

## Course Description: Theoria/Poiesis

**Professors:** Stephen Ross (English) and Emile Fromet de Rosnay (French)

**Description:** This course asserts that there is a fundamental continuity between modernist cultural practice and late-twentieth-century literary and cultural theory. Literary works frequently inaugurate lines of inquiry that philosophy, theory, and cultural studies later take up. We will both begin from and go beyond the observation that that Gilles Deleuze read D. H. Lawrence, that Alain Badiou read Samuel Beckett, or that Jacques Derrida read James Joyce (there are many other such pairings possible). Instead, students will be encouraged to consider whether the later theories propounded by Deleuze, Badiou, Derrida derive from their encounters with modernism. If so, what/how much does theory learn from modernism? What does it reject? Why? How might we usefully read modernism as theory and theory as modernist?

Students will read both primary modernist cultural products – poems, plays, novels, etc. – and later theoretical works. We will treat aesthetic works as theory and theoretical works as aesthetic objects. We will ask not only about how novels think, for example, but also about how theory deploys the aesthetic. In the process, we will revisit key terms in the history of Western philosophy – theoria (speculation) and poēsis (making). Students will be encouraged to read widely on these terms and their histories, and to bring that knowledge to bear in reconsidering the relationship between modernism and theory, between art and philosophy. Students will be challenged to read against the grain and against their prior instruction, to question conventional accounts, and to challenge their own assumptions about the relative places of aesthetics and thought.

### Tentative Texts:

Adorno, Theodor. *Prisms*.

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Man without Content*.

Badiou, Alain. *On Beckett*.

Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*.

Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Franz Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

Flaubert, Gustav. *Madame Bovary*.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*.

Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

**Coursepack** with readings including Derrida, Jacques – “Ulysses Gramophone,” “What is Poetry?”; Benjamin, Walter –from *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism* and from *The Arcades Project*; Bhabha, Homi K - “How Newness Enters the World”; Blanchot, Maurice – *Le Livre à venir*; De

Man, Paul – “Autobiography as Defacement”; Heidegger, Martin – “Origin of the Work of Art”; Jameson, Fredric – from *The Political Unconscious*; Lacan, Jacques – “Le Sinthome”; Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe – “Introduction to Walter Benjamin's *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism*”; Mbembe, Achille – “Necropolitics”, “African Modes of Self-Writing”; Nietzsche, Friedrich – from *The Will to Power*, and from *The Birth of Tragedy*; Sloterdijk, Peter – from *Domestication of Being*; Žižek, from *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*.

There will also be readings from Stéphane Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire, Marguerite Duras, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Luce Irigaray, Paul Celan, Georges Bataille, and others.

**Assignments:**

Presentations: 2 x 10% each = 20%

Mid-Term Paper = 20%

Term Paper Proposal = 10%

Term Paper = 30%

Take-Home Final Exam = 20%