

English 693

Charles Baldwin, ENGL 693, Fall 2006



“There ought to be limits to freedom.”

- George W. Bush

“The important thing now isn't freedom of information, but freedom of form, freedom to mutate and modify your body.” – Stelarc

ENGL 693: Special Topics

Sovereign Life, Bio-Power, and Representation

700-950pm, STA 48

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Office Hours MWF 1-220pm
and by appointment

Sovereign Life, Bio-Power and Representation is an introduction to theories of sovereignty and biopower, with a focus on bodies and representation under the current “state of exception.” The guiding question: what is power today and how is it organized today? Michel Foucault’s final

work turned from the influential analysis of disciplinarity to biopower and biopolitics, focused on the modern shift from government through sovereign political representation, for better or worse, to government through the management of “life.” For Foucault, the new political subject of modernity was the target of regimes of “fostering life or disallowing it.” The resulting notion of biopolitics leads to indirect and aggregate modes of control through notions of “security” or “population,” and to an instrumentalization and depoliticization of representation and language. In Giorgio Agamben’s elaboration and clarification of Foucault’s arguments, this flattening of representation means citation and circulation in the name of “bare life” (e.g. “illegal combatants”), on the one hand, and a new representational source code in biotechnology and revived eugenics, on the other. The events of the last five years, from 9/11 to the current Iraq war, and its domestic correlates in the Patriot Act and other legislation, raise the stakes for coming to terms with biopower. The course begins from a theoretical framework and then examines case studies (e.g. the recent persecution of Steve Kurtz) drawn from two inter-related areas: 1) biotechnology as the instrumentalization of life; 2) national security, particularly the US Patriot Act. Theories studied in the first part set out the problem of sovereign life and biopower via Benjamin, Schmitt, Derrida, and Foucault; leading up to crucial texts by Agamben, with elaborations by Butler, Thacker and Hardt & Negri. The second part of the course will consider texts and artworks engaged with sovereign life and biopower, from Critical Art Ensemble, Stelarc, Symbiotica, SRL, Kac, Jake Chapman, Dollyoko, and others.

Texts Available at the WVU Bookstore (Other editions are OK)

- (ER) = WVU Electronic Reserve at <http://ereserves.lib.wvu.edu/>. Username: Baldwin, Password: 737.
- Texts followed by a URL are web-based.
- Note: Print and bring to class Electronic Reserve and Web-based items.

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (recommended)

Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*

Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life*

Critical Art Ensemble, *Marching Plague*

Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*

Haraway, *ModestWitness@SecondMillenium*

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

The Prosthetic Impulse, Ed. Smith and Morra

Stelarc: The Monograph, Ed. Smith

Requirements

- In-class instigation. Not a presentation nor a summary, but leading discussion, raising provocative questions, focused on specifics in the reading and on and critical problems. Instigations will start September 11. Requirements: background research as necessary; handout for class (500 words minimum).30%
- 8 reading reflections, 500 words minimum. Write a reflection for 8 of the 10 classes between 8/28 and 11/13. Skip the week of your instigation and take one other week off as well. For each reflection: choose one work assigned during the week, write three critical questions about the work, and write your own answer to one of the questions. Bring your reflection to class the day that the work is discussed. 25%
- 10 page conference-style essay, with at least three outside sources, following MLA formatting. Always approach graduate essays as the beginning of a conference presentation and/or publication. We will discuss topics in class. One page proposals are due in class on 11/13. 45%
- I assume that graduate students will attend class and prepare work in a responsible and professional manner.

Academic Integrity

West Virginia University expects that every member of its academic community shares the historic and traditional commitment to honesty, integrity, and the search for truth. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating and dishonest practices; and forgery, misrepresentation, or fraud. Here is WVU's Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism Policy.

Social Justice Statement

"West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangement with Disability Services (293-6700)."

Schedule (All reading and work is due on the date indicated)

Aug 21 Introduction

Aug 28 Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" (handout) and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" , Derrida, "Force of Law" (handout). Recommended: Schmitt, selections from Political Theology (ER).

Sep 4 Labor Day

Sep 11 Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*.

Recommended: September 15 and 16 BIOS Symposium.

Sep 18 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

Sep 25 Agamben, *The State of Exception*. Recommended: Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz

Oct 2 Butler, *Prearious Life*. Recommended: Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism" and

Recommended: Oct 5 "Vibration: Darwin, Deleuze, and Music," Elizabeth Grosz Lecture, noon in Mountainlair Rhodo Room.

Oct 9 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Recommended: Baudrillard, "War Porn"

Oct 16 Haraway, *ModestWitness@SecondMillenium*. Recommended: Thacker, "Bioinformatics and Bio-Logics" and "Data Made Flesh"

Oct 23 Critical Art Ensemble, *Marching Plague*, CAE Web Site especially BioTech Projects. Recommended: CAE Defense Fund .

Oct 30 *Prosthetic Impulse*

Nov 6 Cancelled

Nov 13 *Stelarc: The Monograph*, Stelarc Website . Recommended: Extropy especially Transhumanist FAQ; FM-2030 ; Transhumanist ; Immortality Institute .

Nov 20 Thanksgiving

Nov 27 Dollyoko , Eduardo Kac, especially , Tissue Culture & Art, . Recommended:

Dec 4 Workshop and Conclusions

Other Bio-Power Links

Abu Ghraib

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ghraib_torture_and_prisoner_abuse

USA Patriot Act / Homeland Security

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USA_PATRIOT_Act

<http://www.eff.org/patriot/>

<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/>

<http://www.ready.gov/>

Visible Human Project

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html

<http://visiblehuman.epfl.ch/>