

Non-Law Elective Proposal by Albeena Shakil

Course Title: Realism, Reality and Post-truth

No Pre-requisites

Credits (4)

1. Course Vision

Reality denotes the state of things as they actually are, as opposed to perspectives or ideas about them. Reality is often contrasted with that which is “imaginary, illusory, only in the mind, in dreams, or what is false, fictional, or abstract”. Realism implies a concern with reality, as distinguished from an interest in speculation, fantasy or abstraction. It also denotes “the tendency to view or represent things as they really are or ways of relating to the real.”

This course will examine the evolving terrain of different conceptions of realism and reality since the second half of the 20th century. Some of the key concepts that this course will examine are - magic realism or postcolonial tilism and jadu; absurd reality; marvellous/fabulous/hallucinatory realism; virtual reality, augmented reality; hyper-reality; simulacra or simulation. The course will mainly rely upon popular culture, literary texts, video texts and films in combination with critical readings.

Since 2016, the term ‘post-truth’ has gained traction in public discourse when it became the Oxford Dictionary’s international word of the year. Post-truth is defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Alternate terms, like ‘post-fact’ and ‘post-real’, are also being employed.

The phenomenon of post-truth is associated with a deep crisis of legitimacy or trustworthiness of different public institutions. It is also associated with changes in the pre- and post-Arab Spring social media terrain, wherein authoritarian regimes started focusing considerable efforts towards evolving measures to control the Internet. This debate now involves the complex algorithms and filter bubbles employed by Facebook, Google and other media outlets that, in the name of personalising content, can keep people restricted to respective echo chambers by completely blocking out contending views. The term is also associated with science denial and climate-change denial, and has regained traction since the COVID-19 pandemic.

So, is ‘truth’ in a crisis in our times? Is there a difference between ‘truth’, ‘fact’ and ‘reality’? Does post-truth imply a contention over reality or over ways of relating to reality? How is it different from plain old lying or deception? What is its relation to ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’? Is post-truth relevant to India? This course seeks to explore answers to these questions by tracing the continuities, discontinuities and contentions over realism, reality and post-truth in contemporary times.

2. Course Aims

By the end of the semester, the course seeks to enable students to do the following:

- Understand conceptions of post-truth.
- Develop an understanding of contemporary contentions over fact and truth.
- Identify and comprehend different types of realisms and approaches to reality.
- Apply theoretical knowledge to evaluate everyday examples from popular culture.

3. Teaching Methodology

Learning about each concept will be based on lectures by the faculty on relevant concepts and key terms, accompanied by student presentations and discussions on applying the readings to popular print, video and multimedia texts.

4. Weekly Modules

Weeks 1 & 2: Introduction to Post-truth

Week 3: Fact, Truth and Reality

Week 4: Realism

Week 5: Anti-realism and Absurd Reality

Week 6: Magic realism; Marvellous, Fabulous, Hallucinatory Reality

Week 7: Virtual and Augmented Reality; Hyper-reality/Simulacra/Simulation

Week 8: Jadu, Tilism, Maya

Week 9: Post-truth Debate I – Did Postmodernism Cause Post-truth?

Week 10: Post-truth Debate II – Is Post-truth the same as lying?

Week 11: Post-Truth Debate III – Have Globalisation and Anti-globalisation led to Post-truth or is it a timeless phenomenon?

Week 12: Post-truth Debate IV: Is post-truth similar to Goebbelsian Propaganda?

Week 13: Revisions

Each Module will be discussed with the help of examples such as short stories by Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, Mo Yan, films like *The Matrix*, *Get Out*, *Avengers Series*, *Inception*, *Django Unchained*, *Life of Pi*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, *After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News* and TV series like *X-Files* and *Black Mirror*.

5. Essential Readings (essays and excerpts from books)

- Francis Fukuyama, 'The emergence of a post-fact world,' 2016

- Wendy E Parmet JD and Jeremy Paul JD, 'COVID-19: The First Posttruth Pandemic,' 2020
- Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed*, 1997, pp. ix-xii and 1-8.
- Peter Lamarque, 'Literature and Truth,' 2014.
- Bente Kalsnes, 'Fake News.' 2018.
- Pam Morris, 'Introduction,' *Realism*, 2003, pp. 1-6.
- Raymond Williams, 'Realism', pp. 198-202 and 'Subjective,' pp. 243-47 from *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 2015
- Peter J. McCormick ed., *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrationalism*, 'Is There Still Anything to Say about Reality and Truth?' 1996, pp. 11-28.
- Michael Y. Bennett, Chapter 1- Sections 1-3, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*, 2014.
- Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 'Preface,' 2006.
- Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, 'Introduction,' 2004.
- Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 1984
- Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 1983
- Paul Mealy, *Virtual & Augmented Reality For Dummies*, 2018
- S. Radhakrishnan, 'The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya,' 1914.
- Suhail Ahmed Khan, 'The Symbolic Aspects of Tilism,' 2000.
- Anjali Gera Roy, 'Aja'ib, Ghar'aib, Tilismi Qisse, and Salman Rushdie's Tilismi Realism,' 2016.
- Albeena Shakil, 'The Realism Controversy,' from *Understanding the Novel: A Theoretical Overview*, 2015.
- Lee McIntyre, *Post-truth*, Chapters 1 and 6, 'What is Post-truth?' and 'Did Postmodernism Lead to Post-Truth?', 2018
- Nikil Saval, Globalisation: the rise and fall of an idea that swept the world.' 2017
- Jayson Harsin, 'Post-Truth and Critical Communication Studies, 2018
- Ralph Keyes, *The Post-truth Era*, 2004.
- Leonard W. Doob. 'Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda,' 1950