

EAST 525 Critical Area Studies in Asia

EAST 525 Critical Area Studies in Asia Wednesdays, 2:35pm-5:30pm (13 JAN – 14 APR, inclusive) ONLINE	Professor Gavin Walker email: gavin.walker@mcgill.ca office hours: by appointment
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Description

Area is a quintessentially modern form of the classification and ordering of the world, and is inseparable from the advent of the modern state. Prior to the beginnings of the modern state forms of organization of territory and population, we cannot speak about the sense of “area” that we mean. “Area” as a form of classification is not something primal or originary, it does not precede the state – it is important to distinguish area as an epistemological-political technique from the common-sense or everyday understanding of area as simple and self-evident spatial unit of measurement that is bounded and gathered improvisationally in terms of certain given social circumstances. Rather, we want to give a specific social and historical meaning to “area,” that is, “area” as it appears in the phrase “area studies.” Area in this sense indicates the undercurrent or substratum of the territorial grounding of the population through techniques of unification and semiotic effects such as “culture,” “language,” “ethnicity,” and so forth that are demanded by the modern nation-state for its own justification. Area has never been a substance, but rather an intermediary zone of grounding between “the people” and “territoriality.” What sustains the form of area studies is the imaginary relationship among projected positionalities in terms of which the identities of the observer and the observed are figured out. In other words, area is a technology according to which elements – which may or may not have been thoroughly heterogeneous to each other – are gathered and redeployed as a point of reference for a variety of social – racial, class, religious, gender, and so forth - distinctions. At the historical juncture where the future of area studies is most uncertain, the history of area studies in knowledge production must be revisited from this perspective. We will address the initial formation of area studies in North America, but we are not overlooking its precedent histories – how area studies was reconstituted out of the European and Japanese studies of the colonies, the field of geopolitics, and imperial ethnography. Relations to contemporary theoretical analysis of comparison, the formation of the humanities, Marxist analysis, and critical theory in its broad sense will be explored.

General Topics and Reading Assignments

Since we are online in the academic year 2020-21, this upper-division class will have a different form than usual. Since we are a significantly international student body and we must attempt to accommodate different time zones, it is impossible to maintain constant ‘live’ discussion. Instead, we will have the lecture component of the course via video, which will be posted each week by 2:30pm. Please watch the video lecture to accompany your readings. It may be possible to have certain ‘live’ sessions on Zoom for discussion –

it is important to note that, per McGill Faculty of Arts policy, these sessions are not mandatory. It may be impossible for all of you to participate in these. In this sense, this class will be a quite self-directed reading class, in which the bulk of your experience will be reading and writing. Please consider this when deciding to take the class. For more information on the orientation of the class, you may consult my profile at <http://www.gavinwalker.ca> to give you a sense of the theoretical and historical direction of the course.

Evaluation and Grading

1) Weekly response papers of 1 page, responding to the readings, should be turned in by email, beginning Week 2. These are intended to provide you with a space to respond in concrete terms to the readings, and to build up your own archive of notes and reactions to the texts. (50% in total). These are not graded, but simply given a check (if done), and a zero (if not).

2) A paper, on a topic related to area studies, its theoretical and historical constitution, or a particular aspect of its critique and future, of approximately 10 pages (50%), due by email in the last week of the term.

Required texts:

The Cultures of Globalization, eds. F Jameson and M Miyoshi (Duke, 1998)
Learning Places: Afterlives of Area Studies, ed Harootunian and Miyoshi (Duke, 2003).
The End of Area, eds. G Walker and N Sakai (Duke, 2019).
J Fabian, *Time and the Other* (Columbia, 1983).
A Badiou, *Ethics* (Verso, 2001).

Weekly Schedule **All readings are posted on myCourses**

WEEKLY SCHEDULE TBA

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information). In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site

www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest). Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).