

Course Syllabus: Anthropology 189 From Biopower to Bio Design

Fall 2013. Professor Paul Rabinow

Thursday 29 August: Some of the themes of the class are introduced.

Tuesday 3 September: The class focuses on a short text by Bertolt Brecht entitled "Writing the truth: Five Difficulties." Much of the class is spent working out what the world was like when Brecht wrote this essay. Students mentioned many things that occurred in 1935. Professor Rabinow then close off the class by asking the students to consider what type of figure of anthropos is configured by the qualities Brecht evokes in the essay: cunning, keenness, skill, judgment, and courage. The importance of reading thoughtfull and slowly was impressed upon the students.

[A first version of the Brecht essay was published in the *Pariser Tageblatt*, on December 12 1934, under a different title: "Dichter sollen die Warheir schreiben" (Poets should tell the truth). The final version of the essay was published in 1935 by another Parisian magazine run by German exiles, called *Unsere Zeit* (Volume VIII, No. 2-3, April 1935) under the title "Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit." The final version of the essay was first translated into English in 1948 by Richard Winston, in a book called *Art and Action*, which was the tenth anniversary edition of a magazine called *Twice a Year*.

Thursday 5 September: We began the class by talking about some of the ways in which questions of life seem to be at stake in contemporary debates. Professor Rabinow brought in two articles, from the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The latter dealt with a perilous evacuation of chickens condemned to the gas chamber. It was juxtaposed with an article from the *New York Times* on the battle over food stamps, and a chilling front-page image of a group of soldiers in Syria about to be executed. This image was later discovered to be from 2012. All these articles, along with a recipe for what one might do with the chickens (*la poule au pot*) can be found on the wiki. The students then broke into groups, and each group took apart one of Brecht's five difficulties with writing the truth. The summary of this group work is on a PowerPoint that could be found in the resources section. For next Tuesday, the class is to read a text by Foucault, to be found in the Resources tab.

Tuesday 10 September: Class focused on the beginning of an interview Michel Foucault gave to Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino in 1977, which in English is called 'Truth and Power.' Professor Rabinow focused our attention on the differences between Foucault's approach and what one could term ideology critique, the latter for Foucault assumes a referent (a real substrate to which the ideology of false consciousness can be opposed: for the Marxists, this is political economy, but one could imagine others), a subject (some enduring element that persists) and an opposition between truth and falsehood. Instead, Foucault will suggest, "At this level it's not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why the régime undergoes a global modification."

Thursday 12 September: The class attended to the portion of Foucault's 1977 interview that Foucault wrote after the interview. It centers on the exhaustion of the universal intellectual: the intellectual who speaks truths about everything, and, in its Marxist guise, finds, in the particular, the means of advancing the universal class (aka. The proletariat). The class began by surveying some contemporary intellectuals in America. Attention was drawn to the positioning of people with expertise in science, who then go on to speak in the public realm. Further discussion

attended to the particular intellectual. In particular (sorry), Professor Rabinow emphasized that the particular intellectuals speaks not to a universal truth, but to the general, which is not a category of proposition true for an 'all'. The particular intellectual attends not simply to the truth of a given statement, but the way those truths circulate in politics and economics.

Tuesday 17 September: We began to read a chapter of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, the 'Right of Death and Power over Life', which is the one place in his published works that he mentions biopower. The class analyzed the first paragraph of Foucault's chapter, paying particular attention to what it might mean to 'dispose of life'. We also contextualized Foucault's approach, as one of a rigorous historical inquiry, and not the practice of theory.

Thursday 19 September: We continued to read the 'Right of Death and Power over Life.' Students were set an assignment to find instances of deductive and positive power. Emphasis was placed on whether positive power, biopower, and letting live were adequate concepts to explain life in a post-social world. Through a proliferation of instances on the wiki, the classes attention was drawn to the relationship between the historical shifts Foucault is attending to, and the way life as a category is imbricated in contemporary debates.

Tuesday 24 September We continued to work on the 'Right of Death and Power over Life.' Professor Rabinow laid out the two poles that Foucault discusses (p.6 of the PDF) through which power over life developed: the disciplinary pole (an anatomo-politics of the human body), and a regulatory politics focused on the species body and populations (a bio-politics of the population). Group work was begun on these two poles, and their imbrication in several contemporary situations.

Thursday 26 September The class then moved on to focus further on the development of bio-political administration. Professor Rabinow emphasized the differences between norm, normalization, and what some in the anthropology department have called 'cultural norms.' Attention was paid to the development of the techniques required (including statistics) for such operations.

Tuesday 1 October There was no class today, due to an explosion on campus.

Thursday 3 October We finished discussing the 'Right of Death and Power over Life' in this class. We focused on the following rich paragraph from Foucault: "Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention." Attention was paid to the way in which life emerges as a historical question.

Tuesday 8 October: With Professor Rabinow absent, Joshua Craze took the class through an essay written by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose. We first attempted to answer the question: What is a concept? We distinguished between the use of the concept in Agamben, and in Negri, before placing both of these authors in the context of Italian thought, and in particular, in terms of debates in Italian Marxism over the concept of sovereignty. We then analyzed the relationship between empiricism and conceptual work in Rabinow and Rose' essay, and studied the criteria for biopower given in the text. Having analyzed the first word of the title (Biopower), we then began to analyze the second word: today, and what contemporary configurations of biopower might look like.

Thursday 10 October: Professor Rabinow returns! We discussed the difference between theory and inquiry, and emphasized the extent to which theory correlates to examples (we find examples of a theory in the world), which differ significantly from cases, into which into inquiries, to find out about the world, and the adequacy of one's concepts. Very diagrammatically, one can say that a concept is an idea that has a history (biopower, for instance, has a history of people who have used the concept, situations in which it made sense to use the concept, and a social and intellectual world in which the concept arose), and that is used to inquire into a situation. This inquiry may then lead to the recalibration (or abandonment) of the concept. We then broke into groups to discuss some instances that may (or may not) be instances of biopower.

Tuesday 15 October The mid-term was assigned in class, and Professor Rabinow then allowed the class to go and work on their mid-terms.

Thursday 17 October As the class had been occupied writing the mid-term exam; this class was devoted to watching Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*. In part, this was to emphasize the historicity of questions of the Human Park: we find, in this 1970s evocation of 1798, questions of the relationship between man and animal, and the proper cultivation of the human.

Tuesday 22 October We began the class by finishing our viewing of *L'Enfant Sauvage*, and Professor Rabinow gave a useful commentary on some of themes to be found in the film. Professor Rabinow and Joshua Craze, who marked the mid-terms, then gave a commentary on some of the problematic assumptions in some of the answers, and we discuss writing style and useful writing exercises, culminating with one of the students reading out their paper for evaluation.

Thursday 24 October We began reading an essay by Paul Rabinow, entitled *Artificiality and Enlightenment: From Sociobiology to Biosociality*. Much of this initial class was devoted to laying out some of the history of synthetic biology, which Professor Rabinow did through charting some of his own important interventions in the field.

Tuesday 29 October We devoted this class to thinking through some of the recent manifestations of biosociality, and interrogating the useful schema that Deleuze presents us with of four 'force-forms': infinite, finitude and the 'fini-illimité' – in which previously finite material is taken as the ground for a potentially infinite elaboration of possible configurations of the human.

Thursday 31 October We began to do group work, dividing the class into four themes: Biosociality, Biosecurity, GMOs, and a group dedicated to looking at Peter Sloterdijk's text *Rules for the Human Park*. These groups would each investigate contemporary instances that problematized the concepts at hand.

Tuesday 5 November We began class with a discussion of another of Professor Rabinow's essays, *Galton's Regret*, and spoke about the importance of grounding our inquiries into the claims of techno-utopians.

Thursday 7 November We continued our discussion of Galton's *Regret*, and the groups continued to work on their own projects.

Tuesday 12 November: Due to a Labinar workshop, Professor Rabinow and Joshua Craze were unavailable, and the class watched another Truffaut film that brings up many of the issues we have discussed in this class, *Fahrenheit 451*.

Thursday 14 November: The Biosociality group presented their preliminary findings, focused on questions of fairness and the athlete, as well as questions of modification of military capacity. Professor Rabinow emphasized the long history that must be attended to when we think about modifying the capacities of the human.

Tuesday 19 November: The Biosecurity group then made a presentation, focused on tracking some elements of Avian flu.

Thursday 21 November: The GMO group presented its work.

Tuesday 26 November: The final Sloterdijk group began presenting its work.

Thursday 28 November: Thanksgiving | No class

Tuesday 3 December: The final part of the Sloterdijk group will present its work, and Joshua Craze and Professor Rabinow will offer some closing thoughts.

Thursday 5 December: Final exam.