 Literary Theory and Critical Thought, Lectures MT17

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 20th 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
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

Further reading
Graham Allen, Intertextuality (in the ‘New Critical Idiom’ series)
Derek Attridge, The Singularity of Literature
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)
Bühler, Karl, Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language, trans, Donald Fraser Goodwin (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 91–166

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)
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)
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#
What is Woman?
The most stimulating responses to this question have almost invariably rejected its fundamental premise, contending instead that there is in fact no such thing as ‘Woman.’ In this lecture, I focus on three of the most influential feminist thinkers of the last 70 years — Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray — who have rehearsed this very argument, albeit in strikingly different ways, and to rather different effect. Placing their conceptual frameworks and approaches in dialogue with one another provides a clearer sense of how their critical interventions continue to foster debates about feminism today.

This lecture considers feminist theory in relation to other major currents of 20th-century thought — including existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism and psychoanalysis —, and offers an overview of the main questions and strategies that Beauvoir, Cixous and Irigaray explore in their work. In particular, it sheds light on such concepts as the mythification of Woman; the cultural construction of gender; the relationship of biology to so-called ‘destiny’; the elusive workings of patriarchal ideology and its reliance on binary thought; the famous (and famously misunderstood) practice of écriture féminine and ‘writing the body’; and the subversive use of ‘mimicry’ and the reclaiming of a maternal genealogy.

ON BEAUVOIR:
Nancy BAUER, Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophy and Feminism (Columbia UP, 2001)
Ruth EVANS (ed.), Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex: New Interdisciplinary Essays (Manchester UP, 1998)
Toril MOI, Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman (Blackwell, 1994) and What is a Woman? And other essays (OUP, 1999)
Ursula Tidd, Simone de Beauvoir, Gender and Testimony (Cambridge UP, 1999)
Emily GROSHOLZ (ed.), The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir (Clarendon Press, 2004)
Joseph MAHON, Existentialism, Feminism and Simone de Beauvoir (Macmillan, 1997)
Catherine RODGERS, Le Deuxième Sexe de Simone de Beauvoir (L’Harmattan, 1998)
Karen VINTGES, Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir (Indiana University Press, 1996)

ON CIXOUS:
Ian BLYTH and Susan SELLERS, Hélène Cixous : Live Theory (Continuum, 2004)
Abigail BRAY, Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)
Verena Andermatt CONLEY, Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine (U. of Nebraska Press, 1991)
Mairead HANRAHAN, Cixous’s Semi-Fictions: Thinking at the Borders of Fictions (U. of Edinburgh Press, 2014)
Lee JACOBUS and Regina BARRECA (eds), Hélène Cixous. Critical Impressions (Gordon & Breach, 1999)
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’, ‘post-humanism’ 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.
These lectures will introduce selected aspects of the Nonhuman Turn by focusing on affect theory, ecotheory and a few texts considering the impact recent technological inventions has 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**


**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:**