Peregrine Thinking: The Politics of Conceptions of “Thought”

Course: CHID 390 A  
Instructor: Terry Schenold  
Time: TTh, 10:50-1:00  
Place: SAV 138  
Email: schenold@uw.edu  
Hours: TTh 1:00-2:00, or by Appt.

Thought is non-productive labor, and hence does not show up as such on balance sheets except as waste.

- Bill Readings, The University in Ruins

Aesthetics presents philosophy with the bill for the fact that the academic system degraded it to being a mere specialization.

- Theodore Adorno, Aesthetic Theory

Leading Thoughts
Writing in 1997 about the emergence of the “market university,” Bill Readings lamented the invisibility of the activity of “thought” under the justificatory regime of market efficacy and productivity. What counts institutionally as productive labor has implications for the experiences of thinking in education most valued and oft incorporated in learning. But how, we should wonder, are the operative accounts of thinking limiting? How might they be re-imagined and re-configured, and what kinds of thinking would such changes foreground and background? Rather than attempting to identify which limiting theory or paradigm of thinking should be “presented with the bill” for our current situation and bring it to account (whatever we may think about it)—a direct politics of thought-as-object, instead we will try to explore experiences of what we might call “peregrine thinking,” those often recalcitrant, back-grounded, subtleties of thinking that are hard to make represent-able, much less accountable to the more limited views of productivity we normally assume. The term peregrine comes from the Latin “peregrinus,” which indicates something alien, exotic, or foreign, and has been used to describe individuals who have no rights of citizenship. Used in this context, “peregrine thinking” is suggestive of exiled or ignored “thinking” that is either subsumed under more common categories of intellectual labor, or considered illegitimate if this cannot be done in some expedient way.

The CHID390 junior colloquium is designed to focus our attention on the theoretical and practical problems of interpretation and knowledge production generally, and in this particular version of the course, we will explore different ways in which “thought” has been characterized as an activity, and the consequences of those characterizations. Most of these, let’s call them “modes of thinking” for now, have been considered errant, dangerous, purposeless, non-productive, non-serious, or even disavowed as something completely other-than-thought. We are often called to “think harder!” about something when problems arise in the course of our education, but this usually means think with more precision using the knowledge-tools we have been given from a particular discourse or theoretical approach. During the nine weeks of the summer we will read some philosophy, novels, poetry, cultural theory, and experience game media in order to gain an enlarged understanding of the consequences of our conceptions of what counts as productive thinking.

Contours
This course emphasizes three crucial and interconnected critical practices: reading, talking, and writing. Crucial because together they comprise the foundation of an academic community of inquiry, and interconnected because each alone constitutes only part of the process of understanding and creating new knowledge. The first objective of the course is to expose students to a wide range of readings and media that expand upon or challenge more commonplace and simplified notions of what goes on, and what is valuable in different aspects of experience we put under the descriptor “thinking.” Many of these texts and media are challenging in their own right (they have technical language and

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complex working assumptions from their disciplines), but we will also have to guard against our impulse to translate the differences in thinking they attempt to make visible into the very language and way of thinking about “thought” that we have inherited and institutionalized. All of the reading will require careful, thoughtful, detailed attention.

The second critical practice is engaging in verbal discussion, which serves to create and sustain a learning community through sharing of views and ideas. One of the things we hope you will gain from this seminar-style class is an enhanced ability to carry on a conversation about your own and others’ ideas.

Finally, you will write regularly in response to the readings and your colleagues’ thoughts. Writing is a crucial component of academic thinking, and is a practice that facilitates engagement in, and understanding of, texts and ideas. It is also, perhaps, the most efficient and productive tool for organizing your own thoughts while simultaneously making them widely shareable and accessible. The class offers “W” credit, so you will have a chance to revise your short response papers, as well as your critical précis.

Mediations
✓ Course E-Reader: scanned materials (download on website)
✓ Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein
✓ Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities

Connections
Participants will be expected to:

✓ Come to class prepared to actively participate in discussion. This means coming to class with the assigned work done and ready to share your thoughts and questions with the group.
✓ Frame and facilitate a discussion on one of the readings or media during the quarter with a colleague in the seminar.
✓ Contribute creative, reflective writing to the “stream of thoughts” online chain-conversation about the course materials and your everyday experiences during the summer.
✓ Compose three short written responses to self-selected critical readings in the quarter.
✓ Share research experience by writing a critical précis on a self-selected outside source related to the theme of the class. These documents will be circulated among the group and published in a PDF collection at the end of quarter with your essays.
✓ Explore a topic suggested to you by the class experience in greater depth by writing an essay incorporating materials from the reading as well as outside sources. These will be included in the PDF collection as well.

Quantifications
Participation: 5%
Discussion Facilitation: 15%
Stream of Thoughts Contribution: 15%
Reading Responses: 30%
Critical Precis: 15%
Essay: 20%

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**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READING**

As a colloquium, this course is focused on developing a community of inquiry that responds to the ongoing interests and contributions of the participants. To this end, the schedule will be considered provisional and open to revision by the group. Early in the quarter we will be reflecting on progress and emerging interests and adapt the course to those reflections.

**Adventures**

Week 1, 6.22 & 6.24 - Introduction: Clear Thoughts? Wasted Thoughts? Exiled Thinking?
T: Thing-Thought, Thought as Means, The problem of “Clear and Distinct” (Descartes); “Dianoia,” Thought as Calculation (Plato)
Th: Alfred North Whitehead: “Aims of Education” & “Universities and their Function”

Week 2, 6.29 & 7.01 – Retroduction, “Musement”
[Response 1/3]

Week 3, 7.06 & 7.08 – The Howling Rhizome
Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari: “Rhizome,” A Thousand Plateaus
Allen Ginsberg: “Howl” (poem+audio)

Week 4, 7.13 & 7.15 – Affect, Feeling
Brian Massumi: “The Autonomy of Affect,” Parables for the Virtual
Rohrer, Jason: Passage (game)
[Response 2/3]

Week 5, 7.20, 7.22 – Play: Ludus and Paidia
Johan Huizinga: (chapters) Homo Ludens
Rodriguez: “The Playful and the Serious”

Week 6, 7.27 & 7.29 – Reflection, Wonder, Reverie
Gaston Bachelard: (chapters) Poetics of Reverie
Phillip Thurtle: “Poetics of Wandering,” Emergence of Genetic Rationality
[Response 3/3]

Week 7, 8.03 & 8.05 – Hope, Utopos, Fantasy
Ernst Bloch: “Something’s Missing,” Utopian Function of Art and Literature
Darko Suvin: (chapters) Metamorphoses of Science Fiction
Italo Calvino: Invisible Cities
[Critical Precis]

Week 8, 8.10 & 8.12 – Empathy, Imagination
Mary Shelley: Frankenstein
William Carlos Williams: Spring and All

Week 9, 8.17 & 8.19 – Catalysts for Thought
Student Work sharing, concluding discussions
[Essay]

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