

Education 737-002

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Nature, Culture, and Justice: Latour, Foucault, Haraway

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This course presents an opportunity to read and discuss work by three major theorists who address issues of knowledge and representation by challenging the modernist separation of culture from nature. Our goal will be to explore the implications of their perspectives for research in science education, learning technologies, and new media literacies.

Each of these theorists can be read as arguing that the inseparability of the natural and the cultural makes our customary understanding of representations, discourses, and the role of new media in society, and so also in education and in research, untenable. They offer new ways of connecting people and artifacts, technical practices and socialized bodies. They frame serious intellectual and moral challenges to modernist institutions and the unjust power relations they require. In this course we will use their perspectives to think critically about the future of education, technology, and research.

1. Foucault on the Origins of Modernist Science

Foucault, M. (1966). *The Order of Things*. New York: Random House.

= translation of *Les mots et les choses*, "words and things"

Reading:

Chapters 2 (The Prose of the World), 3 (Representing), 5 (Classifying), 7.3 (Organic structure of beings), 8.1 (The new empiricities), 8.3 (Cuvier), 10.1 (3 faces of knowledge)

In the book as a whole, Foucault is looking to understand how the modern discursive constructions of the fields of science, economics, and linguistics came into being historically. He is looking at changes in discourses about nature, language, and labor/value in the 17th-18th centuries. His project is to see common trends in all these cases, defining a modernist *episteme* or epistemological worldview. He ends with a focus on history and the newer social sciences, especially ethnography.

2. Latour on the Separation of “Nature” and “Culture”

Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern* (C. Porter, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

In this short, difficult book, Latour makes his first systematic effort to deconstruct the assumptions that lie behind the modernist separations of nature from culture and facts from values. He describes a “modernist constitution” as a kind of intellectual contract that created the illusion that modern Western culture was qualitatively different from all other cultures, founded on the special claims to truth of modern science.

3. Re-entangling Humans and Nonhumans

Latour, B. (1999). *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reading: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9

This book is a collection of loosely related essays. Its overall theme is the “science wars” that were more or less provoked by Latour’s and other sociologists and historians of science undermining the claims to pure, objective truth on the part of natural science. In these chapters, he picks up on the themes of *We Have Never Been Modern* and examines their politics implications. His basic claim is that the ideal of objective truth is an elitist weapon against true democracy, and he proposes an alternative that keeps a common sense notion of empirical reality but redefines the epistemological (and ontological) relationship between humans and nonhumans (people and nature).

4. Politics After “Nature”

Latour, B. (2004). *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (C. Porter, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Influenced by the work of philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers (a close associate of Nobel chemist Ilya Prigogine), Latour tries to re-imagine an ecological politics in terms of his alternative to modernism, expanding on the ideas from *Pandora's Hope*.

5. Haraway on the Commodification of Living Systems

Haraway, D. (1997).

Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan(c)_Meets_OncoMouse(TM). New York / London: Routledge.

Donna Haraway began her career with a study of the gender biases in modern primatology, and what happened when a new generation of women entered the field. She went on to become a major feminist theorist with interests in both science and politics. This book looks at contemporary re-definitions of the boundaries between nature and culture/society in applied biology in terms of ethical, political, and economic issues (e.g. patenting living organisms, genetic code as corporate intellectual property) and their implications.

Supplementary / Optional Works:

Foucault, M. (1969). *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Random House.
= presents Foucault's discourse-centered view of cultural history

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. New York: Routledge.
= earlier work by Haraway that explores hybridity between humans and nonhumans

Latour, B. (1987). *Science in Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
= earlier work by Latour that presents his view of how science really works

Latour, B., & Woolgar, S. (1979). *Laboratory Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
= first major work by Latour, an interpretive ethnography of a research lab

Shapin, S., & Schaffer, S. (1989). *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
= an influential history of the emergence of modern science in England; highlights the term "modest witness" and the political significance of the Royal Society

Stengers, I. (1997). *Power and invention* (P. Bains, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
= collection of influential essays on philosophy of science, with an introduction by Latour

Stengers, I. (2000). *The invention of modern science* (D. W. Smith, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.