

EN 264: Essay 2 questions, 2015-16

An essay of 5,000 words – or 2,500 words for the 50/50 option – is due on Tuesday, 3 May 2016 (Week 2 of Term 3). As before, the following topics are intended to offer only suggested directions for your thinking and research; feel free to adapt or develop your own topic in consultation with me beforehand (titles should be confirmed by Friday, 8 April 2016).

1. Nancy Fraser argues, contrary to some theories, that capitalism does not depend on the ever-increasing commodification of social life, since it needs non-commodified sectors to support it. How do you understand this assertion in tandem with Arlie Hochschild's documentation of the drive toward the 'commercialization of human feeling' in *The Managed Heart*?
2. "Human beings do not simply live, animals live" (Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*). What roles does 'nature' play in Mies's conception of accumulation?
3. How were 'women, nature and colonies' externalized from the (re)productive relations of society during capitalism's early phase, according to Mies? In what ways is this externalization at work today?
4. Silvia Federici argues that three social roles associated primarily with women – prostitution, midwifery and witchcraft – were integral to the emergence of a specifically capitalist form of patriarchy in the early modern period. Examine one of these roles in depth as a prologue to assessing Federici's thesis.
5. Analyze a cultural text – novel, film, video game, etc. – through the theoretical lens offered by social reproduction theory. How does the relation between paid and unpaid work inform the text you've chosen?
6. Federici argues, "There is a continuum between the computer worker and the worker in the Congo who digs coltan with his hands trying to seek out a living after being expropriated, pauperized, by repeated rounds of structural adjustment and repeated theft of his community's land and natural sources" ("Precarious Labour"). What is the nature of the continuum Federici posits here? What implications does it have for a politics of 'immaterial labour'?
7. Write an essay analyzing an example of advertising from the standpoint of (1) affective labour, and/or (2) world-ecology.
8. Following Daniel Bell, Arlie Hochschild argues that the growth of the service sector means that 'communication and encounter' are at the heart of work relationships today; at the same time, the processes of modernization mean that such functions are increasingly being automated. How do you read the consequences of this apparent contradiction?
9. "The 'human-dominated' geologic epoch [] seems much more a product of chance and unconsciousness than of a proper control of the global material cycles. ... 'They do not know it, but they do it' – this is what Marx said about the fetishized social activity mediated by commodities, and this is the key to a critical understanding of the

Anthropocene” (Daniel Cunha). Discuss the apparent paradox by which anthropogenic climate change escapes human control.

10. “We don’t yet have an adequate language to talk and act and analyze as if humans and the rest of nature mutually constitute each other” (Jason W. Moore, “Wall Street is a Way of Organising Nature”). Write an essay analyzing the discursive inadequacies to which Moore draws attention, and/or explore examples (in culture and discourse) where these limits are creatively overcome.

11. Moore suggests that “science, power and culture” are crucial to capital’s ability to appropriate unpaid work, thereby creating the conditions for producing Cheap Nature. Explore the role of culture in this regard. Can culture contest, as well as ratify, the means of this appropriation? How?

12. Recalling the materialist analyses of social-media technology from term 1, write an essay on the ‘co-constitutive’ role of social media in the production of the (worldwide) web of life. How might we read online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as world-ecological?