Professor Buck-Morss Post-Democracy? Spring 2016

GC Room 6421 Wednesday 2-4pm

In a US election year, this seminar considers the question: Are We “Post-Democracy”? Is national democracy a viable political form 200 years after its one-time revolutionary role? Can party politics deliver representation of, by, and for “the people”? Is it possible to believe in democracy when, after electing a 2-term Black President, a social movement is required to insist that Black Lives Matter? Is “bringing democracy to Europe” a viable project, when victories in democratic elections have not changed the course of economic austerity, and the identity of Europe is challenged by half a million refugees? Does global capitalism vitiate popular rule? Does neo-liberalism undermine it? Given vast migrations of human beings, and given our interconnectedness ecologically, economically, and technologically, how should “the people” be defined? Is state sovereignty democracy’s friend or foe? Has the democratic goal of national liberation failed the post-colonial world? What are the potentials of social media, anarchist practices, and trans-local solidarities for redefining democracy? We will consider new political movements (Arab Spring, Syriza/Indignados, OWS, Black Lives Matter) and read recent works in political theory relevant to this set of questions (W. Brown, D. McKesson, K. Ross, J. Rancière, R. Rorty, G. Agamben, J .Derrida).

(\*) = recommended for purchase. [Weeks 8 – 14 of this syllabus may be revised as we proceed].

Week 1. INTRODUCTION (Feb 3)

Week 2. THE PROBLEM (Feb 10)

(\*) Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution,* especially intro and Chapter 1 (9-45); “Educating Human Capital,” (175-200); “Losing Bare Democracy” (200-222).

Week 3. THE PEOPLE (Feb 17)

(\*) Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy.*

Week 4. PARTICIPATION (Feb 24)

(\*) Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury*

Week 5. CIVIL WAR (Mar 2)

(\*) Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*

Week 6. TERROR (Mar 9)

François Furet, “The Terror,” *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*

Leon Trotsky “Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism”

[file:///Users/susanbuckmorss/Desktop/Leon%20Trotsky:%20Why%20Marxists%20Oppose%20Individual%20Terrorism%20(1911).html](file:///Users/susanbuckmorss/Desktop/Leon%20Trotsky%3A%20Why%20Marxists%20Oppose%20Individual%20Terrorism%20%281911%29.html)

Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom*: “The Totality on the Road to Self-Realization,” 39-48; “Spirit and the Course of the World,” 59-68,

Week 7. CONSTITUENT POWER/DESTITUENT POWER (Mar 16)

Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence” pdf

Giorgio Agamben, “Elements for a Theory of Destituent Power” pdf

Theodor W. Adorno, “Constitution Problems,” *History and Freedom,* pp. 19-28.

Week 8. VISIBILITY (Mar 23)

Rabih Mrouré, *The Pixellated Revolution* pdf

Jodi Dean, “Communicative Capitalism” pdf

Elisabeth Weber, “Ages of Cruelty: Jacques Derrida, Fethi Benslama, and their Challenges to Psychoanalysis” pdf

Week 9. MID-TERM PAPER/DISCUSSION 5-7 pp. (Mar 30)

Week 10. DIRECT ACTION – DEMOCRATIC ACTION (Apr 6)

BLM; Occupy movements; Indignados; Arab Spring; Greek elections spring 2015; Jeremy Corbin British Lsbor; US 2016 electoral politics (current reading/website suggestions appreciated)

DeRay McKesson, blog

Erik Swyngedouw, 2011. “Interrogating Post-Democratization: Reclaiming Egalitarian Political Spaces.” *Political Geography*  30 (7): 370-380.

Sitrin, ed., *Horizontalism*. excerpts from activists in Latin American.

Week 11. WORLD WAR AS CIVIL WAR? A GLOBAL PUBLIC SPHERE? (Apr 13)

John Rawls: 50 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/50-years-after-hiroshima-2>

“Last Words from Richard Rorty” *Progressive* June 2007: [www.progressive.org/mag\_postel10607](http://www.progressive.org/mag_postel10607)

Jürgen Habermas, “European Nation-State and the Pressures of Globalization” pdf

WEEK 12. REFUGEES and CITIZENS (Apr 20)

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/10/refugee-crisis-europe-zizek-habermas-singer-greece-syria-academia/>

Agata Bielek Robson “Marrying the Speech of Strangers”

Derrida excerpts from *Monolingualism of the Other or, The Prosthesis of Origin*

Slavoj Zizek, “A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism” pdf.

WEEK 13 SPRING VACATION (Apr 27)

WEEK 14. APOCALYPSE and the ANTHROPOCENE (May 4)

Erik Swyngedouw. 2010. “Apocalypse Forever?” Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change.” *Theory, Culture & Society*  (27) (2-3): 213-232.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” Critical Inquiry 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 197-222.

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter:* “The Force of Things” (1-19); “Stem Cells and the Culture of Life” (82-93)( “Political Ecologies,” (94-109).

Week 15: CAN THE DEMOS BE GLOBAL? (May 11)

Adorno on Universal History (*History and Freedom,* pp. 79-114.)

Benjamin on Progress (Paralipomena from “On the Concept of History”)

Benjamin on Pedagogy (Edward Fuchs; first part)

FINAL PAPER, 12-15 pp.