

PULSE Council Seminar
PL293.01: Culture and Social Structures I
Fall 2007 Tuesdays 4:30 - 6:00ish

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This course is one in the four semester cycle of courses designed for members of the Boston College PULSE Council. In this course we attempt to lay a foundation for understanding contemporary ways in which people choose to structure -- literally and figuratively (or perhaps better, symbolically) -- the way they live together. Our study centers on questions about how our culture and its social structures are the concrete expression of what we value, of the things we consider meaningful and important.

The texts we have chosen to guide us in this pursuit will lead us to raise these questions in a way that will direct our focus from some general principles and ideas to somewhat more specifically western, particularly North American ways of creating these cultural and social structures.

As the late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Thomas P. O'Neill, the distinguished Boston College alumnus whose name adorns our library, was fond of saying: "All politics is local." No doubt he derived that from his reading of Aristotle's *Ethics*, a book with which most of you are familiar. Understanding that as a sort of underlying theme of all four semesters of the Council class, we hope to look closely at the origins and development of some of the guiding themes and ideas that ground those local politics, i.e., to look at the culture which underlies the structures we find ourselves within.

Accordingly, we have selected texts from a range of disciplines: Architecture, Cultural History, Political History, Literature and Scripture. As usual for this seminar, some may initially appear to have little to do with what you think of when you hear the word "philosophy." They all, however, have a great deal to do with what you might need to think about when trying to answer such questions as: "What does it mean to be part of a culture?" "Is there a philosophy behind what it means to be a citizen of a particular country?" or "What does it mean to be a member of a particular society?"

We trust you will keep such questions in mind as we go through the semester and as you fulfill each of the course requirements.

Requirements:

- 1) Faithful (and punctual) attendance and preparation for each class meeting.
- 2) Two in-class presentations and leading discussions (or more, depending on enrolment).
- 3) Three written questions about the readings on the weeks you are not presenting.
- 4) A possible, individual mid-semester "conversation" about what we have been reading.
- 5) Completion of your duties as a PULSE Council member – this *is* a factor in your grade.
- 6) A grueling, nerve-wracking, angst-inducing, group oral final exam.

Book/Reading list:

Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*
Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*
Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox*
The Bible, *The Acts of the Apostles*
Patrick Byrne, "Paradigms of Justice and Love" (Handout)
Nathaniel Hawthorn, "Ethan Brand" (Handout)
Martin Heidegger, "Memorial Address" (Handout)

Reading Assignments:

September 11 -- *Genius Loci*, Chapters 1 - 3.

September 18 -- *Genius Loci*, Chapters 4 - 6.

September 25 -- *Genius Loci*, Chapters 7 & 8 and Heidegger's "Memorial Address"

October 2 -- *People of Paradox*; Preface & Part I: Prolegomenon; Chs. 1 -- 3.

October 9 -- *People of Paradox*; Part II: Prolegomenon; Chapters 4 – 6.

October 16 -- *People of Paradox*; Part III: Prolegomenon; Chapters 7 – 9.

October 23 -- *The Machine in the Garden*, Chapters I & II

October 30 -- *The Machine in the Garden*, Chapters III & IV

November 6 – *The Machine in the Garden*, Chapters V & VI and "Ethan Brand"

November 13 -- *Acts of the Apostles* and Patrick Byrne, "Paradigms of Justice and Love"

November 20 -- No class. Happy Thanksgiving from us.

November 27 -- The Grand Synthesis

December 4 -- Final Exam