

Culture and Modernity

GS.SPT 6647/ GS.Humanities 6319 Winter 2010

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A chief characteristic of the modern era is the heightened sense of the importance of culture. Equally, a self-conscious discourse on modernity as a distinct historical era was of crucial importance to the understanding and practices of culture. The aesthetic movement known as modernism can be understood as a diverse and polemical exploration of the relationship between modernity and perception. At the same time, modernism needs to be understood within the broader social economy of modernization in western societies. Furthermore, modernism is not the only context in which culture and modernity interact. Their relationship can be explored in terms of changing concepts of identity, space and place, and a heterogeneous set of practices associated with culture that are not limited to the arts.

This course explores culture from a theoretical and historical perspective, focusing on the symbiotic history of culture and modernity within contemporary modern / postmodern western societies. It offers a rigorous interdisciplinary approach to the understanding and critical analysis of culture. It encourages students to compare and combine critical themes and vocabularies drawn from critical theory of the early 20th century, cultural studies of the late 20th century, political and aesthetic beliefs materialized in modernist artistic and urban praxis, cultural policy and the critique of culture as “governmentality,” studies of modernity in the arts and everyday life, and more recent philosophical and political critiques of culture and power in the era of globalization.

This course draws on critical theory, cultural studies, sociology and social theory, discourse analysis, aesthetics, art history, and political economy to explore the interdependency of modernity and culture in modern western societies. It explores the shaping of modern culture, the effectivity of culture within modernity, the political and aesthetic struggles mounted in the name of culture, the shifting relations between culture and power, and the controversial status of modernism, modernity and culture today.

COURSE READINGS (* 3 DAY RESERVE IN YORK LIBRARY)

Required:

- Emmanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question, What is Enlightenment?* Penguin, 2009.
Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. NY: Penguin, 1988.*
Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford University Press, 1990.
Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations**
Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism**
Don Slater, *Consumer Culture & Modernity*. Blackwell 1997.*
Vassili Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou (eds), *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. Lopez. Foreword by Renato Rosaldo. University of Minnesota Press, 1995.*
Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*.*

Recommended books (ordered through York University Bookstore)

- Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
John Jervis, *Exploring the Modern: Patterns of Western Culture and Civilization*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998*
Tim Armstrong *Modernism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. *
J. Berland and S. Hornstein, *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions and the Value(s) of Art*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.
Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbault, David Solkin (eds), *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*. NSCAD Press, 2004.
Fred Inglis, *Culture*. Polity, 2004.
Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*.
Jean-Michel Rabate, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*. Blackwell, 2007.

(see full course bibliography on course website):

COURSE EVALUATION

- Presentation of readings: 15%
Presentation of research problem: 15%
Short review essay: 20%
Seminar Participation: 10%
Final essay: 40%