

# ARE WE LIVING IN A POST-REVOLUTIONARY ERA?

HON 4300 – 001

FALL 2012

INSTRUCTOR: GABRIEL ROCKHILL

**Time:** TTh 1-2:15

**Location:** Garey 115

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“We do not live in a revolutionary situation, and actually things are worse than ever. The horror is that for the first time we live in a world in which we can no longer imagine a better one.”

- Theodor Adorno, “Towards a New Manifesto?”

“La révolution est à réinventer et d’abord à reconnaître! Aujourd’hui, l’esprit prométhéen, c’est celui qui prononce: ‘La Révolution, comme l’amour, est à réinventer.’”

- Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction à la modernité*

## OVERVIEW

This course explores the recent transformations in our *political culture*, understood as the practical mode of intelligibility that dictates the very nature of politics by determining who qualifies as a political subject, what is visible as a political action, and how the spatio-temporal framework of politics is structured. After a brief methodological and historiographical introduction, we will study the historical emergence of the modern concept of revolution and the transformations in the temporal horizons of the political due to the opening up of the future as an unknown field of possibility. We will examine, in this light, historical writings on various revolutions as well as theoretical attempts to conceptualize the specificity of revolutionary social transformation. Against this historical backdrop, we will then inquire into whether or not there has been a change in the very nature of political practice due to the apparent shift from an era of revolutionary politics (roughly 1789 to 1968) to a purportedly post-revolutionary epoch (1968-present). More specifically, we will ask such questions as the following: Is the belief in an unprecedented future a thing of the past? Is such a future, in fact, a *future past*? Is our age resolutely “presentist” insofar as the present has come to engulf both the future and the past? If so, what are we to make of the recent revolutionary activity around the world, from Latin America to the entire Mediterranean region, the Occupy movement and beyond? What is the status of revolutionary activity in the present, and does it require a reworking of the very category of revolution?

Our approach will be resolutely interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on the fields of philosophy, political science, sociology, history, and media studies. Our primary methodological goal will be to bridge the gap between theoretical reflection and concrete analysis of the contemporary political situation. We will also stress the importance of comparison between different cultural contexts by relying on an international perspective and regularly challenging parochial cultural assumptions. Finally, this course will directly engage with our immediate context, and we will often discuss and critically reflect on current events as they unfold.

## REQUIRED MATERIAL

1. Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1978).
2. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Books, 2006).
3. Alain Badiou, *Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (Verso Books, 2012).
4. Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (Verso Books, 2012).
5. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso Books, 2012).
6. Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (Zuccotti Park Press, 2012).
7. Essays and articles will be made available to you electronically via Blackboard. **It is required that you print or photocopy them so that you can bring them to every class.**
8. It is highly recommended that the students keep abreast of current events through the course of the semester by consulting and comparing various media sources (conservative and progressive, American and foreign, etc.). In addition to well-known sources of news (NY Times, Washington Post, major network news, BBC, etc.), it is recommended that you look at alternative sources like [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org), [www.english.aljazeera.net](http://www.english.aljazeera.net), [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com), [www.http://mondediplo.com](http://www.http://mondediplo.com), <http://www.counterpunch.org>, [www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org) and [www.informationclearinghouse.info](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info).

## REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and Participation – 15%.** The class will be conducted as a community-based seminar so it will be very important for you to come to class on time having engaged with the required material. This means taking notes on the readings, preparing informed questions and comments, and reviewing the material after class discussion. A cursory, passive overview of the material will prove insufficient. In addition, you should make sure that you organize your time wisely since some sessions will require more out-of-class work than others.
2. **Mid-Term Paper – 25%.** You will be expected to write a 5-page double-spaced mid-term paper that critically responds to and engages with one of the readings or films in the first half of the semester. You will need to carefully review the material you choose and consult other relevant sources. The aim of this exercise is to have you succinctly present a core theme or issue and carefully work through its implications via rigorous philosophical argumentation and precise textual analysis. You can choose any of the required material from the first half of the semester.
3. **Oral Presentation – 25%.** You will be required to make a 10-minute presentation on a current event relevant to the overall theme of the course. You will need to carefully review the required material for the session that you choose and consult other relevant sources. Your presentation should present the current event, situate it in relationship to major issues in the seminar, and provide theoretical guidelines for understanding and interpreting the event in question.
4. **Final Project – 35%.** You will be expected to write a final research paper. Precise guidelines will be provided.

## POLICY ON E-MAILS AND COMPUTER USE

1. I will try to respond to all e-mails in a reasonable time frame. As a general rule of thumb, this means that you will get a response within 24 to 48 hours. If you send an email over the weekend or late at night, do not expect to receive a response back immediately, even if you deem it to be an emergency.
2. I will **not grant extensions via e-mail** except in extreme circumstances.

3. In general, I will not provide my lecture notes or other material that you could have obtained in class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain this material from the other students.
4. I will not provide information already available in the syllabus via e-mail.
5. **No computers** will be allowed in the classroom unless you obtain explicit consent from the instructor.
6. **No cell phones or other technological devices** will be allowed in the classroom unless you obtain explicit consent from the instructor.

#### **POLICY ON GRADE CHANGES, LATE WORK AND ABSENCES**

1. I will not change grades based on oral negotiation. If you feel that I have overlooked something in my grading policy, please submit a detailed written explanation of what has been overlooked along with the graded copy of your work.
2. **No late work will be accepted.** You will only be able to make up for late work in the most extreme cases, and preferably when you have let me know ahead of time.

#### **POLICY ON PLAGIARISM AND RESEARCH RESOURCES**

Any form of plagiarism is unacceptable. This includes, but is not limited to, referencing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without proper citation as well as handing in someone else's work as your own. This also includes using any part of an Internet resource without proper citation. Any assignment that is at all plagiarized will automatically receive an F and, depending on the circumstances, may constitute grounds for failing the course. Moreover, every incident will be reported to the university and could constitute grounds for expulsion. For a good list of resources on what counts as plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarizing see <http://directory.google.com/Top/Reference/Education/Educators/Plagiarism/Prevention/>

You should be aware of the fact that not all of the information on the Internet is equally accurate. This is why I strongly encourage library over Internet research and require that you do most of your work in the library (which includes using its digital databases). Of course, you should also be wary of the quality of published sources and try to get a feel for what is reliable (based on the author's name, the publisher, journals' reputations, etc.). If you have any questions regarding the quality of Internet or published resources, please contact me.

**PROGRAM** (subject to change)

#### **Section I: The Post-Revolutionary Era?**

**Session 1 (8/28)** Jürgen Habermas, "The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies."

#### **Section II: The Historical Emergence of Modern Concept of Revolution**

**Session 2 (8/30)** Raymond Williams. *Keywords* ("Reform" and "Revolution").  
Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution* (Introduction).

*Optional Film Series: The Revolution* (History Channel), 2006.

**Session 3 (9/4)** Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution* (Chapter 1).

*Optional Film Series: The Revolution* (History Channel), 2006.

**Session 4 (9/6)** Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution* (Chapter 2).

*Film: The French Revolution* (History Channel), 2005.

**Session 5 (9/11)** Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution* (Chapter 3).

Reinhart Koselleck, "Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution," *Futures Past*.  
Film: Andrzej Wajda. *Danton*, 1983.

### **Section III: Marxism and Revolution**

**Session 6 (9/13)** Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

**Session 7 (9/18)** Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," "The Coming Upheaval," "Class Struggle and Mode of Production," "The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution," "After the Revolution" and "Europocentric World Revolution," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 143-145, 218-220, 522-524, 542-548, 676-677.

*Optional Film:* Peter Watkins. *La Commune*, 2000.

**Session 8 (9/20)** V.I. Lenin. *Essential Works of Lenin*, p. 1-10, 271-285, 333-349.

*Film:* Sergei Eisenstein. *October*, 1928.

**Session 9 (9/25)** Leon Trotsky, "Introduction" and "What Is the Permanent Revolution?," *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 125-143, 276-281.

*Film:* Chris Marker. *A Grin without a Cat*, 1977.

**Session 10 (9/27)** Mao Tse-tung, *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* (chapter 2):

[http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_23.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm)

*Film:* Chris Marker. *A Grin without a Cat*, 1977.

### **Section IV: Anarchism and Revolution**

**Session 11 (10/2)** Peter Kropotkin, "Revolutionary Government."

*Film:* Steven Fischler and Joel Sucher. *Anarchism in America*, 2006.

**Session 12 (10/4)** Rosa Luxemburg, "Social Reform or Revolution."

*Mid-Term Paper Due*

**Session 13 (10/9)** Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation."

### **Section V: Reworking Revolution in the 20th Century**

**Session 14 (10/11)** Antonio Gramsci. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, p. 246-274.

*Film:* Emile de Antonio. *Underground*, 1976.

**Semester Recess (10/15-10/19)**

**Session 15 (10/23)** Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Anticipated Revolution."

*Film:* Jean-Luc Godard, *La Chinoise*, 1967.

**Session 16 (10/25)** Michel Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: 'Until Now,'" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*.

Martin Luther King. "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," 1967: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC1Ru2p8OfU>

**Session 17 (10/30)** Frantz Fanon, "Decolonization and Independence."

Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation."

Black Panther Party, "The Ten-Point Program":

<http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm>

*Film:* Göran Olsson, *The Black Power Mixtape*, 2011.

### **Section VI: Revolutions in the Current Conjuncture**

**Session 18 (11/1)** Enrique Doussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, p. xv-xvii, 94-113.

*Film:* John Pilger. *The War on Democracy*, 2007.

- Session 19 (11/6)** Paul Mason. *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (Introduction and Chapter 1).  
*Video: Year of Global Uprisings, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street: A Special Look Back at 2011:*  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/2/year\\_of\\_global\\_uprisings\\_from\\_the](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/2/year_of_global_uprisings_from_the)  
*Optional Videos: The Death of Fear and The End of a Dictator:*  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2011/04/20114483425914466.html>  
*Optional Films: 60 Minutes - Revolution – CBS and Frontline: Revolution in Cairo:*  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7346812n>  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/>  
*Optional Videos for Sessions 19-24:*  
[http://www.democracynow.org/topics/arab\\_spring](http://www.democracynow.org/topics/arab_spring)  
[http://www.democracynow.org/topics/rolling\\_rebellions](http://www.democracynow.org/topics/rolling_rebellions)  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12813859>  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2011/04/20114483425914466.html>
- Session 20 (11/8)** Paul Mason. *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4).  
*Videos: The Fall of Mubarak and The Evolution of Revolutions:*  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2011/04/20114483425914466.html>
- Session 21 (11/13)** Paul Mason. *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (Chapter 6 and Chapter 9).  
*Videos: Libya: Through the Fire and The People Want...:*  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2011/04/20114483425914466.html>
- Session 22 (11/15)** Alain Badiou. *The Rebirth of History*, Introduction-Chapter 4.  
*Film: May Ying Welsh. Shouting in the Dark, 2011:*  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/2011/08/201184144547798162.html/>
- Session 23 (11/20)** Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, Chapter 5-Chapter 10.  
*Video: People and Power – The Indignant:*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auSbaPq3Cpk>
- Session 24 (11/27)** Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, Appendices.  
 Slavoj Zizek, "Shoplifters of the World Unite":  
<http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite>  
*Videos: Inside Story - Greece: Bailouts, Austerity and Protests and People and Power – English Riots: People, Police and Politicians:*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz1ebJ8mVpk>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0H1LdOIqec>  
*Optional Videos:*  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/6/29/inside\\_greeces\\_general\\_strike\\_video\\_report](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/6/29/inside_greeces_general_strike_video_report)  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/7/1/hundreds\\_of\\_thousands\\_of\\_greek\\_and](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/7/1/hundreds_of_thousands_of_greek_and)  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/10/over\\_1\\_000\\_arrested\\_in\\_uk](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/10/over_1_000_arrested_in_uk)
- Session 25 (11/29)** David Harvey, *Rebel Cities* (Preface and Chapter 5).

Videos:

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/18/its\\_people\\_power\\_a\\_s\\_tens\\_of](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/18/its_people_power_a_s_tens_of)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4VLYGfGDZg> (*Fault Lines - History of an Occupation*)

Optional Videos:

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/25/protesters\\_expect\\_100\\_000\\_in\\_madison](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/25/protesters_expect_100_000_in_madison)

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/25/wisconsins\\_uprising\\_a\\_guided\\_tour\\_of](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/25/wisconsins_uprising_a_guided_tour_of)

[http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/30/ahead\\_of\\_may\\_day\\_david\\_harvey](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/30/ahead_of_may_day_david_harvey)

[http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2012/5/1/part\\_2\\_david\\_harvey\\_on\\_rebel\\_cities\\_and\\_occupy\\_wall\\_street](http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2012/5/1/part_2_david_harvey_on_rebel_cities_and_occupy_wall_street)

Optional Videos for Sessions 25-28:

<http://www.democracynow.org/topics/protests>

[http://www.democracynow.org/topics/occupy\\_wall\\_street](http://www.democracynow.org/topics/occupy_wall_street)

[http://www.democracynow.org/topics/us\\_labor\\_protests](http://www.democracynow.org/topics/us_labor_protests)

<http://www.democracynow.org/topics/wisconsin>

**Session 26 (12/4)**

David Harvey, *Rebel Cities* (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

Video:

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/10/occupy\\_wall\\_street\\_emerges\\_as\\_first](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/10/occupy_wall_street_emerges_as_first)

Film: *Occupy Wall Street: We Are The 99%*, 2012 (if available).

Optional Videos:

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/6/naomi\\_klein\\_protesters\\_are\\_seeking\\_change](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/6/naomi_klein_protesters_are_seeking_change)

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/24/dr\\_cornel\\_west\\_w\\_e\\_are\\_in](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/24/dr_cornel_west_w_e_are_in)

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/16/as\\_occupy\\_enters\\_third\\_month\\_a](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/16/as_occupy_enters_third_month_a)

**Session 27 (12/6)**

Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* ("Editor's Note" and "Occupy").

Videos:

[http://www.democracynow.org/2012/5/25/maple\\_spring\\_nearly\\_1\\_000\\_arrested](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/5/25/maple_spring_nearly_1_000_arrested)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gen6MiuKm0w> (*The Stream - Canada's Maple Spring*)

**Session 28 (12/13)**

Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* ("InterOccupy" and "Occupying Foreign Policy").

**Final Project Due (TBA)**