

CMPL 370 / ENGL 370 — *Itineraries of Postmodernism*

MWF 3:30-4:20 / King 341

Patrick O'Connor

Office Hours: T, Th 3:00-4:30pm and by appointment. 402 Peters Hall.

Tel. 775-8922. poconnor@oberlin.edu



“Tilly Losch,” circa 1935, by Joseph Cornell, Construction, 10 x 9³/₄ x 2¹/₂ inches ©The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York City. From “Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination,” Peabody Essex Museum, 2007

When, why, how, and to what effect did Modernism transmogrify into Postmodernism, if it did? After surveying current theories of these two amorphous “isms,” we will draw upon literary and philosophical texts to explore the forking paths between them.

This course emphasizes the roots of postmodernity in continental philosophy. Theorists have been selected both for their canonical stature and for their decisive formulations of key problematics of postmodernism, e.g. Nietzsche on aestheticism and perspectivism, Derrida on poststructuralism, Rorty on contingency, Barthes and Foucault on authorial agency, Vattimo on the “transparent society,” and Spivak on the subaltern. Literary texts have been chosen (outside of the North American literary tradition) both for their historical importance in the modernist-postmodernist trajectory and their aesthetic responsiveness, formal and thematic, to defining issues of postmodernism.



Mao Tse-Tung, Andy Warhol

CMPL 370 / ENGL 370 — *Itineraries of Postmodernism*

MWF 1:30-2:20 / King 239

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I. Course Description.

When, why, how, and to what effect did Modernism transmogrify into Postmodernism, if it did? After surveying current theories of these two amorphous “isms,” we will draw upon literary and philosophical texts to explore the forking paths between them.

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II. Required Texts. All required texts must be brought to class in hard copy.

Franz Kafka, *The Castle* (1926)

Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (1941, 1944, 1956)

Flann O'Brien, *At-Swim-Two-Birds* (1939)

Marguerite Duras, *The Lover* (1984)

Georges Perec, *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975)

Severo Sarduy, *From Cuba with a Song* (1966) [out of print; available on BlackBoard; used copies on Amazon]

Also on BlackBoard:

John Barth, “Literature of Exhaustion” & “Literature of Replenishment” (9pp.)

Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text” & “The Death of the Author” (15pp.)

Georges Bataille, “The Object of Desire: Prostitution” & “Beauty” (17pp.)

Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences” (15pp.)

Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Culture” (12pp.)

Jean-François Lyotard, “Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable” (9 pp.)

_____, “Answering the Question: ‘What is Postmodernism?’” (11pp.)

Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense” (15pp.)

Richard Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity?” (15pp.)

_____. “The Contingency of a Liberal Community” (25pp.)

Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (5pp.)

Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (2 chapters, selections) (27pp.)

III. Grading.

2 papers (6-9 pages each): 25% each. 50%

1 Final Paper (12-15 pages): 30%. 30%

Participation: attendance, discussion (and discussion leading), quizzes, and other short assignments. 20%

Papers may be e-mailed to me (poconnor@oberlin.edu), in Microsoft Word format, with your name and .doc in the title (e.g., krislov.itin.pomo.paper1.doc); Times New Roman 12-point font; number your pages and put your name in the header.

IV. Attendance and Late Work. Unexcused absences rapidly lower your participation grade. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility both to turn your work in on time and to learn the material you've missed – including class discussion – before the next class. Late assignments are reduced one grade step (A- → B+, etc.) per day.

V. Honor Code. To participate in this class, you must understand and adhere to Oberlin's Honor Code. See <http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs.html#honor>.

Itineraries of Postmodernism – Reading Schedule

Week I

[M 9/1 Labor Day]

W 9/3 Hello/ What Was Modernism?/ The Itinerary (just walk away)
Kafka, "An Imperial Messenger"
Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, pp.5-6 and 13-14

*1. Walking away from Weber's Modernity (i.e., High Modernism),
Kafka walks way into Weber's Bureaucracy*

[Artist on My Mind: Marcel Duchamp]

F 9/5 Kafka, *The Castle*, Publishers' Note and Translator's Note, and pp. 1-56

Week II

M 9/8 Kafka, pp.56-170

W 9/10 Interlude: Gianni Vattimo, "The Transparent Society"; "Myth
Rediscovered"

Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of a Liberal Community"

F 9/12 Kafka, pp.171-235

Week III

- M 9/15 Kafka, finish (pp.236-316, plus Appendix)
W 9/17 summing up #1: the modernist Kafka vs. the post-modernist Kafka

2. *The Rules of the Mind/ Language Games*

[Artist on My Mind: René Magritte]

- F 9/19 Borges, "Funes, the Memorious" and "The Library of Babel"

Week IV

- M 9/22 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense"
W 9/24 Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences"
F 9/26 continue with Derrida

Week V

- M 9/29 Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"
John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion";
and Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment"
W 10/1 Borges, "The South"
summing up #2: Borges, Nietzsche, Barth, and Derrida

****Paper #1, 6-9pp., due 4pm Thursday 10/2****

3. *Authorship, Agency, Intertextuality*

[Artist on My Mind: Andy Warhol]

- F 10/3 Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*"
Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

VI

- M 10/6 Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp.1-49
W 10/8 Foucault, "What Is an Author?"
F 10/10 O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp. 50-104

VII

- M 10/13 O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, pp.104-178
W 10/15 the modernist Bakhtin and the post-modernist Bakhtin:
"the polyphonic novel" versus "heteroglossia"
Barthes, "From Work to Text"
F 10/17 O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, finish.
Summing-up #3: Barthes, Foucault, Bakhtin, O'Brien

[Fall Break]

4a.: *Autobiography, Representation, History*

[Artists on My Mind: Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington]

VIII

- M 10/27 Georges Perec, *W, or the Memory of Childhood*, pp.1-60

W 10/29 Jean-François Lyotard, "Representation, Presentation, Unrepresentable"
F 10/31 Perec, *W*, pp. 63-102

IX

M 11/3 Perec, *W*, finish
W 11/5 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"
F 11/7 Foucault, "Truth and Power"
Borges, "An Examination of the Works of Herbert Quain"

X

M 11/10 Rorty, "Objectivity or Solidarity?"
summing up #4, Perec, Lyotard, Foucault, Rorty

4b.: Autobiography, Representation, and Loving the (Exotic(ized)) Other
[Artist on My Mind: Joseph Cornell]

W 11/12 Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, pp.1-33
F 11//14 Bataille, "The Object of Desire: Prostitution," and "Beauty"

XI

M 11/17 Duras, *The Lover*, finish
W 11/19 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Interlude: Not Quite Perec, Duras, or Sarduy

F 11/21 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Culture"
****Paper #2, 6-9pp., due Sunday 6pm 11/23 ****

5: The Artifice of Gender, the Exoticized Self, and Postmodern Desire
[Artist on My Mind: Jack Smith]

XII

M 11/24 [In-class screening: Jack Smith, *Flaming Creatures* ?]
[some other readings Weeks XII-XIII TBA]
W 11/26 Sarduy, *From Cuba With a Song I*
[F Thanksgiving Break]

XIII

M 12/1 Sarduy, *From Cuba II*
W 12/3 Sarduy, *From Cuba III*
F 12/5 Sarduy, *From Cuba*, finish
Summing up #5: Duras, Bataille, Spivak, Jameson, Smith, Sarduy

XIV

M 12/8 Lyotard. "Answering the Question: 'What is Postmodernism?'" (71-82)
W 12/10 Lyotard. "Introduction" to *The Postmodern Condition* (xxiii-xxv).
F 12/12 Conclusion.

Appendix: Jed Deppman's Syllabus for *Itineraries*, last Spring Term:

Other than beginning with much of an entire book by Nietzsche and ending with a Chinese novel from the 1990s that are no longer on the syllabus, Jed's Spring 2008 syllabus is very similar to what he was planning for this semester. He planned to add Georges Perec's novel *W* as an example of metafiction that is not "mere" play but a mode of examining historical tragedy and personal autobiography. He also ordered Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, but I reversed that decision and this semester we will once again be reading Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*. I talked to him about why he wanted to read *Nightwood* for the class, and he said that he wanted to bring out questions of gender and desire in modern/ postmodern contexts, so I have added Severo Sarduy's *From Cuba With a Song* to the syllabus for that purpose, because it is a Latin American novel I know well, because it was written in Paris by a Cuban exile friend of Roland Barthes's, because it is eminently post-modern and full of itineraries, and because it is funny.

Jed also planned regular small-group discussion assignments; I don't know what he had in mind for that, and decided not to try to duplicate them.

I. *God is Dead & Things are Becoming more Artistic.*

2/4 Monday. Introduction.

2/6 Wednesday. Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*. 279-348.

2/8 Friday. Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*. 279-348.

Small Group Presentation #1. *Nietzsche*.

2/11 Monday. Franz Kafka, *The Castle* (1-106).

2/13 Wednesday. Kafka, *The Castle* (107-219).

2/15 Friday. *No Class*.

2/18 Monday. Kafka, *The Castle* (220-316).

Small Group Presentation #2. *Nietzsche & Kafka*.

2/20 Wednesday. Gianni Vattimo, "A Transparent Society" (1-11; 28-44).

Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of a Liberal Community" (44-69).

2/22 Friday. Small Group Presentation #3. *Nietzsche, Kafka, Vattimo, Rorty*.

2/25 Monday. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign & Play..." (278-293).

2/27 Wednesday. Derrida. "Structure, Sign & Play..." (278-293).

2/29 Friday. Small Group Presentation #4. *Nietzsche, Kafka, Vattimo, Nancy, Derrida*.

II. *Authorship, Agency, Intertextuality.*

3/3 Monday. Barthes, "From Work To Text" (73-81)

Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (v-xviii; 9-187).

3/5 Wednesday. O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (187-316).

3/7 Friday. Small Group Presentation #5. *Barthes, Derrida, & O'Brien*.

3/10 Monday. Barthes, "Death of the Author" (142-148).

Foucault. "What is an Author?" (141-160).

3/12 Wednesday. Discussion: O'Brien, Barthes, & Foucault.

3/14 Friday. Small Group Presentation #6. *Barthes, Foucault, & O'Brien*.

III. *Mind, Fantasy, History.*

3/17 Monday. Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (17-34)

"The Library of Babel" (79-88).

Barth, "Literature of Exhaustion" & "Literature of Replenishment." (77-86).

3/18 Tuesday. Paper #1 Due. (Typed, by 4 pm, in Rice 28.)

3/19 Wednesday. Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" (45-56)

"Funes, the Memorious" (107-116)
3/21 Friday Small Group Presentation #7. *Borges & Barth*.

Spring Break.

3/31 Monday. Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" (573-88).
4/2 Wednesday. Borges, "The South" (167-74).
"The Secret Miracle" (143-150).
4/4 Friday. Small Group Presentation #8. Rorty & Borges.
4/7 Monday. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" & "Truth and Power" (360-81).
4/9 Wednesday. Borges: "An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain" (73-8).
4/11 Friday. Small Group Presentation #9. Borges & Foucault.

IV. *Autobiography, Representation, Pomo Love.*

4/14 Monday. Marguerite Duras, *The Lover* (1-117).
4/16 Wednesday. Duras, *The Lover* (1-117).
Jean-François Lyotard, "Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable" (119-128).
4/18 Friday. Small Group Presentation #10. Duras & Lyotard.
4/21 Monday. Georges Bataille, "The Object of Desire: Prostitution" (129-39) & "Beauty"
(140-6).
4/23 Wednesday. Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak" (24-28).
Duras, *The North China Lover*. (Selections on BB.)
4/25 Friday. Small Group Presentation #11. Duras, Spivak, & Bataille.

V. *Postcolonialism, Capitalism, High-brow - Low-brow, Pomoeroticism.*

4/28 Monday. Zhou Wei Hui, *Shanghai Baby* (1-158).
4/29 Tuesday Paper #2 Due. (Typed, by 4 pm, in Rice 28.)
4/30 Wednesday. Wei Hui, *Shanghai Baby* (159-263).
Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism & Consumer Culture" (282-94).
5/2 Friday. Small Group Presentation #12. Wei Hui & Jameson.
5/5 Monday. Lyotard. "Answering the Question: 'What is Postmodernism?'" (71-82)
5/7 Wednesday. Lyotard. "Introduction" to *The Postmodern Condition* (xxiii-xxv).
5/9 Friday. Conclusion.
5/16 Friday. Final Paper Due. (Typed, by 4 pm, in Rice 28.)