

## Literary Theory and Critical Thought, Lectures Michaelmas Term 2018

On the following pages you find a presentation of the lecture-series on 'Literary Theory and Critical Thought'. You also find a number of bibliographical references. Please note that *these references are not the prescribed readings* for 'Paper 12: Literary Theory' or for the graduate module 'Key Questions in Critical Thought'. These two courses each have their own bibliographies. What is listed below is material we will be engaging with in the lectures.

### Texts (Weeks 1 and 2, Ian Maclachlan)

The idea that in studying literature we're involved with texts may seem like just about the most unilluminating 'no-brainer' imaginable. But in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the resonances of a lexicon of textuality, writing and difference were bound up with a radical reconception of the literary work, its meaning, and its cultural role and value. This reconception may be summarised in terms of the movement from structuralism to post-structuralism and beyond, and these two lectures will offer an account of those intellectual developments, focusing on such figures as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Rancière, and discussing notions of semiology, intertextuality, deconstruction, and *différance*. They will also explore the idea that Derrida's famous proclamation 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte [There is no outside-text]' in no way implies a schism between text and world, but rather heralds their ceaseless interweaving and, therefore, an essentially political dimension of the literary text, as we see, for example, in the later work of Barthes and in Rancière's thinking of the politics of literature.

### Bibliography

#### *Primary texts*

Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image — Music — Text*, ed. Heath; 'Inaugural Lecture', in *Barthes: Selected Writings*, also published as *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Sontag  
Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', 'Signature Event Context', both in *Margins — Of Philosophy*; abridged versions available, along with other useful extracts, in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Kamuf

Stanley Fish, 'Is There a Text in this Class?', in *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*

Julia Kristeva, 'Word, dialogue and novel', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Moi

Jacques Rancière, 'The Politics of Literature', in *The Politics of Literature*

#### *Further reading*

Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (in the 'New Critical Idiom' series)

Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*

Nicholas Harrison (ed.), *The Idea of the Literary*, Paragraph 28:2 (July 2005)

Ann Jefferson and David Robey (eds), *Modern Literary Theory: a comparative introduction*, especially the chapters by David Robey on 'Modern linguistics and the language of literature', and by Ann Jefferson on 'Structuralism and Post-Structuralism'

Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (in the 'Routledge Critical Thinkers' series)

## Identities (Weeks 3 and 4, Helen Swift)

A vast field of literary and cultural enquiry, whose parameters are ever-broadening: from how identity is constituted as a relationship between body and voice, to critical interrogation of the very utterance 'I am', to reflection on how selfhood is defined and defines itself as gendered, to consideration beyond traditional limits of identity as a human category. Starting with an argument between Barthes and Derrida in 1966, these two lectures will focus on 1) identity in relation to literary subjectivity (deictics of utterance; relations between body and voice; the posthuman), and 2) performativity as a fundamental tenet of late-twentieth and early twenty-first reflection on identity, as conceptualised by Judith Butler in her now-seminal work on 'gender trouble'.

### Bibliography

(\*asterisks are not intended to indicate a hierarchy of value, but simply the readings that most influenced the thinking of this lecturer and thus the content of these two lectures)

Braidotti, Rosi, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013)

Bühler, Karl, *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*, trans. Donald Fraser Goodwin (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 91–166

\*Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004)

Derrida, Jacques, *La Voix et le phénomène*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Paris: PUF, 1983)

\*Hayles, N. Katherine, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999)

\*Ricoeur, Paul, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990)

### Further reading, applying concepts to specific cultural material:

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2003)

Gilbert, Jane, *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011)

Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthom, Katherine Runswick Cole, 'Posthuman Disability Studies', *Subjectivity* 7 (2014), 342-61

Kenny, Neil, *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: OUP, 2015)

Killeen, Marie-Chantal, *En souffrance d'un corps: essais sur la voix désincarnée* (Quebec: Nota bene, 2013)

Rabaté, Dominique, *Poétiques de la voix* (Paris: Corti, 1999)

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1990)

Spearing, A. C., *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: OUP, 2005)

Swift, Helen, *Representing the Dead: Epitaph Fictions in Late-Medieval France* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016)

'Whither Death?': Sub-Faculty of French workshop, March 2017:  
<http://torch.ox.ac.uk/%E2%80%98whither-death%E2%80%99#>

## Posthumanism (Week 5, Barry Murnane)

Jacques Derrida once asked whether somebody from 500 years ago would recognize modern people as humans at all. Derrida's question addresses some of the key issues of our day: the challenge posed to inherited and established conceptions of what it means to be human by the impact of contemporary bio-technologies, bio-politics, and bio-media. Following on from Michel Foucault's critical reconsideration of the post-Enlightenment humanist subject, Posthumanism is a critical discourse which has emerged in the last twenty-odd years or so bringing together multiple fields of enquiry to answer precisely this question— from historians and philosophers of science and history to cultural theorists, from philosophers of ethics and identities to literary scholars, from IT-specialists to media theorists, and from biomedical researchers to writers/makers of speculative fiction and film. While for some writers the posthuman condition is one to be embraced – either as a space of potential to crack binary gender politics in Haraway, for example, or as a means of transcending the limitations of our imperfect bodies in 'Transhumanism' – for others the experience of posthuman biomedical technologies and solutions is one associated with pain, biopolitical control, and potentially death. This lecture will introduce the key themes and thinkers of Posthumanism mainly through the lens of the Medical Humanities, playing some of the more optimistic, speculative scenarios of posthuman transcendence off against current medical instances of actual posthuman conditions in order to develop a narrative of 'Critical Posthumanism'.

### Bibliography

- Braidotti, Rosi, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013)
- Cooper, Melinda. *Life as Surplus. Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*. (Seattle, London: U of Washington P, 2008)
- Haraway, Donna 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990)
- Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan<sup>®</sup>\_Meets\_OncoMouse<sup>™</sup>* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997)
- Hayles, N. Katherine, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999)
- Herbrechter, Stefan, *Posthumanism. A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)
- Lock, Margaret, 'The Alienation of Body Tissue and the Biopolitics of Immortalized Cell Lines'. In: *Body & Society* 7 (2001), 63-91.
- Mbeme, Achille. "Necropolitics". Trans. Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15 (2003): 11-40.
- Rose, Nikolas. *The Politics of Life Itself. Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton: UP, 2007.
- Shaviro, Steven, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010).
- Remaking Life & Death. Toward an Anthropology of the Biosciences*. Ed. Sarah Franklin and Margaret Lock. (Santa Fe, Oxford: School of American Research P and James Curry, 2003)
- Schildrick, Margrit: 'Posthuman and the Monstrous Body'. In: *Body&Society* 2:1 (1996), 1-15.
- Stone, Allucquère Rosanne, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1998)

Thacker, Eugene, 'Data made flesh: biotechnology and the discourse of the posthuman'. In: *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003), 72-97

### **The Nonhuman Turn (Weeks 6 and 7, Nikolaj Lubecker)**

During the last fifteen to twenty years, a plethora of new theoretical approaches has emerged in literary studies as well as in the humanities and social sciences more widely. Labels such as 'affect theory', 'new materialism', 'object-oriented ontology', 'animal studies', 'ecocriticism', 'posthumanism' (see week 5) and 'cyborg theory' have been coined. In 2015, Richard Grusin attempted to bring together this diverse set of theoretical formations under the umbrella term 'the nonhuman turn'. While this term deserves questioning, Grusin's effort to bring out what these writings all share is still helpful. He sees them as responses to some of the major societal challenges facing us today – above all, global warming and rapid developments in the bio-technological sciences. In other words, these theoretical texts aim to interrogate the place of the human in a world of climate crisis and radical technological developments.

Following on from week 5 in particular, these two lectures will introduce selected aspects of the Nonhuman Turn by focusing on affect theory, ecotheory and a few texts considering the impact of recent technological inventions on the human. The lectures will also present some less contemporary texts (by Simondon, Guattari and Williams) that the nonhuman turn has brought back into the spotlight.

#### **Bibliography**

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

Richard Grusin, *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Continuum, 2008 [1989])

Mark B.N. Hansen, 'The Operational Present of Sensibility', in *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no 47 (2014), pp. 38-53

Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', in *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

Brian Massumi, 'Of microperception and micropolitics' in *Politics of Affect* (London: Polity, 2015)

Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Gilbert Simondon (1992 [1958]), "The Genesis of the Individual," pp. 297-319 in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York, NY: Zone Books).

Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, (Univocal publishing 2017 [1958])

Raymond Williams, 'Structures of Feeling', in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

## Worlds (Week 8, Jane Hiddleston)

This lecture will explore the meaning of the term 'world' according to several recent philosophers, such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Edouard Glissant and Paul Gilroy, in particular in the context of current conceptions of globalisation. The discussion will tie these theories in with postcolonial history and suggest that we need a concept of 'world' or of 'worldliness' which is able to accommodate diversity, relationality, and creativity. The second part of the lecture will analyse the notion of 'world literature' in the light of the tension in current theories between universalism and the demand for proper attention to the multiple different streams that make up the 'worldly' literary text.

### **Bibliography:**

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007)

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)

Edouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde. Poétique IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997)

Edouard Glissant, *La Cohée du Lamentin. Poétique V* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005)

David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012)

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Globallectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)