

## Political Science 283W: Contemporary Political Theory

Professor James Johnson  
312 Harkness Hall \* Office Phone # 275-0622 \* [jd.johnson@rochester.edu](mailto:jd.johnson@rochester.edu)  
Spring Term 2011 \* Class T-Th 11:05-12:20 \* Office Hours Th 1:30-3:30

Teaching Assistant: Emily Scott [escott10@u.rochester.edu](mailto:escott10@u.rochester.edu)

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This is an advanced course in political theory. The course is meant to push you to think and to write, to struggle with ideas and figure out how to articulate them. In other words, I hope that you will not learn about political theory, but actually take a step or two towards thinking and writing like a political theorist.

The course is not open to freshman and has as a pre-requisite PSC 202: Argument in Political Science or, if you are not a political science major, my permission. I intend to run the class on the model of a graduate seminar. That means it will be very demanding in terms of your time and effort.

The course is something of an experiment. We will proceed by trying to weave together several disparate bodies of work:

- We will place three 20<sup>th</sup> Century political theorists - John Dewey, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault – into conversation with one another - paying special attention to the theme of visibility and how it intersects topics of power, freedom, and truth in their writings.
- We will look at the work by a number of contemporary photographers, paying special attention to the theoretical issues – issues of aesthetics and politics – that they raise in their work.
- And we will read a set of critics who comment on those photographers and on photography generally.

As you can guess, all this means that there is *a lot* of reading. The reading is not easy (no pre-digested textbooks). Since I intend the course to run as a seminar, you will have to speak in class. In other words I expect you to not only attend class but to come prepared to actively participate. Doing the reading as assigned will greatly facilitate your ability to do that. Please refer to the schedule I provide below. It is possible that we will get off schedule. If you don't know what you should be reading at any time during the term ask!

**Readings:** I have ordered the following books at the College bookstore, but you should be able to track them all down used at you preferred e-purveyor.

Hannah Arendt. 1963 *On Revolution*. Penguin.

Hannah Arendt. 1961. *Between Past & Future*. Penguin.

John Dewey. 1927. *The Public & Its Problems*. Swallow Press.

Michel Foucault. 1978. *Discipline & Punish*. Pantheon.

Michel Foucault. 2003. *The Essential Foucault*. New Press.

Susan Sontag. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. FSG.

Steve Edwards. 2006. *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford.

Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein. 2010. *They Say, I Say*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). W.W. Norton.

In addition to these books there are a significant number of other readings; I will make all of those available electronically via Blackboard.

**Films:** In addition to regularly scheduled classes there are five 'extra' sessions on the schedule. You can think of them as analogous to lab sessions in a science or survey methods course. In the first four of those sessions we will watch and discuss documentary films about photographers and their work. (I note the fifth below.) The subjects of the films are Susan Meiselas, James Nachtwey, Edward Burtynsky and Sebastião Salgado. The films and associated readings will form the basis of the four short papers. You are responsible for viewing these films *even if you cannot make it to the movie nights*. They all are on reserve at the Media Center in Rush Rhees.

Movie Nights are scheduled from 5:00-7:00 pm on four Wednesdays (marked \*) and will be held in Harkness 329.

**Written Assignments:** The course is writing intensive. I am sure you think you already know how to write. But everyone can improve on that score. And this course is aimed at helping you improve. There are a number of class meetings devoted explicitly to writing.

There are four short (3-4 typed pages) writing assignments during the course of the semester. These papers will require that you see the films noted on the course schedule and read the relevant chapters in Graff & Birkenstein. We will be discussing your papers in class on the day they are due, so you must write them on time.

I also expect you to produce a substantial term paper. (When I say 'substantial' you can think roughly 20 typed pages – but it *really* is best to think in terms of writing a good paper rather than in terms of page thresholds.) I structure the semester so

that you will have to demonstrate progress toward that goal. We will talk about this paper in class. But it is due at noon on the day we might otherwise have an in class final exam. (*Note: There is no final exam in the course*) *I will not accept late papers except under the most unusual circumstances.*

You will note that I have scheduled a *mandatory* meeting (marked #) with two of the research staff in the Library. Ann Marshall is the Political Science bibliographer; Stephanie Frontz is one of our Art Librarians. This meeting – which is the fifth of the extra sessions on the class schedule – is to help guide you through some of the library resources available to you as you research your paper. When I say that the meeting is mandatory I am not kidding.

I urge you to talk to me about ideas for a research paper early. You need to have a topic *before* the meeting with Ann and Stephanie. I am more than willing to talk to you during office hours or we can make an appointment for some other time.

Here is a very partial list – more of a suggestive sampling than anything else – of very different photographers whose work you might start to explore for purposes of writing a paper:

Robert Adams	Chris Jordan
Diane Arbus	Josef Koudelka
Eugene Atget	Miki Kratzman
The Atlas Group	Antonin Kratochvil
Richard Avedon	Dorothea Lange
Robert Bergman	Annie Leibovitz.
Margaret Bourke-White	Robert Lyons
Miguel Rio Branco	Susan Meiselas
Edward Burtymsky	Richard Misrach
Robert Capa	Joel Meierwitz
Roy DeCareva	Simon Norfolk
Andre Cypriano	Gilles Peress
Raphaël Dallaporta	Alexander Rodchenko
Lalla Essaydi	Martha Rosler
Walker Evans	Richard Ross
Robert Frank	Sebastião Salgado
David Goldblatt	August Sander
Ken Gonzalez Day	Randa Shaath
Daniel Hernandez Salazar	Joel Sternfeld
Lewis Hine	Paul Strand
Alfredo Jaar	Krzysztof Wodiczko

## Class Schedule

### January

13 Introduction (Syllabus); Susan Sontag, 'Photography: A Little Summa'

18 ~ Steve Edwards *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*

20 ~ Walter Benjamin, "A Little History of Photography"; John Berger, *Selected Essays*, 274-93; Robert Adams, *Beauty in Photography*, 49-75; Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization*, 2-21; Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance*, 3-65.

25 ~ Dewey, *The Public & Its Problems*.

\*26 ~ Movie Night #1: James Nachtwey – *War Photographer* (2003).

Read: Susie Linfield *The Cruel Radiance*, 205-233.

27 ~ Dewey, *The Public & Its Problems*.

### February

1 ~ Graff & Birkenstein, Part I. **First Short Paper Due.**

3 ~ No Class; Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

8 ~ Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Mark Reinhardt "Picturing Violence."

\*9 ~ Movie Night #2: Sebastião Salgado - *Spectre of Hope* (2001).

Read: Ingrid Sischey (1991) "Good Intentions"; David Levi Strauss, *Between the Eyes*, 3-11, 42-51.

10 ~ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization* 63-116; Robert Adams *Beauty in Photography* 21-36; Elaine Scarry *On Beauty & Being Just* 55-92.

15 ~ Graff & Birkenstein, Part II. **Second Short Paper Due.**

17 ~ Arendt, *On Revolution*.

22 ~ Arendt, *On Revolution*; Arendt, *Between Past & Future*.

\*23 ~ Movie Night #3: Edward Burtynsky – *Manufactured Landscapes* (2007).

Read: Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise*, 135-139.

24 ~ Arendt, *Between Past & Future*.

### March

1 ~ Graff & Birkenstein, Part III. **Third Short Paper Due.**

3 ~ Patricia Phillips "The Aesthetics of Witnessing: An Interview with Alfredo Jaar"; Abigail Solomon-Godeau "Lament of the Images: Alfredo Jaar & the Ethics of Representation"; Rebecca Solnit *Hope in the Dark* 56-89.

8 – 10 ~ *Spring Break*

15 ~ Patricia Phillips "Creating Democracy: A Dialogue with Krzysztof Wodiczko."

\*16 ~ Movie Night #4: Susan Meiselas – *Pictures from a Revolution* (2007).

Read: Joy Garnett & Susan Meiselas. 2007. "On the Rights of Molotov Man: Appropriation & the Art of Context," *Harpers* (February), 53-58 AND Robert Adams, *Why People Photograph*, 105-7.

17 ~ James Johnson "The Arithmetic of Compassion."

22 ~ Graff & Birkenstein, Part III (again), plus chapters 12 & 14.

**Fourth Short Paper Due.**

#23 ~ Library Resources: *Mandatory* meeting with Ann Marshall & Stephanie Frontz  
Time 4p.m.; Location TBA

24 ~ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*

29 ~ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*

31 ~ Foucault, *Essential Foucault*, 18-66,102-202,229-78,351-70,377-92.

## **April**

5 ~ James Johnson "Communication, Criticism & the Postmodern Consensus";  
*Migrations: The Work of Sebastião Salgado*; "; Ariella Azoulay "What is a  
Photograph? What is Photography?"

7 ~ Writing: Organization.

12 ~ Susan Sontag "Regarding the Torture of Others"; Elaine Scarry *The Body in Pain*  
3-59, 161-79; Alfredo Jaar and David Levi Strauss "A New Lament.

14 ~ Writing: Style/Coherence.

19 ~ Alan Trachtenberg Reading American Photographs 164-230; John Stomberg "A  
Genealogy of Orthodox Documentary".

21 ~ Writing: Style/Cohesion.

26 ~ Summing Up and Catching Up

TBA- Final Paper Due: Noon on the Day that we otherwise would have an in-class  
final according to the College exam schedule.