

The Modern Revolution
HUM 410/PHIL 304
Spring 2009
Dr. Robert C. Thomas
Rm. HUM 582, 3:35 – 4:50 PM
Office Hour: Thursday, 2:35 – 3:35 PM
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“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) 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)

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 Metamorphosis and Other Stories*
Franz Kafka – *The Trial*
Robert Walser – *Jakob von Gunten*

Essays

Walter Benjamin – “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century” (handout)
Michel Foucault - "What is Enlightenment?" online at
<http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>
Michel Foucault – *Abnormal* (lecture – selection) (handout)

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)

Possible Short Films

Lumiere Brothers (selections) (France, 1899)

William Heise – “The Kiss” (USA, 1896)

Georges Méliès – “A Trip to the Moon” (France, 1898)

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 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. *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 45% || Final Essay 45%

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(Instructor Reserves the Right to Modify)

Wk 1.:	Jan 27 Jan 29	Introduction and handout of course material <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 3 - 45
Wk 2.	Feb 3 Feb 5	Walter Benjamin – “Paris, Capital of the 19 th Century” (handout) Walter Benjamin – “Paris, Capital of the 19 th Century” (handout)
Wk. 3	Feb 10 Feb 12	Film – <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> Walter Benjamin – “Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1939 version) in Benjamin Film – <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i> Walter Benjamin – “Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1939 version) in Benjamin
Wk. 4.	Feb 17 Feb 19	<i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 175 – 198, 252 – 277 <i>Artificial Kingdom</i> 175 – 198, 252 – 277
Wk. 5	Feb 24 Feb 26	Film – <i>Return to Oz</i> Film – <i>Return to Oz</i>
Wk 6.	Mar 3 Mar 5	Mid-Term Paper Assignment Handed Out Kafka – “Report to an Academy” Kafka – “Report to an Academy”
Wk. 7.	Mar 10 Mar 12	Nietzsche – “On Truth and Lies In a Non-Moral Sense” Nietzsche – “On Truth and Lies In a Non-Moral Sense”
Wk. 8.	Mar 17 Mar 19	Michel Foucault - "What is Enlightenment?" online at http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html Michel Foucault - "What is Enlightenment?" online at http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html
Wk. 9.	Mar 24 - 26	Spring Break – No Class
Wk.10.	Mar 31 Apr 2	Cesar Chavez Day – No Class Kafka – <i>The Trial</i> Film – <i>The Trial</i>
Wk 11.	Apr 7 Apr 9	Kafka – <i>The Trial</i> Film – <i>The Trial</i> Kafka – <i>The Trial</i>
Wk 12.	Apr 14 Apr 16	Kafka – “In the Penal Colony” Nietzsche – “Beyond Good and Evil” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 311 - 361
Wk. 13	Apr 21 Apr 23	Nietzsche – “Beyond Good and Evil” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 311 – 361 Nietzsche – “European Nihilism” in <i>Nietzsche Reader</i> , 385 - 389 Foucault – <i>Abnormal</i> (lecture – selection) (handout)

Wk. 14	Apr 28	Film – <i>Institute Benjamin</i> Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i>
Wk. 15.	Apr 30	Film – <i>Institute Benjamin</i> Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i>
Wk. 16.	May 5	Handout on Final Paper Walser – <i>Jakob von Gunten</i>
	May 7	Nietzsche – “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life”
Wk. 17	May 12	Benjamin – “On the Concept of History,” <i>Selected Writings</i> , 389 - 400
	May 14	Benjamin – “Paralipomena to the Concept of History,” <i>Selected Writings</i> , 401 – 411.
	May 21	4:00 PM Final Paper Due in HUM 416 (Do Not Be Late)