POST45: LITERATURE, CULTURE, THEORY

7AAEM706

Autumn 2025

Course Convenors:	Jane Elliott jane.elliott@kcl.c.uk Seb Franklin seb.franklin@kcl.ac.uk

Level/Semester:	Level 7, taught in Semester One
Credits:	30 credits; compulsory module for the MA in Contemporary Literature and Culture
Assessment:	1 x 1,000 word critical analysis (20%) and 1 x 4,000 word essay (80%)

This module considers a series of intersections among literature, culture and theory since 1945, by focusing on the changing aesthetic and political values accorded to representation throughout the period. The course proceeds in three chronological blocks: postwar, postmodernity, and the present. Each week, you will read a set of texts that engage a specific representational problematic from various aesthetic, cultural and theoretical angles native to that chronological moment. Thus, the module holds theory, history and literary and cultural practice in tension; it offers a means of conceptualizing the contemporary as a discrete historical entity, while also challenging you to read the contemporary as it has been constituted differently by different writers, practitioners and theorists in the decades since 1945.

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*Starred items should be obtained by the student. The rest will be provided on the online learning site for the module (Keats). Content notes can be accessed here.

Week 1: Aesthetics/History/Theory (week starting September 29)

Jane Elliott and Seb Franklin

Fredric Jameson, 'Preface' and 'On Interpretation: Literature as Socially Symbolic Act', in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (1981; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. viii-xiv, 1-88.

Political Unconscious Reading Guide

Carolyn Lesjak, 'Reading Dialectically', *Criticism* 55:2 (Spring 2013), pp. 233-277.

Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, 'Surface Reading', *Representations* 109:1 (November 2009), pp. 1-21.

Week 2: Old Left /New Left (week starting October 6)

Luke Roberts

Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (London:Harper, 2007) [1962]*

Doris Lessing, 'TheSmall Personal Voice', in A Small Personal Voice (NewYork: Knopf, 1974), pp. 3-21 [1957]

Further reading

Georg Lukács, 'Critical Realism and Socialist Realism', in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism,* trans. by John and Necke Mander(London: Merlin Press, 1962), pp. 93-135 [1956]

E.P. Thompson, 'Socialist Humanism', in *E.P. Thompson and the Making ofthe New Left: Essays and Polemics,* ed. by Cal Winslow(New York, Monthly Review, 2014), pp. 48-87 [1957]

Week 3: Old Left / New Left II (week starting October 13)

John Connor

OLD DO NOT USE

Raymond Williams, 'Foreword,' 'Tragic Ideas' and 'Koba' from *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966). [Only this first edition contains the play 'Koba']

Raymond Williams, 'A Letter from the Country,' televised 2 April 1966; published in *Stand*, 12 no.2 (1971), 17-34.

Raymond Williams, 'Public Inquiry,' televised 15 March 1967; published in *Stand*, 9 no.1 (1967), 15-53.

Further reading

Raymond Williams, 'Afterword 1979' in *Modern Tragedy* (London: Verso, 1979), 207-219

Wendy Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholy,' *boundary 2*, 26 no.3 (1999), 19-27.

Lauren Berlant, 'Introduction' to *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011), 1-21.

Week 4: The Postwar Black Left (week starting October 20)

Christine Okoth

Ann Petry, *The Narrows*, (1953) *

Claudia Jones, 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Women' (1949) and 'On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt' (1946) in *Claudia Jones, Beyond Containment: Autobiographical Reflections, Essays and Poems*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies, Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd, 2011

Aimé Césaire, 'Letter to Maurice Thorez' *Social Text*, vol. 28, no. 2 (103), June 2010, pp. 145–52. [1956 *Présence Africaine*]

Further Reading

Sophia Azeb, 'Epilogue: From Antigua to Algérie: The Particularity and Promise of the Afro-Arab'. *Sept. 2020.*

- Epilogue: From Antigua to Algérie: The Particularity and Promise of the Afro-Arab – Post45

Andy Hines, 'Ch.3 Tactical Criticism' in *Outside Literary Studies: Black Criticism and the University* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), pp.91-125

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Week 5: Structure, Abstraction, Rebellion (week starting October 27)

Seb Franklin

Samuel R. Delany, *Tales of Nevèrÿon* (stories 1976-1978; appendix 1981; preface 1986)*

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp.6-18.

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), pp.13-67.

Further Reading

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (1972; University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp.1-8 ('Desiring-Production'), 68-75 ('The Connective Synthesis of Production'), 222-240 ('The Civilized Capitalist Machine')

Week 6: Reading Week (week starting November 3)

No seminar

Week 7: Literary Production & the late-C20 Artist (week starting Nov 10)

Charlotte Terrell

Muriel Spark, *A Far Cry from Kensington* (London: Virago, 2009) [1988] *

OLD DO NOT USE

Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,' in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), pp. 29–73. [1983]; and

'Introduction to the First Edition,' in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. xxiv–xxx. [1984]

Further Reading

Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (London: Stanford University Press, 2014) ['Ch. 2, Work as Art/Art as Life,' pp. 34–55.]

Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) ['Ch. 7, American Novels: Authors, Agents, Editors, Publishers,' pp. 139–62.]

Week 8: Postmodernist Theory (Of and In History) (week starting Nov 17)

Steven Connor

Linda Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction: "The Pastime of Past Time" ', in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 105-23.

Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow: Or, The Nature of the Offence* (London: Vintage, 2003) [1991]*

Further Reading

Steven Connor, 'Epilogue: Modernism After Postmodernism', in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 820-34.

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Week 9: What is Queer Now? (week starting Nov 24)

Mark Turner

Isabel Waidner, *Sterling Karat Gold* (London: Peninsula Press, 2021)*

Isabel Waidner, 'Class, Queers and the Avant-Garde', Text commissioned on the occasion of the ICA exhibition, *I,I,I,I,I,I,I Kathy Acker* (1 May-4 August 2019): https://www.ica.art/live/class-queers-and-the-avant-garde

C.A. Conrad, selections from *You Don't Have What It Takes To Be My Nemesis* (NY: Penguin, 2023)

Tyler Bradway, 'Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form,' *PMLA* 136:5 (2021), 711-27.

Further Reading:

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erikson, eds., *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010).

Week 10: Generation Ship: Reproduction and/as Form (week starting December 1)

Jane Elliott

High Life (Dir., Claire Denis, USA 2019)* AND/OR Rivers Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. New York: Akashic Books, 2017*

Jane Elliott, 'Punitive futurity and speculative time', *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 2021.

Alys Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History*. Durham: Duke UP, 2019. Introduction [Optional: Chapter One].

Further reading:

Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures : Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times*. Durham: Duke UP, 2017. Introduction.

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Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel'. In *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: Univ. Texas Press, 1981. 84-258.

Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: A Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions.* London: Verso, 2005.

Week 11: Essay workshop (week starting December 8)

Jane Elliott and Seb Franklin

Week 12

Essay preparation week

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