrew. "Jobs in Candyland: An Introduction." In *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs*, 1-20. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

20 Sept: Crystallization and the Commodity Form

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, 217-52. New York: Schocken, 1968.

Liu, Alan. Part III: "The Laws of Cool." In *The Laws of Cool*, 176-282. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

27 September: no class, professor out of town.

4 Oct: Rethinking Repetition

Deleuze, Gilles. "Conclusion" In *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton, 262-304. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Plato and the Simulacrum." *October*, no. 27 (1983): 44-56.

Foucault, Michel. "Theatrum Philosophicum." In *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, Epistemology*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 343-68. New York: The New Press, 1998.

(I) Break for Method

11 Oct: Rhythmanalysis

Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis*. Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Subjectivities

18 Oct: Embodiment

Mauss, Marcel. "Body Techniques." In *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster, 95-123. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices." In *The Logic of Practice*, 52-65. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Program for a Sociology of Sport." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5 (1988): 153-61.

Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Comportment, Motility and Spatiality." In *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*, 27-45. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

25 Oct: Selves and Others

Goffman, Erving. "Information Control and Personal Identity." In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 41-104. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

Butler, Judith. "Introduction." In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, 1-23. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Butler, Judith. "Introduction: Acting in Concert." In *Undoing Gender*, 1-16. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man." In *The Location of Culture*, 85-92. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Middle Eight

1 Nov: Presentation of Work in Progress

Expressions

8 Nov: Ritual, Fashion, Custom

Elias, Norbert. "On Behaviour at the Table." In *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 72-109. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Maltham: Basil Blackwell, 2000.

- Carey, James. "A Cultural Approach to Communication." In *Communication as Culture*, 13-36. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988.
- Calefato, Patrizia. "Dress, Language and Communication" and "Dress and Social Identity." In *The Clothed Body*. Translated by Lisa Adams, 5-26. New York: Berg, 2004.
- Simmel, Georg. "Fashion." In *The Rise of Fashion: A Reader*, edited by Daniel Leonhard Purdy, 289-309. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

15 Nov: Repetition and the Experience of Music

- Keil, Charles. "Motion and Feeling through Music." In Charles Keil and Steven Feld, *Music Grooves*, 53-76. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Kivy, Peter. "The Fine Art of Repetition." In *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music*, 327-359. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Mowitz, John. "Different Strokes for Different Folks." In *Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking*, 67-115. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Hughes, Walter. "In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco." In *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, edited by Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, 147-57. New York: Routledge, 1994.

22 November: Samples, DJs, Echoes

- Cutler, Chris. "Plunderphonics." In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 138-56. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Miller, Paul D. "Algorithms: Erasures and the Art of Memory." In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 348-54. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Toop, David. "Replicant: On Dub." In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 355-57. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Schloss, Joseph G. "It's About Playing Records: History." In *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip Hop*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 25-61, 2004.
- Doyle, Peter. "From 'My Blue Heaven' to 'Race with the Devil': Echo, Reverb and (Dis)Ordered Space in Early Popular Music Recording." *Popular Music* 23, no. 1 (2004): 31-49.

Rethinking Difference

29 November: Three Classic Takes

Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." In *Margins of Philosophy*, 3-27. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Fraser, Nancy. "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age." In *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*, 11-39. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Gilroy, Paul. "Third Stone From the Sun: Planetary Humanism and Strategic Universalism." In *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, 327-56. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.