"Postmodernism ... indicate[s] a specific moment in history. It is a moment in which in-depth transformations of the system of economic production are also altering traditional social and symbolic structures. In the West, the shift away from manufacturing toward a service and information-based structures entails a global redistribution of labor, with the rest of the world and especially the developing countries providing most of the underpaid, offshore production. This shift entails the decline of traditional sociosymbolic systems ... [as] postmodernity corresponds to reorganization of capital accumulation in a transnational mobile manner. Given this new historical trend toward 'trans'-national mobility, it is imperative for critical theorists and cultural critics to rethink their situation and their practices within this scheme." — Rosi Braidotti

"Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of the 'real' America which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety; in its banal omnipresence which is carceral)." — Jean Baudrillard.

This course involves a critical sociological exploration of the historical emergence of postmodern and/or ultramodern forms of culture, power, and economic life. In particular, this seminar will focus on the relationship between new global capitalist technologies of power and the ritual social organization of everyday life—bodily and in the imaginary realm.

In what ways, if any, is it helpful to theorize the historical passage of modern/colonial forms of power into new postmodern social formations? Is it today possible to speak of new high-speed technologically mediated networks of force, capable of engendering new types of subjective experience and mutations in the objective possibilities of human cultural and natural forms of life and death? In what ways do new postmodern technologies of power extend and strengthen modern/colonial social hierarchies, such as those pertaining to gender, race, sexuality, and class? In what ways might new forms of power fundamentally transform modern/colonial societies, subverting modern/colonial hierarchies, while opening history to new and possibly more just ways of organizing social life? What, moreover, is the relationship between the emergence of postmodern (or ultramodern) modes of power and the ritual production of social knowledge? How adequate are the methods of contemporary sociology for making sense of the fascinating and often fearful forms of cybernetic or telematic power in which both sociologists and everyday people find themselves in history? What kind of new theoretical methods and strategies of action might be necessary to make sense of and intervene within new global formations of power? And in what ways, if any, are such new methods and strategies capable of contributing to the construction of a more just and life-affirming social order? Examining these and related questions represents a key aspect of the stories to be told within this seminar. Beware: these may not always be pleasing stories to tell together.
1. (Sept. 10) **Introduction: Death at the Parasite Cafe.**

"I am burning with desire to tell a story of the postmodern, of the society in which I find myself (k)notted in a complex network of inFOrmationally mediated relations to others. This is a story to counter-memorize or countermand what I take to be an emerging terroristic formation in HIStory—the postmodern—a new American Empire of the Senseless. Although this story passes through my body breathless, it is not mine alone. Nor am I entirely by myself in the re(w)ritings that become this text. No parasite is. Repeatedly."

"Come on, then." She took his hand. We'll get you a coffee and something to eat. Take you home. Its good to see you, man." She squeezed his hand. He smiled, something cracked. Something at the core of things. The arcade froze, vibrated—She was gone. The weight of memory came down, an entire body of knowledge was driven into his head like a microsoft into a socket. Gone. He smelled burning meat."


2. (Sept. 17) **New Global Technologies of Capitalist Power.**

“Streamed culture [is] when capitalism has suddenly and irreversibly speeded up beyond necessary production, beyond definite consumption, achieving for the first time in financial history that long-sought state of economic … equilibrium: zero-time circulation of value in a new economy typified by the circulation of pure capital…. Here, just as Marx had prophesied in the *Communist Manifesto*, the unfettered movement of the commodity-form breaks beyond the strictly economic sphere to involve the market penetration of every dimension of human experience, from electronically mediated human subjectivity and processed (social) relations to the biogenetic engineering of human reproduction…. [With this] streamed capitalism announces … the global consolidation of multinational corporations into branded electronic networks, not domiciled in a fixed geographic location, but representative only of a strategic node in the circulation of digital capital.”

— Arthur Kroker, *The Will to Technology*


**supplementary reading:**


3. (Sept. 24) **Setting the Stage in History.**

"In the morning I walked to the bank. I went to the automated teller to check my balance. I inserted my card, entered my secret code, tapped out my request. The figure on the screen roughly corresponded to my independent estimate, feebly arrived at after long searched through documents, tormented arithmetic. Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. The system hardware, the mainframe sitting in a locked room in some distant city. What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not at all had been authenticated and confirmed. A deranged person was escorted from the bank by two armed guards. The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies."—Don DeLillo, *White Noise.*


**supplementary reading:**


"The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image."—Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle

"Postmodernism...is not just another word for the description of a particular style. It is also a periodicizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life of a new economic order—what is euphemistically called modernization, postindustrial, or consumer society, the society of the media or spectacle, or multinational capital."—Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"


supplementary reading:


5. (Oct. 8) **From Modern (Gendered) Subjects to Postmodern Cyborgs.**

"Our cyborg worlds extend from the military... to video games, to advertising, to home appliances, to the work-place, to 'defence' debates. In all those realms, the military information society not only defines the ruling order but also sets the terms for what counts as an effective opposition."—Les Levidow and Kevin Robins, *Cyborg Worlds*


**supplementary reading:**

[www.etheory](http://www.etheory) (explore this website)


Rosi Braidotti, "Organs Without Bodies," in *Nomadic Subjects*, pp. 41-56.*


Scott Lash and John Urry, "Reflexive Subjects," in *Economies of Signs and Space*, pp. 31-59.


6. (Oct. 15) **Eating the Racialized Other of Modernity**
"The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new
delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling.... The 'real fun'
is to be had by bringing to the surface all those 'nasty' unconscious fantasies and longings
about contact with the Other embedded in the secret (and not so secret) deep structure of
white supremacy."— bell hooks

Black Atlantic, pp. 70-110.
3. bell hooks, "Introduction" and "Eating the Other," in Black Looks: Race and Representation.
4. Cornel West, "Black Culture and Postmodernism," in Barbara Kruger and Phil Marini, eds.,
5. Stephen Pfohl, "Twilight of the Parasites: Ultramodern Capital and the New World Order,"

supplementary reading:

Ariel Dorfman, The Empire's New Clothes, New York: Pantheon, 1983, pp. 3-64, 108-131, 199-
210.


Gloria Anzaldua, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," in Gloria
Anzualdua, ed., Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of

Michael Ventura, "Hear that Long Snake Moan," in Shadow Dancing in the USA, Los Angeles:

7. (Oct. 22) From the Haunts of Production to the Ecstasies of Consumption.

"The logic of representation—of the duplication of its object—haunts all rational
discursiveness. Every critical theory is haunted by this surreptitious religion, this desire bound
up with the object, this negativity subtly haunted by the very form it negates."— Jean
Baudrillard.

1. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster (ed.), The Anti-
2. Stephen Pfohl, "A Story of the Eye/I" in Death at the Parasite Cafe: Social Science
(Fictions) and the Postmodern, 59-103.**
York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 41-54.

supplementary reading:

Jean Baudrillard, "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign," in *Selected Writings*, pp. 57-97.


8. (Oct. 29) **From Doubled Consciousness to Cybernetic Feedback.**

"Postmodernism enjoins us in the necessity for engaging in a cultural politics... It is not surprising that the most interesting theoretical works and reflections on the state of contemporary culture have come out of art and literary [engagements]... and have come from women... who have attempted to grapple with the... issue of representation of women. They do not necessarily offer positive images of women, but they do question the notion of "Woman" as a natural construct. They do not offer solutions, but instead force the readers of their works to develop skills in interpreting and reading. It is important to transit skills that will allow consumers of capitalism to understand the power of images in general and to question the notion of immutability of that which we take to be real. It is at this conjuncture that aesthetic judgment and politics meet."—Kim Sawchuk, "A Tale of Inscription/Fashion Statements."


supplementary reading:


9. (Nov. 5) **Flexible Reconfigurations of Power and Catastrophe.**

"Who can now speak with confidence of the future of a postmodern scene when what is truly fascinating is the thrill of catastrophe, and where what drives onward economy, politics, culture, sex, and even eating is not the will to accumulation or the search for lost coherencies, but just the opposite—the ecstatic implosion of modern culture into excess, waste, and disaccumulation. When technology of quantum order produces human beings who are part-metal and part-flesh, when robo-beings constitute the growing majority of a western culture which fulfills then exceeds, Weber's grim prophecy of the coming of an age of "specialists without spirit", and when chip technology finally makes possible the fateful fusion of molecular biology and technique: then ours is genuinely a postmodern condition marked by the deepest and most pathological symptoms of nihilism."—Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*

1. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1994), pp. 3-7.**


**suplementary reading:**


10. (Nov. 12) **The Fate of Whose Bodies in Ultramodernity?**

"They see death everywhere.... They think solely of the fact that they live surrounded by vipers, tigers and cannibals. Their imaginations are constantly struck by the idea of death as figured by these images of the wild and the only way they could live in such a world...was by themselves inspiring terror."—Michael Taussig


**supplementary reading:**

Sadie Plant, "Victory will be for those who create disorder without loving it," in *The Most Radical Gesture*, pp. 111-149


11. (Nov. 19) **Reconfiguring Power and Resistance in the Postmodern.**

"Jean Baudrillard is the theorist of nihilism as the fate of postmodernity.... a theorist of the cynical commodity. What makes Baudrillard so dangerous, allowing him to put Nietzsche into play as the doppelganger of Marx's *Capital*, is that he writes from that point where the commodity-form, abandoning its historical association with the simulacra of concrete labor, reveals itself for what it always was: a transparent sign-system that traces out in the curved
space of political economy (and of consumer culture) the implosive, disaccumulative, and seductive cycle of postmodern power.”— Arthur Kroker, "Baudrillard's Marx.


**Supplementary Reading:**


Rosi Braidotti, "Re-figuring the Subject," in *Nomadic Subjects*, pp. 95-110.

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**12. (Dec. 3) Resituating Postmodern Knowledges.**

"[Our' problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faith accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness."— Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."


**Supplementary Reading:**


12. (Dec. 10) **Countering the Cold Passions of Ultramodern Power.**

"Developing a style nobody can deal with—a style that cannot be easily understood or erased, a style that has the reflexivity to create counter-dominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy—may be one of the most effective ways to fortify communities of resistance and simultaneously receive the right to communicate pleasure."— Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*.


**Supplementary Reading:**


**Course Requirements:**
This is an advanced reading and writing seminar. Participants taking the course for credit will be asked to read and actively discuss assigned course materials, serve as periodic leaders of seminar discussion, and to complete the following assignments. (10% of course grade) Auditors are welcome.

1. Each participant is to produce two short 4-5 double-spaced page essays addressing issues raised by particular sets of assigned readings and seminar themes. First essay is due no later than October 22. (Each essay is 15% of course grade.) The second must be submitted no later than December 10th.

2. Each participant is to produce one approximately 20 double-spaced page term paper involving a theoretical investigation of a particular scene or event within postmodern society. Papers must engage explicitly with materials assigned for this particular seminar. Short (1-2 page) paper proposals are due in class on October 8. A working draft of this text is to be presented as part of the collective work of the seminar. (Term paper is 60% of course grade.) Due: Friday, December 18th, 5 PM.