

HUM 410-01/ PHIL 304-01

## **The Modern Revolution**

T/TH 2:10 – 3:25 || HUM 115

Dr. Robert C. Thomas

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## **The Modern Revolution**

### **Course Description**

How do we think about the modern? Is it the new (the avant-garde)? A break with the past? The everyday? What it 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) through a careful examination of select primary theoretical texts (Nietzsche, Benjamin), works of literature (Walser, Kafka), artwork (Duchamp), photography (Muybridge), and film (Lumiere, Méliès, Vertov) from *within* the modern. (We will follow the convention of the catalog description in looking at modernisms from, roughly, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.) We will also make use of secondary work (Olalquiaga, Kwinter) on the modern, including the work of Michel Foucault. We will strive throughout this course to think modern thought as something *immanent to* (i.e. not outside) modernism/modernity. In other words, the counter-modern, the a-modern, the alternatives to, and the excluded of modernity are fully a part of modern life itself. This is because the problem of modernity is something we are continuing to work through, even today (we are not finished with the modern/modernity). This is simply one of the paradoxes of modernity that we will explore in this class. To paraphrase Michel Foucault, what might it mean to think the modern, simultaneously, as a philosophical problem, a relation to life, and a critique of the present (as a problematization of time and history)?

### **Required Texts (available at the bookstore)**

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

Walter Benjamin – *Selected Writings: Volume Four*

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

Franz Kafka – *The Collected Short Stories*

Michel Foucault – *Abnormal*

Robert Walser – *Jakob von Gunten*

Sanford Kwinter – *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*

Please note that you need to purchase all of the books. The final essay assignment will require you to use one or more texts (from sections not assigned in this class) among these major works: Benjamin, Nietzsche, Foucault, Kwinter. These works are assigned, in part, so that they can be used as part of your research for the second part of the semester.

### **Essays (handed out in class or, on-line)**

Walter Benjamin – “Paris, Capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century” (1935) and (1939) (both versions)

Michel Foucault – “What is Enlightenment?” on-line at:

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

Michel Foucault – “The Means of Correct Training”

Additional works on Modernism/Modernity that I recommend:  
Massimo Cacciari – *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point*  
Sara Darius – *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*

The journal Modernism/Modernity is a good source of recent scholarship in the field  
[http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/modernism\\_modernity/](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)

### Short Films

Lumiere Brothers (selections) (France, 1892 - 1901)  
William Heise – “The Kiss” (USA, 1896)  
Georges Méliès – “A Trip to the Moon” (France, 1902)  
Legar and Murphey “Ballet Mecanique” (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 requirement and will be graded for style and content. 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 be forwarded to the Dean's office. No papers will be accepted via e-mail. Cell phones and PDA's are to be turned off in class. If you are caught text-messaging in class, surfing the web, or 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).*

## TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Wk 1.:	Jan 24th	Introduction and handout of course material
Wk 2.	Jan. 29th Jan. 31st	<i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 3 - 45 <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 67 - 95
Wk. 3	Feb. 5th Feb. 7th	Walter Benjamin – “Paris, Capital of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century” (1935) and (1939) – both versions (handout) Walter Benjamin – “Paris, the Capital of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century” (1935) and (1939) – both versions (handout)
Wk. 4.	Feb. 12 <sup>th</sup> Feb. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Film – <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> Walter Benjamin – “Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1939 version) Walter Benjamin – “Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1939 version)
Wk. 5	Feb 19 <sup>th</sup> . Feb. 21 <sup>st</sup>	“Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1939 version) Artwork and Film – Muybridge/Méliès/Lumiere/Leger <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 175 – 198, 252 – 277
Wk 6.	Feb. 26 <sup>th</sup> Feb. 28 <sup>th</sup>	Artwork – Duchamp/Magritte Michel Foucault – “What is Enlightenment?” online at Michel Foucault – “What is Enlightenment?” online @ <a href="http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html">http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html</a>
Wk. 7.	Mar. 4 <sup>th</sup> Mar. 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Mid-Term Paper Assignment Handed Out</b> Film – <i>Return to Oz</i> Film – <i>Return to Oz</i>
Wk. 8.	Mar. 11 <sup>th</sup> Mar. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Nietzsche – “On Truth and Lies In a Non-Moral Sense” Kafka – “Report to an Academy,” <i>Short Stories</i>
Wk. 9.	Mar. 18th Mar. 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Mid-Term Paper Assignment Due</b> Nietzsche – “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life” Foucault – “The Means of Correct Training” (handout)
Wk.10.		<b>Spring Break – No Classes</b>
Wk 11.	Apr. 1 <sup>st</sup> Apr. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Foucault – <i>Abnormal</i> xvii – xxv, 19 - 26, 31 - 75 Foucault – <i>Abnormal</i> , xvii – xxv, 19-26, 31 - 75
Wk 12.	Apr. 8 <sup>th</sup> Apr. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Foucault – <i>Abnormal</i> , 81 - 134 Foucault – <i>Abnormal</i> , 81 - 134
Wk. 13	Apr. 15 <sup>th</sup> Apr. 17 <sup>th</sup>	Film – <i>Institute Benjamenta</i> Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i> Film – <i>Institute Benjamenta</i> Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i>

Wk. 14	Apr. 22 <sup>nd</sup> Apr. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i> Kafka – “In the Penal Colony,” <i>Short Stories</i>
Wk. 15.	Apr. 29 <sup>th</sup> May 1 <sup>st</sup> .	<b>Final Paper Assignment Handed Out</b> Nietzsche – “Beyond Good and Evil” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 311 - 361 Nietzsche – “Beyond Good and Evil” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 311 - 361 Nietzsche – “European Nihilism” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 385 - 389
Wk. 16.	May 6 <sup>th</sup> May 8 <sup>th</sup>	Kwinter, <i>Architectures of Time</i> , 1 - 50 Kwinter, <i>Architectures of Time</i> , 1 - 50
Wk. 17	May 13 <sup>th</sup> May 15 <sup>th</sup>  May 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Benjamin – “On the Concept of History,” <i>Selected Writings</i> , 389 - 400 Benjamin – “Paralipomena to the Concept of History,” <i>Selected Writings</i> , 401 – 411. Kafka – “Before the Law,” <i>Short Stories</i>  <b>Final Paper Due in my office, HUM 416, by 4:00 PM</b>