

## **Hurford Seminar- Capitalist Mythologies: Deconstructing Western Normalcy**

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### **Description**

Mythology is constructed by narratives perpetuated by culture that are rarely questioned and often invisible. Everybody's lives, whether they are aware of it or not, are guided by mythology. It is what makes the human world impossible to be viewed objectively. Capitalist mythology is by far the most dangerous of all, for the power it holds in the modern world has the ability to disguise itself as fact. When ideology is directed to be taken as fact, systems of power and inequality go uncontested. Scholars of the social world have constructed and deconstructed structures of oppression since the dawn of the field, yet the depth of cultural mythology is hidden in human cognition and perception. The ability to criticize and question ideologies such as those guiding indigenous American, African, or Middle Eastern thought is simple when those with the privilege of speculating about "others" belong to Capitalist power. Academic fields have long failed to turn the eye inward and have thus remained part of the system that dictates what is the "correct" way of thinking.

A self-reflective and transdisciplinary approach is taken to illuminate the invisible hand of Capitalist mythologies throughout the syllabus for this seminar. This seminar is meant to open the conversation for students across disciplines to examine the cultural mythologies underlying hegemonic ideologies residing within their studies. Each mythological construct examined will be supplemented by pieces highlighting traditional indigenous thought that has been demeaned and labeled untrue so as to justify their degradation by Capitalist systems of power.

This seminar is most likely to follow the common 5-session structure similar to seminars before. The first session will open the seminar with an introduction to the broad concepts, while the following sessions will cover broadly functioning Capitalist myths of (1) the self, (2) the Earth, (3) Time, and (4) Humanity. The goal underlying the criticality of this seminar is to, above all, give way to optimism and open mindedness. Capitalist mythologies construct a world that necessitates inequality so as to perpetuate it. Deconstructing mythologies that have caused harm works to counter the generations of cultural destruction done in the name of civilization and industrialization.

This seminar takes a perspective that students studying social sciences— namely anthropology, political science, or psychology— would be largely familiar with, yet it is applied heavily across an array of disciplines. Students in the arts and humanities would be able to explore the ideas of power within the role of authorship and the Capitalist promotion of hyperindividualism and humanism in artistry. A student studying environmental science would be able to explore how philosophies of the Capitalist construction of the earth as an exploitable "standing reserve" directly contributes to economic justification for climate change. Although this array of content appears from this summary to be broadly scattered, the intrinsic connections between the fundamental mythologies of Western Capitalism and the disciplines studied in higher education will be illuminated through the structuring of this syllabus.

### **Preliminary Syllabus:**

A tentative idea in addition to the sessions is traveling to various locations within Philadelphia. Situating the learning on-site will force us to reckon with our thought processes upon interaction with the world.

**Potential Guest Speaker:** Kim Tallbear, Indigenous professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples, Technoscience and Environment

**Session 1: Seminar Introduction**– (Re)defining Capitalism and mythology as concepts

- Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 1970.
- Baysha, Olga. “Deconstructing Mythologies” in *The Mythologies of Capitalism and the End of the Soviet Project*. pp. 15-28. 2014.
- Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism*. Ch. 1-3, pp. 1-20. 2009.
- McLean, C. and Syed, M. “Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Identity Development in Context” 2015.
- Melamed, Jodi. “Racial Capitalism” in *Critical Ethnic Studies*. Pp. 76-85. 2015.

**Session 2: The Construction of the Self**– Humanism, individualism, commodification

- Disciplinary highlights: English, art history, psychology
- Possible trip: **Philadelphia Museum of Art**
- Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author” 1977.
- Davenport, D. and Lloyd, G. *Rugged Individualism: Dead or Alive?* 2017. (Introduction only!)
- Feher, Michael. “Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital” 2009.
- Kwan, V. and Herrmann, S. “The Interplay Between Culture and Personality” 2015
- Sharp, Lesley. “The Commodification of the Body and its Parts” 2000.
- Renaissance/ Baroque/ Neoclassical portraits (focuses on Albrecht Durer and Rembrandt Van Rijn)

**Session 3: The World is a Standing Reserve**– Climate change, Enframing, Indigenous perceptions

- Disciplinary highlights: environmental science, political science, philosophy
- Possible trip: **Examining Haverford College Campus & Arboretum!**
- The Ghost in Your Phone– Throughline Podcast <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/31/1179117816/the-ghost-in-your-phone>
- Clapp, Jennifer. “Distancing of Waste: Overconsumption in a Global Economy” 2002.
- Grande, Sandy. “Red Land, White Power” in *Red Pedagogy*, pp. 93-128. 2015.
- Heidegger, Martin. “The Question Concerning Technology” 1977.
- Hoshi, Shinichi. “He-y, come on ou-t!” 1971.

**Session 4: Time Moves in a Straight Line**– Questions of linearity, progress, and the past

- Disciplinary highlights: comparative literature (focus on science fiction), anthropology
- Booth, Newell S. “Time and Change in African Traditional Thought.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 7, no. 2 (1975): 81–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1594752>.
- Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. 1979.
- Sørensen, Majken Jul, and Kristin Wiksell. “Constructive Resistance to the Dominant Capitalist Temporality.” *Sociologisk Forskning* 56, no. 3/4 (2019): 253–74. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26840570>.
- Wojtkowski, Ł. and Jeziński, M. “Nostalgia Commodified” 2016.

**Session 5: Humanity is Chaos**– Locating humanity and human nature, wrapping up the seminar

- Disciplinary highlights: anthropology, political science, philosophy
- Kim Tallbear– “Science and Whiteness” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzVKVbG4S4>
- When Things Fall Apart– Throughline Podcast <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1151023362>
- Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*. 2009. (Introduction only!)
- Maeshiro, Kelly. “The Capitalist Religion and the Production of Idols” 2016.
- Tallbear, Kim. “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming” 2019.

**Possible Final Trip:** Independence Hall + The President’s House + Eastern State Penitentiary