Seminar on Repetition

EngC/ArTH 646A – FALL 2005

Tuesdays 2:35-5:25, Arts W5

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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.

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!)


20 Sept: Crystallization and the Commodity Form


27 September: no class, professor out of town.

4 Oct: Rethinking Repetition


(I) Break for Method

11 Oct: Rhythmanalysis

**Subjectivities**

18 Oct: Embodiment


25 Oct: Selves and Others


**Middle Eight**

1 Nov: Presentation of Work in Progress

**Expressions**

8 Nov: Ritual, Fashion, Custom


15 Nov: Repetition and the Experience of Music


22 November: Samples, DJs, Echoes


Rethinking Difference

29 November: Three Classic Takes
