About the Seminar

This course is concerned not only with theory in geography but also with the relation of geography to theory. Throughout the course we are asking a series of fundamental questions: What is geographic theory? What is geography’s relation to critical social theory? How have theorists engaged the discipline of geography and how has the discipline contributed to the project of building theory? How is theory spatial, or to put it differently, how has space been theorized? And why? How is theory grounded in the material world? Among the numerous topics we will explore are the relationship between geography and gender; the co-constitution of the social and the spatial with consequences for justice; the social construction of landscapes (urban, rural and in-between); and the application of theory to social praxis and social change. Our investigation will lead us through geography’s engagement with the –isms, including Marxism, Feminism, Realism, and Post-structuralism. Throughout we are concerned with the relationship between theory and materiality.

This semester our seminar is fortunate to be collaborating with the Wolfsonian-FIU Museum. There are significant synergies among the course readings and the thematic content of the Wolfsonian collection. For example, of central concern to geographers are questions surrounding complex concepts or processes such as modernity, urbanization, identity, racism, colonialism, imperialism, power and social change. Many of these theorists examine and refer to material culture as they theorize processes of social transformation. The Wolfsonian’s Mission Statement, which is to “use[] objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, political, and technological changes that have transformed our world” accords perfectly with our course objectives. Therefore we can utilize items from the Wolfsonian collection to provide geographic and historical context for theorists, their writings and theorizations. We can ask, how does our engagement with material culture inform theory? And how are the objects and ephemera themselves bearers of a theoretical position? We can explore the aesthetization of political economy and political projects such as fascism, colonialism, and modernization, through both formal propaganda and the prosaic, seemingly mundane items of everyday use.

Moreover, we can join in the fun of using archival material in our own research. Over the course of the semester, one class session—on a date soon to be determined—will be held at the Wolfsonian-FIU. There we will have a private guided tour of the galleries and library and we will learn how to conduct research to use materials that are only available at the Wolfsonian-FIU.

Seminar Requirements
Our purpose in this seminar is to create a dynamic and focused intellectual environment in which learning is a collective process. To that end, we will analyze, critique, question and debate the weekly readings. My mantra is this: there is no "royal road" to knowledge—that is, there is no easy path—only through careful reading, taking notes, and writing abstracts and critiques does the material contained in the texts become part of your intellectual repertoire. Seminar participation comprises a significant portion of the course grade. There will be little formal lecturing on my part. Instead, class time will be spent in open discussion and the use of a modified Socratic question and response method.

Here is how I will determine course grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly questions</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Commentaries</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Synthesis &amp; Research Papers/Essays (20% &amp; 30%)</td>
<td>50%</td>
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**Weekly Written Commentaries & Questions**

Each week all students will prepare a 500 to 750-word commentary on the week's readings. A commentary should include your summary plus thoughtful critique and analysis. It is through the meticulous work of abstracting and critiquing that you build the foundation for dissertation writing, research papers, and preparation for comprehensive exams. I'll collect the commentaries during the class period in which those readings are being discussed. Each week you will also prepare at least two questions that I'll collect in advance of our discussion for use during class.

**Synthesis & Research Papers/Projects**

Over the course of the semester you will produce two papers that review and synthesize the readings in dialogue with materials that you select from the Wolfsonian collection. The papers are due the 7th and 16th weeks of the semester. The first is due on Friday, February 17 and the second on Tuesday, April 24.

The first paper, 1500-1700 words, will draw on the readings through the seventh week. To inaugurate your research relationship with the Wolfsonian Museum, I am asking you to select and incorporate two images from those available online, linking them to your review and synthesis.

The second paper (2500-3000 words) is your final project, a case study that incorporates materials from the Wolfsonian collection to investigate a topic related to course readings. In this paper, you will synthesize the readings and then focus on the theme(s) of your choice. You will next take that thematic section of the readings and use it for an analysis of Wolfsonian materials that you have identified as germane to your topic and interests. We will discuss each of the assignments in class and with the Wolfsonian curators and librarians. Perhaps your final project can provide the basis for a Wolfsonian library exhibit in the near future?

**Texts**


**Weekly Reading Schedule**

**Week 1: January 10**

Introduction and visit to Frost Art Museum Wolfsonian Teaching Gallery, exhibit entitled “Modern Meals.”

**Week 2: January 17: Beginnings, & early Harvey...**


**Week 3: January 24: Theorizing Space**


**Week 4: January 31: Realist/Feminist/Queer Geographies**


**Week 5: February 7: Geographical Imagination: The World as Exhibition**


**Week 6: February 14: Geographical Imagination: Cartographic Representation**


For further reading: [http://www.countercartographies.org/](http://www.countercartographies.org/) and


**Week 7: February 21: [Post]Colonial Geographies/Commercial Empire**


**Week 8: February 28 (AAG Meeting, CLASS DOES NOT MEET)**

**Week 9: March 6: Political Economy to Political Ecology**


Also see: [http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/](http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/)

**Week 10: March 13 (SPRING BREAK, CLASS DOES NOT MEET)**

**Week 11: March 20: Social Justice and the City/Country Redux**


**Week 12: March 27: The Point is?**


**Week 13: April 3: Hybrid Geographies**


Week 14: April 10: Consuming Geographies


Week 15: April 17: Late Harvey...


Week 16: April 24 (I think)

Class meets to discuss final research essays...fun! [Bring powerpoints & snacks]