English 746.01
Fall 2014

Studies in Rhetorical Theory and Practice:
“Pragmatism, Interactionism, Field Theory, Activity Theory, and Rhetoric”
Wednesday 6:30-9:20 pm
MHRA 1304

Instructor:
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Office Hours: By appointment.

Course Description:
Pragmatism, Interactionism, Field Theory, Structuration Theory, and Activity Theory are closely related, mutually influencing social theories that are having a profound impact today on issues as diverse as genre, HCI (human-computer interaction), digital rhetoric, second language acquisition, distributed learning, writing across the curriculum, and argumentation. This course will explore the major concepts and methods of these theories, beginning with classic formulations by Vygotsky, Dewey and Mead; moving through major developers of the theories, such as Blumer, Toulmin, Bourdieu, and Giddens; and ending in recent theoretical developments and applications to composition pedagogy.

Texts:


Hyperlinks:


Course Requirements:

1. You will write either two brief (approximately 10 typed pages) research papers or one full-length (approximately 20 page) research paper. You should think of these as being on-the-way to publication: they should be forays into new turf of some sort—new material, new methods applied to old material, new questions about old issues, a new perspective on old or current arguments, etc.

These papers should be well written and documented appropriately in either MLA or Chicago style. At least two weeks prior to their due dates, you should submit to me a one-page description of your project for approval. (Short papers, 25% of your total grade, each; long paper, 50% of your final grade.)

2. This is a seminar. The students will be primarily responsible for the class discussion. Think of me as a “co-facilitator” only. The theories we will be discussing are major philosophical positions that have not been fully translated into composition theory or literary critical theory. This is your chance to come up with something highly original. To that end, I have selected texts from outside disciplines, as well as our own, to stimulate our thinking. You have an opportunity here to tailor the readings to your own special interests and concerns. Think of this as a workshop where we are all helping each other pursue our personal scholarly interests. I hope to be able to write each of you excellent teaching recommendations, as well as scholarly recommendations, as a result of your participation in this class. (Discussion leadership, 25% of your total grade.)

3. Class participation is very important. The success of a course like this one depends upon everyone’s informed involvement. (Participation, 25% of your total grade.)

4. We’ll use Blackboard’s discussion panel. Every week by noon Saturday before the seminar, you should post a brief explanation of two issues raised by that week’s readings that you believe are important. Include the page numbers of essential passages. Every week, you will lead the class in a discussion of at least one of those issues.

5. The schedule below is meant to be fluid. We can add and subtract readings, spend two or three weeks on something that the schedule says we spend a week on—or whatever.

Schedule:

**Week 1** (Aug. 20): Introduction to the course

**Required Reading:**

PAT, “Introduction,” pp. 1-16;
SICS, “Preface,” pp. xv-xviii;
TF, Chap. 1, “The Gist of It,” pp. 3-33

Week 2 (Aug. 27): Pragmatism 1

Required Reading:


Week 3 (Sept. 3): Pragmatism 2

Required Reading:

PFS, Chap. 2: “From Indication to Predication,” pp. 51-98.

Week 4 (Sept. 10): Pragmatism 3

Required Reading:


Week 5 (Sept. 17): Activity Theory 1

Required Reading:

PAT, Chap. 3: Stephen Toulmin, “Knowledge as Shared Procedures,” pp. 53-64.
PAT, Chap. 9: Ethel Toback, “Activity Theory and the Concept of Integrative Levels,” pp. 133-146.

Week 6 (Sept. 24): Activity Theory 2
**Required Reading:**


**Due:** First 10-page paper (if applicable)

**Week 7** (Oct. 1): Field Theory 1

**Required Reading:**


**Week 8** (Oct. 8): Field Theory 2

**Required Reading:**

TF, Chap. 2, “Microfoundations,” pp. 34-56
TF, Chap. 4, “Change and Stability in Strategic Action Fields,” pp. 83-113

**Week 9** (Oct. 15): Symbolic Interactionism 1

**Required Reading:**

SICS, Chap. 1, “The Interactionist Heritage,” pp. 1-21
SICS, Chap. 2, “The Interpretive Heritage,” pp. 22-45
SICS, Chap. 3, “Critique and Renewal: Links to Cultural Studies,” pp. 46-70

**Week 10** (Oct. 22): Symbolic Interactionism 2

**Required Reading:**

SICS, Chap. 4, “Enter Cultural Studies,” pp. 71-94
SICS, Chap. 5, “Communication as Interactionist Problematic,” pp. 95-122
SICS, Chap. 6, “Interactionist Cultural Criticism,” pp. 123-153
Week 11 (Oct. 29): Structuration Theory 1

Required Reading:

CS, Chap. 2, “Consciousness, Self, and Social Encounters,” pp. 41-109

Week 12 (Nov. 5): Structuration Theory 2

Required Reading:

CS, Chap. 3, “Time, Space, and Regionalization,” pp. 110-161

Due: Second 10-page paper (if applicable)

Week 13 (Nov. 12): Structuration Theory 3

Required Reading:


Week 14 (Nov. 19): New Directions

Required Reading:


Due: Twenty-page paper (if applicable)

Week 15 (Nov. 26): Thanksgiving Break