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READING (AND WATCHING) 1984:
A RETURN TO THE SCENE OF THE POSTMODERN



Professor Phillip Wegner
Wednesday 6-8 (12:50-3:50 p.m.)
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The title for our seminar is taken from Michael North's landmark study, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (1999). North's book offers an experiment in reading the extraordinary range of works released in the year 1922—including T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows*, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*—as "a limited test case in investigating the relationship between literary modernism and the public world of which it was a part." In this seminar, we shall perform a similar experiment for the literary and cultural situation of *postmodernism*, taking as our focus works released in the banner year of 1984. That year saw not only the publication of such key theoretical statements as Fredric Jameson's essay, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," the special *Social Text* double issue, "The 60s Without Apology," the English translation of Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, and the posthumous publication of the second and third volumes of Michel Foucault's landmark *Histoire de la sexualité*, but also an extraordinary range of novels and films by established figures and the debut works of others who would become vitally important in the years to follow. The year 1984 also resonated in the larger cultural context in another way, as it was the setting of George Orwell's great Cold War fantasy, *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949). Many of the works released in that year also directly reference and respond to Orwell's masterpiece, marking the distance of current realities from Orwell's own.

Texts

Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School*
 Martin Amis, *Money*
 James Cameron (director), *The Terminator*
 the Coen brothers (director), *Blood Simple*
 Brian De Palma (director), *Body Double*
 Samuel Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*
 Don DeLillo, *White Noise*
 Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*
 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vols. 1-3
 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*
 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*
 Jim Jarmusch (director), *Stranger Than Paradise*
 Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
 Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*
 Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*
 Michael Radford (director), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
 John Sayles (director), *The Brother from Another Planet*
 Ridley Scott (director), Apple Macintosh commercial

Students will be responsible for procuring copies of the major readings for the semester. Films and shorter texts will be made available as the semester progresses.

Aims and Methods

1. Full presence in every spatial, ontological, existential, and intellectual sense of the word, as well as active and engaged participation in the seminar discussions. Given your presence here, I assume that all of you are looking forward as much as I am to having the opportunity for a serious and careful engagement with these texts. Thus, the most general expectation that I have for this semester is that all of you intend to read these works, and to do so in a responsible and rigorous fashion, and in a spirit of good faith and intellectual camaraderie. I would ask then that you make every effort to engage in, to use a much abused term, a *dialogue* with these works, being attentive to their respective voices, acknowledging their particular historical and otherwise contingent beings in the world, and finally working to imagine how we today might best retool the insights and modes of analysis of their various "unfinished projects." In this way, I hope that we will develop a much more complex and profitable understanding of both the power and originality of these arguments and traditions.

2. In order to facilitate and enrich our discussion of these works, I want to ask each of you to be responsible for introducing and situating each week's readings. As I imagine all of our work fundamentally to be a collective project, you will do this in groups of two or three, with each group being responsible for the readings on two different occasions. Each group will be asked both to provide a brief introduction to the material and to serve as general "experts" on the readings for that week. Your group can take a variety of approaches to this task: you may want to highlight some of the central issues the readings address; briefly outline their main arguments; note the ways they engage with what has come before; place them in historical, intellectual, and political contexts; note connections to other practices; give overviews of some of the secondary readings on these works; offer some questions for discussion; provide creative illustrations and applications of the thesis; and so forth. I only ask that you keep the opening comments brief (15 minutes maximum total) so that we can begin our general discussion as soon as possible. I also hope that your groups will continue to work together throughout the semester, sharing ideas, giving support, discussing research projects, enjoying cocktail hours, and other important tasks. I will be very happy to meet with your group beforehand to suggest some secondary readings and discuss approaches and tactics.

3. Some events of special note this coming term: First, the second part of the symposium, "Imagining Climate Change: Science and Fiction in Dialogue," organized by the Science Fiction Working Group, will take place on **February 17-18**. Secondly, the Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Marxist Reading Group will be held **March 10-12**, with keynote addresses by Susan Buck-Morss, Chris Pavsek, and Kristin Ross. Finally, the 13th Annual Conference on Comics and Graphic Novels is scheduled for **April 8-10**. As there will be a great deal of discussion relevant to our class, I would like to encourage all enrolled students to consider attending some of the sessions and events, or taking the opportunity to present your own work at these conferences.

4. For the major written component of the course, I will ask each of you to develop an independent research program, which will take one of two forms: either a) two shorter essays of 10-15 pages in length examining the questions or issues raised by the material in more depth, or drawing connections between these works and other areas of interest; or, b) a major critical research project of some 25-30 pages in length. The aim of the longer project will be to produce: 1) a sustained engagement with some of the works we discuss in class; 2) a further independent examination of the issues raised by the work we have looked at; 3) a discussion drawing upon some of the recommended secondary or additional readings; or 4) an original reading of another other work -be it literary, theoretical, filmic, architectural, cultural, digital, virtual, or otherwise— deploying the concepts and models we elaborate during the course of the semester. I would also like to ask that all 3rd year PhD students plan to pursue option b, with the goal of producing an essay that will serve either as the basis of a dissertation chapter or a publishable essay (or even both). I ask each of you who choose this second option to turn in a detailed paper proposal, complete with bibliography, about a month before the paper is due. If you require additional time to work on this project, I am happy to allow you to do so. However, in order to avoid extending the course indefinitely, I expect that the project will be completed by the end of the summer term; work turned in after that time should not expect to receive extensive (if any) comments.

Grading Criteria

Attendance and Participation: 25%
 Group presentations: 25%
 Seminar paper: 50%

UF Poliey Statements

1. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

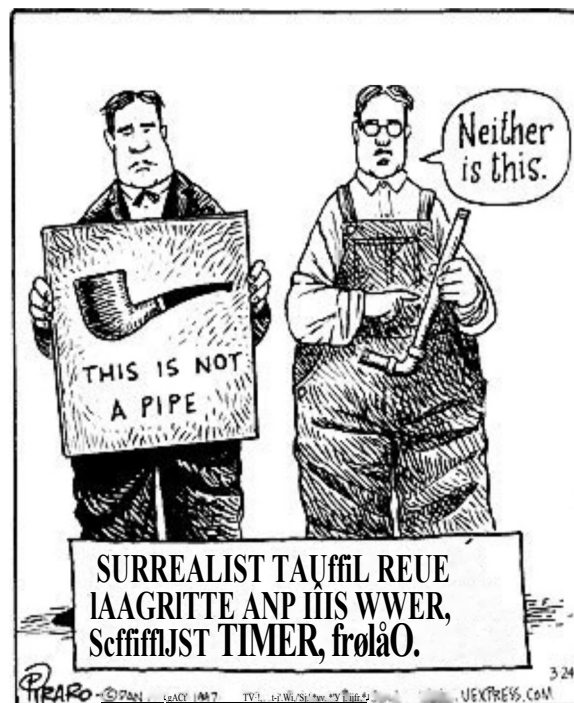
2. UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>

3. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the

highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

4. Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

5. Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.



Tentative Schedule



1. January 6

Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (Ch. 1 of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and "Periodizing the 60s" (from *The Sixties without Apology*)

2. January 13

Jameson, *Postmodernism*, continued

3. January 20

Don DeLillo, *White Noise*



4. January 27

Michael Radford (director), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ridley Scott (director), Apple Macintosh commercial; Martin Amis, *Money*





5. February 3

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vols. 1-3

6. February 10

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vols. 1-3, continued

7. February 17

Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*

8. February 24

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

9. March 2 - NO CLASS (Spring BREAK)

10. March 9

Samuel Delany *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*
and John Sayles (director), *The Brother from Another Planet*



11. March 16

Gibson, *Neuromancer*



12. March 23

James Cameron (director], *The Terminator*

Brian De Palma(director], *Body Double*

13. March 30

Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*



14. April 6

Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School*

15. April 13

Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*

16. April 20

the Coen brothers (director], *Blood Simple*

Jim Jarmusch (director], *Stranger Than Paradise*

