

The Modern Revolution

HUM 410

Fall 2014

T/TH 3:35 – 4:50 PM in HUM 408

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Office HUM 416 | Office Hour: 4:50 – 5:50 Tuesday

Course Website: <http://beautiful.fail>

“The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them

—Michel Foucault

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course covers philosophical and cultural issues of modernism/modernity, roughly from 1850 - 1945. We will undertake a careful examination of select primary (modern) theoretical texts (Nietzsche, Benjamin), works of literature (Walser, Kafka), artwork (Duchamp), photography (Muybridge), film (Lumiere, Méliès, Vertov), secondary texts (Olalquiaga, Lowy) and the work of Michel Foucault. We will follow the convention of the catalog description in looking at modernisms from, roughly, the mid-19th century to the early/mid 20th century. We will, also, watch surprising films like Walter Murch's 1985 adaptation of the turn of the century work of L. Frank Baum, *Return to Oz* (which we will read in light of modernity, commodification, and monstrosity, among much else).

How do we think about the modern? Is it the new, the avant-garde, a break with the past, the everyday? What does it mean to think about "modern" life? And what of progress, enlightenment, technology, and the subject? This course will think modernism/modernity as a philosophical problem rather than a historical object. We will strive to think modern thought as something immanent to (i.e. not outside) the “presents” it traverses. In this reading, the counter-modern, the a-modern, the alternatives to, and the excluded of modernity will be viewed as fully a part of modern life itself. This is because the problem of modernity is something we are continuing to work through, today. To paraphrase Michel Foucault, we will ask ourselves what it might mean to think the modern, simultaneously, as a philosophical problem, a relation to life, and a critique of the present.

Required Texts (available at the bookstore)

Walter Benjamin – *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*

Michael Lowy – *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"*

Nietzsche – *The Nietzsche Reader* (ed. By Keith Ansell-Pearson)

Celeste Olalquiaga – *The Artificial Kingdom: On the Kitsch Experience*

Robert Walser – *Jakob von Gunten*

Essays

Ray Brassier, "The Truth of Extinction" 205 - 239 in *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*
<http://rosswolfe.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/ray-brassier-nihil-unbound-enlightenment-and-extinction.pdf>

Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" online at

<http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>

Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum* (selection)

Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915* (selection)

Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye* (selections)

Short Stories

Franz Kafka - "Report to an Academy," "In the Penal Colony"

Robert Walser (selections)

For those who wish to do additional research, the journal *Modernism/Modernity* is a good source of recent scholarship in the field.

http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/modernism_modernity/

Films (shown in class)

Dziga Vertov – *Man With a Movie Camera* (USSR, 1929)

Walter Murch – *Return to Oz* (USA, 1985)

Brother's Quay – *Institute Benjamenta* (UK, 1996)

Orson Welles – *The Trial* (France, 1962)

Kate Williams – *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization* (USA, 1999)

Possible Short Films

Lumiere Brothers (selections) (France, 1899)

Georges Méliès – “*Voyage à travers l'impossible*” (*The Impossible Voyage*) (France, 1904)

Legar and Murphey “*Ballet Mecanique*” (USA/France, 1924)

ASSIGNMENTS

Students are responsible for completing all the assigned course work and are expected to regularly attend and participate in course discussions. Students are expected to come to class prepared. Prepared means that you have done the assigned reading, have thought about it, and have something relevant to say. Always bring the assigned reading material (for each particular day) to class. Always take notes. My lectures, comments, and rants constitute an important “text” for the course. Be aware that my style is casual and approachable—this should not detract from the seriousness of the work we do together (this style of presentation is meant to make it easier for you to grasp the material). There will be a mid-term paper (5-pages) and a final paper (5- pages) required to complete the course. There will be handouts for each assignment (at least two weeks before the assignments are due). These assignments constitute the ten pages of formal critical writing, required to satisfy the Segment Three writing requirement and will be graded for style and content. (See the Segment Three statement below.) Your papers should demonstrate *mastery of the reading material and course lectures* for the assignments (your grade will be based on this). *All response papers must be critical. No grades will be awarded for non-critical papers. Plagiarism in any of the course assignments, in any form, will result in a grade of zero and be forwarded to the Dean's office.* (Note: you must receive a letter grade for each assignment to complete the course.) No papers will be accepted via e-mail. A final exam covering all of the course material will also be required. *Cell phones and PDA's are to be turned off in class. If you are caught text messaging in class, surfing the web, playing video games, or engaging in any other non-course related activity, you will be required to leave the classroom. No eating in class (unless you bring enough to share with everyone).*

SEGMENT III WRITING REQUIREMENT

To meet the segment III writing requirement, you will be required to write two five page critical papers. These papers are "formal" and will be read and graded by the professor. You will be expected to argue coherently, to support your arguments with detailed examples from the works analyzed, to edit your papers for spelling, grammar punctuation and agreement, *and to meet recognized standards for notes and bibliography when relevant.* All of the above will be taken into account in the grading of these assignments.

STATEMENT ON DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email: dprc@sfsu.edu, <http://www.sfsu.edu/~dprc/facultyfaq.html#1>

GRADING

Attendance and participation 10% || Mid-term Essay 40% || Final Essay 40% || Final Exam 10%

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE
(Instructor Reserves the Right to Modify)

Wk 1	Aug 26 Aug 28	Introduction and handout of course material <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 3 - 45
Wk 2	Sep 2 Sep 4	<i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 67-100, 175-198 <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 67-100, 175-198
Wk 3	Sep 9 Sep 11	<i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 175 – 198, 252 – 277 Film – <i>Return to Oz</i> <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 175 – 198, 252 – 277 Film – <i>Return to Oz</i>
Wk. 4	Sep 16 Sep 18	Walter Benjamin – 1-57, Film – <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> Walter Benjamin – 1-57; Dziga Vertov, <i>Kino-Eye</i> (selections)
Wk. 5	Sep 23 Sep 25	Walter Benjamin – 96-115 (“Paris, Capital of the 19th Century”) Walter Benjamin – 226-239; 315-327; 338-341 (“A Glimpse Into the World of Children’s Books,” “Dream Kitsch,” “On the Present Situation of Russian Film” “Mickey Mouse,” “The Formula in Which Dialectical Film Finds Expression”)
Wk 6	Sep 30 Oct 2	Kafka – “Report to an Academy” Nietzsche – “On Truth and Lies In a Non-Moral Sense”
Wk. 7	Oct 7 Oct 9	Kendrick, <i>The Secret Museum</i> (selection) Film - <i>Pornography: The Secret History</i> Kendrick, <i>The Secret Museum</i> (selection)
Wk. 8	Oct 14 Oct 16	Sewell, <i>Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915</i> (selection) Michel Foucault - "What is Enlightenment?" online at http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html
Wk. 9	Oct 21 Oct 23	Midterm Paper Due Löwy – <i>Fire Alarm</i> 1-60 Löwy – <i>Fire Alarm</i> 1-60 Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”
Wk.10	Oct 28 Oct 30	Löwy – <i>Fire Alarm</i> 60-116 Löwy – <i>Fire Alarm</i> 60-116 Benjamin – “Paralipomena to the Concept of History,”
Wk 11	Nov 4	Film – <i>The Trial</i> Kafka, “Before the Law”

	Nov 6	Film – <i>The Trial</i> Kafka, “In the Penal Colony”
Wk 12	Nov 11 Nov 13	NO CLASS – HOLIDAY Nietzsche – “Beyond Good and Evil” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 311 - 361
Wk. 13	Nov 18 Nov 20	Nietzsche – “Beyond Good and Evil” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 311 – 361 Nietzsche – “European Nihilism” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 385 - 389 Brassier – <i>Nihil Unbound</i> 205-239 (selection on Nietzsche)
Wk. 14	Nov 25 Nov 27	Thanksgiving – No Class Thanksgiving – No Class
Wk. 15	Dec 2 Dec 4	Film – <i>Institute Benjamenta</i> Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i> Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i> Film – <i>Institute Benjamenta</i>
Wk. 16	Dec 9 Dec 11	Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i> Walser – Short Stories (selections); Benjamin, “Robert Walser”
	Dec 16	1:30 PM Final Paper Due, Final Exam @ 1:35 PM (Don’t Be Late)