

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Dr. Brian L. Ott
 Phone: (970) 491-7164
 Email: Brian.Ott@colostate.edu
 Office: Eddy 204
 Office Hrs: M 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Course Information:

TA: Toni-Lee Viney
 TA Phone: (970) 491-3026
 Semester: Spring 2008
 Location: Eddy 212
 Day/Time: M 6:00 – 8:40 PM

❖ **Required Texts:**

- Ott, B. (2007). *The small screen: How television equips us to live in the information age.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Ward, G. (2003). *Teach yourself postmodernism.* Chicago, IL: McGraw-Hill.

❖ **Course Description:**

We live in interesting times! “In fact,” according to Stanley J. Grenz, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Regent College, “we are apparently experiencing a cultural shift that rivals the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages: we are in the midst of a transition from the modern to the postmodern era” (*A Primer on Postmodernism*, p. 2). The shift from modernity to postmodernity reflects a fundamental restructuring of our social world, and thus inflects upon all aspects of our lives both public and private. This course charts the contours, contradictions, and challenges of life in postmodernity. Adopting the perspective of techno-capitalism, it explores how advances in technology and changes in our economic system are altering our daily lives. Although radical change is always disruptive and disorienting, this course does not naïvely deny or pessimistically lament these changes. Rather, it chooses to focus on how a degree in speech communication can be used to confront and address our rapidly emerging postmodern era.

❖ **Course Objective:**

The central aim of “The Capstone Experience” is to assist students in productively utilizing their communication degrees to enrich and enhance their personal, professional, and public lives. By attending carefully to the ways that knowledge of and training in interpersonal, intercultural, organizational, media, and rhetorical studies addresses itself the challenges of life in postmodernity, this course is designed to foster and promote relational competence, professional success, and civic-mindedness. In short, it seeks to equip graduates of the 21st century with the resources to live more meaningful, fulfilling lives at home, at work, and in their local and global communities.

❖ **Assignments:**

4 Quizzes (25 pts each)	100 pts (20%)
Critical Essay #1	100 pts (20%)
Critical Essay #2	100 pts (20%)
Sales Presentation	100 pts (20%)
Career Portfolio	100 pts (20%)
Total Points	500 pts (100%)

❖ **Grading Scale**

- 465-500 pts = A
- 450-464 pts = A-
- 435-449 pts = B+
- 415-434 pts = B
- 400-414 pts = B-
- 350-399 pts = C
- 300-349 pts = D
- 000-299 pts = F

❖ Schedule of Classes at a Glance:

Class Session:	Discussion Topics & Activities:	Readings & Assignments:
January 28	Introduction to Course: The Capstone Experience, 4C and Departmental Assessment	Course Syllabus
February 04	A New Paradigm? Reflections on Modernity, Postmodernity, and Postmodernism	Ott, Ch. 1 and Ward, Ch. 1
11	The Postmodern Condition I: The Rise of the Information Age	Ott, Ch. 2 Quiz #1
18	NO CLASS - WSCA	
25	The Postmodern Condition II: Anxieties of the Information Age	
March 03	Working in the Information Age: Strait Talk from Former Students	Guest Speakers Quiz #2
10	Postmodern Signs I: Aesthetic Exhaustion in Architecture, Art, and Fiction	Ward, Chs. 2 & 3 Due: Critical Essay #1
17	NO CLASS – Spring Break	
24	Postmodern Signs II: Intertextuality in Television, Film, and Music	Ott, Ch. 3 and Ward, Chs. 4 & 5
31	Postmodern Subjects I: Consumerism, Anti-Essentialism, and Constructivism	Ward, Ch. 6 Quiz #3
April 07	Postmodern Subjects II: Fluidity, Multiplicity, and the Schizoid Subject	Ott, Ch. 4 and Ward, Ch. 7
14	Postmodern Ethics and Politics: Language Games and Micropolitics	Ott, Ch. 5 & Ward, Ch. 8 Quiz #4
21	Public Deliberation Forums	Due: Critical Essay #2
28	Sales Presentations	Groups A & B
May 05	Sales Presentations	Groups C & D
12	Awards Ceremony (8:00 – 10:00 PM)	Due: Career Portfolio

❖ **The Capstone Experience:**

According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., the term “capstone” can refer to either “a coping stone” or a “crowning achievement.” I intend it in both senses. SPCM479—Capstone: Life in Postmodernity is the stone that “caps” what you have learned in Speech Communication, the stone that bridges the pillars of knowledge represented by media, rhetorical, and communication studies. It is designed to prepare students for the unique challenges of life in the Information Age, as well as to be the crowning achievement of your undergraduate education. Capstone is *not* a generic “review” of what you have previously learned or a seminar in “how-to-get-a-job.” CSU requires a capstone course in every major, as it fulfills the 4C requirement of the All University Core Curriculum. In accordance with university guidelines, capstone is a senior level course that should enable students to:

1. synthesize the academic and/or artistic experience of the major;
2. analyze disciplinary knowledge with relation to broader areas of intellectual endeavor;
3. evaluate the interaction between their discipline and society;
4. apply appropriate core competencies, foundations and perspectives, and knowledge gained from courses in the major;
5. participate, where appropriate, in collaborative and in interdisciplinary activities relevant to the program of study;
6. make the transition into career or further academic degree programs;
7. identify their roles and potential in the larger professional and/or scholarly community and in society (source: <http://core.colostate.edu/corecriteria.sp04.pdf>).

❖ **Departmental Assessment:**

In addition to fulfilling the University 4C requirement, capstone serves as the principle site of departmental self-assessment regarding undergraduate education. As such, the work students do in capstone is used as an indicator of the degree to which the department is addressing and fulfilling its educational mission. Specifically, capstone is designed to evaluate the writing and speaking skills of our graduating seniors, as well as the depth and breadth of their knowledge in the field of communication. Through specially tailored assignments, capstone allows the Department of Speech Communication to assess how well our undergraduate curriculum is preparing students for their personal, professional, and public lives.

❖ **On Education and Intellectual Rigor:**

A university education is the single most important investment you can make in your future. On a practical level, a college education equips you with the knowledge and skills to participate in the public sphere of ideas as an informed and critical citizen. On an even more fundamental level, higher education allows you to expand the boundaries of your thinking, to entertain alternative perspectives and viewpoints, and perhaps most importantly, to learn about yourself. As the Greek philosopher Socrates eloquently said more than two thousand years ago, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” These dual benefits can only be attained, however, through a conscientious attitude, dedicated work ethic, and rigorous curriculum. You are, therefore, expected to come to class prepared, ready to engage in serious academic dialogue, and willing to struggle with challenging material. Finally, although rigorous intellectual exchange is expected and encouraged, intellectual terrorism will not be tolerated. Kindly be respectful of others beliefs and opinions.

❖ **Participation/Attendance:**

This course is designed to help students better understand, appreciate, and utilize their speech communication degrees in all aspects of their lives. Simply doing the readings, taking the exam, completing the assignments, and attending class cannot fully satisfy that goal. Thus active participation is expected of all students. Failure to participate in class discussions and group work may negatively impact one's course grade. While attendance is not mandatory, there is a *notable* correspondence between final course grades and attendance.

❖ **Content Note:**

Due to the nature of contemporary society, a few of the issues discussed in this class as well as some the materials used (film strips, television clips, advertisements and artwork, etc.) may be considered offensive by some. While I will work to accommodate everyone's concerns, the course demands that we explore some sensitive material and issues.

❖ **Academic Honesty:**

Offering another person's work as one's own—whether in the form of plagiarism, copying from papers or tests, or contracting with another student to prepare one's assignments—is counter to university policy, not to mention inconsistent with the objectives of learning. Any such dishonesty, if detected, will result in an automatic F on the assignment for which the infraction occurs. Repeated instances will result in a failing grade and can lead to dismissal from the university.

❖ **A Unique Challenge:**

Teaching a class on life in postmodernity poses a particularly unique and difficult challenge. Theories of postmodernism and postmodernity are complex, contentious, and even, at times, contradictory. The writings on these topics—though diverse and eclectic—intersect and overlap. Postmodern theory emerged in bits and fragments as a set of associative insights, but not as a causal line of reasoning. In this sense, the scholarship on postmodernism and postmodernity reflects, embodies, and enacts many of the issues, insights, and concerns it raises. But in doing so, the topic resists linear organization and denies would-be students an obvious point of entry. Like the World Wide Web, one can enter at virtually any node and proceed to any other. Our approach, then, will be to treat various topics and issues not as points on a line (i.e., one leading sequentially to the next), but as stars in a constellation—each contributing to the whole picture. On some days, we will give special attention to an individual star, but always with an eye toward viewing that star in relation to others.

❖ **Detailed Course Outline:**

The following course outline is tentative and subject to revision by the instructor.

UNIT I: The Postmodern World – This unit seeks to provide students with an initial sketch, a conceptual map, of the overall theoretical terrain. We will distinguish among concepts such as modernism, postmodernism, modernity, and postmodernity. We will consider what it means to treat postmodernity from a techno-capitalist viewpoint, including but not limited to the global restructuring of capital, shift to a service based economy, and the rise of the new information technologies.

January 28 – Introduction to Course. We will review the course syllabus and discuss the function of the Capstone Experience for students, the University, and the department.

February 04 – A New Paradigm? Students will read Ott, Chapter 1 and Ward, Chapter 1 in preparation for a class discussion about the epochal cultural shift currently under way.

February 11 – The Postmodern Condition I. Students will read Ott, Chapter 2 in preparation for a class discussion of the information explosion, rise of the new information technologies, and the dramatic changes in our economic system over the past 40 years, including the shifts (1) from industrialism to informationalism, (2) from goods manufacturing to service-based communication jobs, (3) from nation-statism to globalism, and (4) from Fordism to flexible accumulation.

February 25 – The Postmodern Condition II. We will be discussing the central social anxieties associated with life in the Information Age, including (1) information overload, (2) feeling adrift or placeless, (3) feeling frenzied and left behind, (4) feeling apathetic, and (5) feeling fragmented.

March 03 – Working in the Information Age. Several former graduates from the Department of Speech Communication will join us to talk about the transition from college to the workforce as well as common workplace challenges today.

Recommended Readings for Unit One:

- Anderson, P. *The Origins of Postmodernity*.
- Castells, M. *The Rise of the Network Society*.
- Eagleton, T. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*.
- Featherstone, M. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*.
- Grenz, S. *A Primer on Postmodernism*.
- Harvey, D. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*.
- Jameson, F. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.
- Lyotard, J. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.
- Malpas, S. *The Postmodern*.

UNIT II: Postmodern Signs – This unit concerns the transition from structuralist to post-structuralist understandings of language, paying particular attention to the endless play of the signifier and the corresponding crisis of representation (e.g., the failure of mimetic theory). We will also consider concepts such as eclecticism, implosion, double-coding, parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, deconstruction, spectacle, and simulacra.

March 10 – Postmodern Signs I. Students will read Ward, Chapters 2 & 3 in preparation for a class discussion about the changing nature of signification and communication in postmodernity. Specifically, we will examine the changing representational practices in architecture, visual art, and literature.

March 24 – Postmodern Signs II. Students will read Ott, Chapter 3 and Ward, Chapters 4 & 5 in preparation for a class discussion about the conventions and consequences of representation in electronic media such as film, television, music, and computers.

Recommended Readings for Unit Two:

- Baudrillard, J. *Simulacra and Simulation*.
- Bignell, J. *Postmodern Media Culture*.
- Collins, J. *Architectures of Excess: Cultural Life in the Information Age*.
- Connor, S. *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*.
- Docker, J. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*.
- Jencks, C. *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism*.
- Varsava, J. *Contingent Meanings: Postmodern Fiction, Mimesis, and the Reader*.

UNIT III: Postmodern Subjects – This unit explores philosophical and material challenges to the notion of the rational, Cartesian subject. We examine constructivist theories of identity, paying particular attention to the shift from a static, singular, holistic view of self to more fluid, multiple, fragmented notions of self.

March 31 – Postmodern Subjects I. Students will read Ward, Chapter 6 in preparation for a discussion about anti-essentialist understandings of identity. We will consider how identity is constructed in relation to consumption and a globalized media culture.

April 07 – Postmodern Subjects II. Students will read Ott, Chapter 4 and Ward, Chapter 7 in preparation for a discussion about the demands placed on subjectivity in the postmodern era. Topics will include multiplicity, fragmentation, and the disembodied self.

Recommended Readings for Unit Three:

- Butler, J. *Gender Trouble and Bodies that Matter*.
- Flax, J. *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*.
- Gergen, K. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*.
- Haraway, D. “The Cyborg Manifesto” from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.
- hooks, b. “Postmodern Blackness” from *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*.
- Kellner, D. *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern*.
- Lifton, R. *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation*.
- Sedgwick, E. *Epistemology of the Closet*.

UNIT IV: Postmodern Publics – This section of the course examines the need to envision, develop, and enact a radical new politics. Students examine the local, contingent, coalitional and agonistic nature of politics and ethics in the postmodern condition.

April 14 – Postmodern Ethics and Politics. Students will read Ott, Chapter 5 and Ward, Chapter 8 in preparation for a discussion about postmodern micropolitics. Consideration will be given to relativism, pragmatism, and historical contingency.

April 21 – Public Deliberation Forum. Deliberation is an approach to politics in which citizens, not just experts and politicians, are involved in public decision making. Citizens come together and consider relevant facts from multiple points of view; listen carefully and propose action based on reasoned judgment.

Recommended Readings for Unit Four:

- Aronowitz, S. “Postmodernism and Politics” from *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism*.
- Bauman, Z. *Postmodern Ethics*.
- De Bono, E. *Lateral Thinking*.
- Laclau, E. “Politics and the Limits of Modernity” from *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism*.
- Madison, G., and M. Fairbairn. *The Ethics of Postmodernity: Current Trends in Continental Thought*.
- Nicholson, L. *Feminism/Postmodernism*.
- Rorty, R. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

UNIT V: Student Presentations – The final unit furnishes students with an opportunity to reflect on and to demonstrate what they’ve learned regarding the postmodern condition. Working in small groups, students will select a contemporary social or political issue and approach it from a communication perspective.

April 28 – Sales Presentations. Groups A & B

May 05 – Sales Presentations. Groups C & D

❖ **Grading Issues:**

Students are expected to complete all assignments on time and in a professional manner. As all assignments are being announced and explained well in advance of their due dates, no extensions will be granted. Plan ahead, allowing time for computing and printing mishaps. Written work must be submitted in person, not by e-mail. Grades on individual assignments, as well as final course grades, will not be curved. This is your last opportunity to demonstrate the quality of work you can do in college. Put forth your best effort!

❖ **Description of Assignments:**

CRITICAL ESSAY #1 – The first Critical Essay is designed to evaluate your *breadth* of knowledge in the field of communication along with your written communication skills. The assignment requires you to (1) select five communication concepts or theories from your previous coursework in the department, (2) define, explain, and give concrete examples of those five concepts or theories in your own words, (3) assess how each one of those concepts can be used to enhance your personal, professional, and/or public life. Please do not choose more than one concept or theory from any given class. The paper *must* be typed. Please use a 12-point font with one-inch margins. The essay should be 5-6 pages in length, include your name and date at the top of the first page, and be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. In the interest of preserving our precious tree resource, please do not include a separate title page. All essays should *strictly* conform to either APA or MLA guidelines and include a bibliography. Critical Essay #1 will be assessed on its organizational clarity, understanding of the concepts and/or theories discussed, ability to relate the concepts to life, grammar, and rhetorical artistry. It is worth 100 points or 1/5 of your final course grade. Critical Essay #1 is due in class on **Monday, March 10**. Papers will not be accepted by e-mail.

CRITICAL ESSAY #2– The second Critical Essay is designed to evaluate your *depth* of knowledge in the field of communication along with your written communication skills. This assignment asks students to (1) select a media, rhetorical, interpersonal, intercultural, or organizational concept or theory, (2) define and explain it, (3) situate it historically and conceptually in relation to the discipline of Speech Communication (i.e., Who is the principle theorist? When was it developed? Has the concept been revised or critiqued?), (4) discuss its unique relevance in the postmodern era, and (5) analyze how it can assist you in your own life. The paper *must* be typed. Please use a 12-point font with one-inch margins. The essay should be 5-6 pages in length, include your name and date at the top of the first page, and be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. In the interest of preserving our precious tree resource, please do not include a separate title page. All essays should *strictly* conform to either APA or MLA guidelines and include a bibliography. The Critical Essay will be assessed on its organizational clarity, understanding of the concept or theory discussed, ability to relate it to the postmodern condition, depth of analysis, grammar, and rhetorical artistry. It is worth 100 points or 1/5 of your final course grade. Critical Essay #2 is due in class on **Monday, April 21**. Papers will not be accepted by e-mail.

SALES PRESENTATION – The Sales Presentation is designed to evaluate your public speaking skills, including delivery (eye contact, volume, rate, gestures, dynamism), content (organization, transitions, evidence), and audience analysis (interesting, important, relevant). For this assignment, students will be working in small groups of 5 assigned by the instructor. Each group will (1) select or create a real or fictional product or service to be sold, (2) pitch that product or service by illustrating (a) the need for it, (b) the manner in which it fulfills that need, and (c) how it will improve the life of the consumer. Each group member is expected to speak for roughly 4 minutes, making the total presentation about 20 minutes in length. Though everyone in the group will speak, the presentation ought to cohere as a unified speech across the individual members. No visual aids are allowed. Conflict arises naturally during group projects. As such, you are expected to work through it on your own. The instructor should be involved only as a last resort. It is worth 100 points or 1/5 of your final course grade. The Sales Presentations will be presented in class on **Mondays, April 28 and March 05**.

CAREER PORTFOLIO – The central purpose of this assignment is to get students thinking about and preparing for life after college. The Career Portfolio must include the following items [*in this order*]: (1) a professional-looking cover page with your name and contact information, (2) a 1-page statement of your career goals and aspirations, (3) a resume that has been reviewed and approved by CSU’s Career Center (Ammons Hall on the Oval), (4) a list of, at least, three *professional* references (name, job title, and occupation or business) with complete contact information, and (5) an edited, revised, and clean writing sample from a previous class. The writing sample should identify the instructor, class, and semester for which it was written. If you plan to enter the field of production, you may substitute a video or other artistic product in place of the writing sample. Please staple these materials in the upper left-hand corner. Do not submit the portfolio in any kind of binder or folder. Form counts! So, the career portfolio should look professional (correct spelling & grammar, laser-printed, etc.). It is worth 100 points or 1/5 of your final course grade. The Career Portfolio is a semester-long project due in class during the final exam period on **Monday, May 12**.

QUIZZES – There will be four in-class, closed-book/notes quizzes during the course of the semester. The quizzes are designed to test student comprehension of the material leading up to them. The single best way to prepare for the quizzes is to come to class regularly, as class lectures and discussions will serve as the basis for generating quiz questions. Each quiz is worth 25 points; the four quizzes will collectively constitute 1/5 of your final course grade. Only students with appropriately documented, University-excused absences will be able to makeup quizzes. Do not expect to makeup quizzes that you miss for personal reasons. The quizzes will be given at the *beginning* (don't be late) of class on **Mondays, February 11, March 03, March 31, and April 14.**

❖ **What Do Employer's Really Want?**

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveys employers every year to find out what is important to them. Below are the "Top Ten" skills that today's employers look for in college graduates (source: <http://www.career.colostate.edu/students/index.html>).

1. Oral Communication and Presentation Skills
2. Interpersonal Skills
3. Teamwork Skills
4. Analytical Skills-Problem Solving, Critical Thinking Skills
5. Flexibility-Cross Functional Skills
6. Leadership Skills
7. Written Communication Skills
8. Proficiency in Field of Study with Industry Specific Skills
9. Computer Knowledge
10. Hands-On Experience (Internships)



❖ **Just For Fun!**

The Po-Mo Page: Postmodern, Postmodernism, Postmodernity

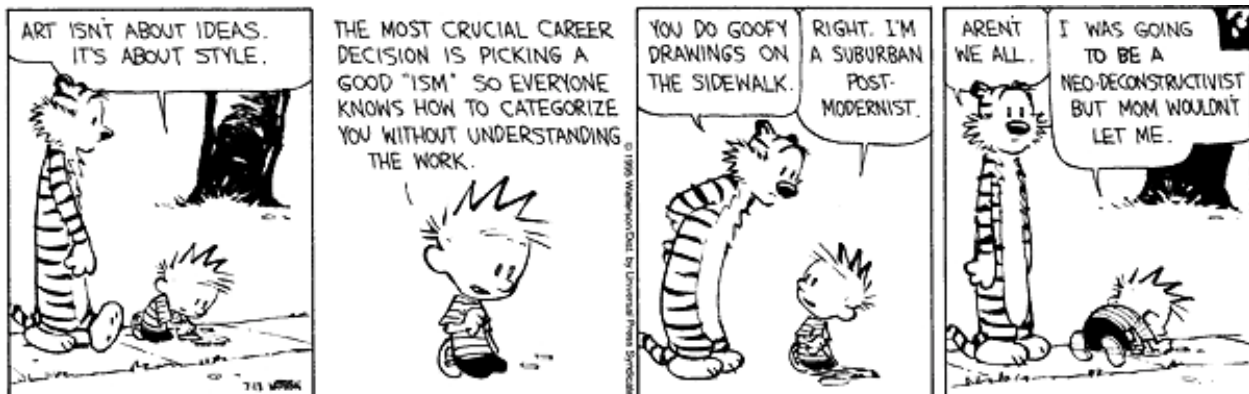
<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/pomo.html>

"Postmodernism" at Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>

Modernity, Postmodernism and the Tradition of Dissent

<http://www.tasc.ac.uk/depart/media/staff/ls/Modules/Theory/PoMoDis.htm>



❖ **Brian’s Decidedly Modernist Mapping of Postmodernism:**

A caution: “[T]he move from one historical moment to another does not usually involve the complete collapse of one cultural mode and the installation of another. ... It is therefore possible to isolate certain features of postmodernist culture within modernity, and certain features of modernist culture in postmodernity” (Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, pp. 183-184).

	Modernism	Postmodernism
Technology and Economic Mode	Goods-based Wares Producer Production Manufacturing Centralized Standardization Homogenous Mass Marketing Industrial Age	Service-based Information Consumer Reproduction Processing Decentralized Diversification Heterogeneous Niche Marketing Information Age
Aesthetics (Cultural Forms)	Print Word Genericized Class/Genre Bounded Finished Singular Hierarchical Real/Original Depth/History	Electronic Image/Spectacle Specialized Eclectic/Hybridized Intertextual Dynamic Plural Nonhierarchical Simulation/Copy Surface/Nostalgia
Subjectivity (Ways of Being)	Individual Rational/Serious Inherited Roles & Categories Stable/Essential Innate Holistic Unitary Embodied Passive Subject	Personae Playful/Pleasurable Constructed Images & Styles Fluid/Flexible Theatrical Fragmented Multiplicitous Disembodied Active Agent
Epistemology (Ways of Knowing)	Linear Predictive Causal Empirical Temporal Determinant Teleological Universal Expositional Rational	Associative Provisional Contingent Interpretive Spatial Indeterminate Anti-Teleological Relative/Local Iconic Intuitive
Politics & Ethics (Ways of Doing)	Masternarratives Disciplinary Canonization High Culture New Criticism Universal Taste Dominant Politics Objective Unreflexive Platonic Truth	Micronarratives Interdisciplinary Border Implosion Popular Culture Deconstruction Taste Cultures Coalitional Politics Subjective Self-Reflexive Sophistic truths