

**Department of English and Writing Studies
Western University**

**English 4050G
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Office hours: Mon. 1-2, Tues.10-11, Thurs 10-11 and by appointment

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Course Description

Taking as its starting point Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility," this course will attempt to understand the relationship between a number of terms central to twentieth- and twenty-first century discussions of art and culture: politics, technology, violence, myth. While we will of course attempt to come to an understanding of Benjamin's work and some of the responses it elicited, not least Horkheimer and Adorno's scathing critique of mass culture, our central concern will be to try to think through the central relationship between the categories of art, literature, culture, the aesthetic, on the one hand, and politics, on the other, in other words, what Benjamin termed the "aestheticization of politics." To this end, alongside Benjamin, Adorno, some of those who have commented most provocatively on their work (Derrida in particular), we will examine works of art from the immediate context of Benjamin's essay (the Dadaists, the paintings of Paul Klee, the propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl; Franz Kafka's *The Trial*), as well as other works that respond to the questions raised by these thinkers (Art Spiegelman's *Maus*). Throughout the course, our purpose will not be to elaborate a specific political position but rather to inquire into the very nature of the relationship between politics and art.

Although we will read a good deal of theory, this course does not require a specific course as a prerequisite. In fact, one of our main concerns will be to think about how theory comes to the kinds of formulations it makes, in other words, to read the theoretical texts as carefully as possible.

Required Texts

Available at the Western Bookstore

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I and II*
Kafka, *The Trial*

Other texts will be made available on a memory stick for students to download.

Academic Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical or compassionate grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling

office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

The full policy is set out in the handbook:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Plagiarism (See U.W.O. Calendar)

Plagiarism (the unacknowledged use of another person's work) is one of the most serious academic offences, since it involves fraud and misrepresentation. In plagiarizing, one is in effect claiming another person's words or ideas or data as one's own work, and thus misrepresenting material subject to academic evaluation. It is necessary, therefore, that plagiarism carry appropriate penalties. These are within the discretion of the Chair of Undergraduate Studies, but may include failure of a course or a grade of zero on an assignment, without the privilege of resubmitting it.

STUDENTS FOUND GUILTY OF A SECOND SERIOUS OFFENCE WILL BE EXPELLED FROM DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH COURSES. FURTHER ACTION MAY BE TAKEN BY THE DEAN'S OFFICE.

Students must acknowledge each printed or electronic source (**including study guides such as *Cole's Notes* and Internet materials**) by author, title, date and place of publication, and page number if: (a) they quote from it directly; (b) they paraphrase its ideas; (c) they are conscious of any influence its ideas may have had on their own work. **Every source (including websites) that students have consulted (whether they refer to it directly or not) must be included in a bibliography (Works Cited).** Some instructors may require that students provide copies of material downloaded from the Internet.

It is not always possible to identify the sources of inspiration of one's own ideas with total accuracy. A reasonable and conscientious effort is all that is required. **However, it is entirely the student's responsibility to be aware of the nature of plagiarism.** If students have any questions about plagiarism, they should ask their instructor. If students have any doubts about the documentation of their own essays, they should see the instructor before the essays are due. Information about correct forms of documentation may be found in the *MLA HANDBOOK For Writers of Research Papers* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009), available in the Reference section at Weldon (LB 2369.M57).

Students found to have submitted the work of another person as their own work **will automatically fail the course**. Any students who know their own work has been used improperly have a responsibility to inform the Department of that fact; otherwise they will be considered collaborators.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Presentation	20%
Short Paper	20%
Final Paper proposal/biblio.	10%
Final Paper	40%
Participation	10%

Late Assignments

Late essays will be penalized 2% per day late. I will not accept essays more than one week late without consultation. Please note that *University Senate policy prohibits me from accepting any assignment after the last day of classes (April 8)*.

Final Paper (Due: March 31)

A research paper of 12-15 pages. In this paper, you will take up one of the issues raised throughout the course (the relationship between politics and art, for instance, or the impact of technology upon art). You are free to write on works on the course (though you must write on a topic different from that of your short essay), but you may also range beyond the works and authors we have studied. You are expected to do significant research in the relevant secondary literature for the essay and must document the essay appropriately.

Essay Proposal (Due: March 17, though I encourage you to submit this before this date)

Since you will be devising your own essay topic for the course, I would like you to submit a proposal for the topic, along with an initial bibliography (it needn't be complete, but it should indicate that you have made some real progress on your research for the paper). You should annotate the bibliography (a sentence or two per item will suffice). For the proposal, write a paragraph in which you describe the topic you would like to explore, the works you plan to discuss, what your approach will be, and how you might develop your argument (I realize that this last item will be tentative until you actually write the paper). Please do feel free to discuss your potential topic before submitting a formal proposal.

Presentation

Each student in the course will give one class presentation of 20 minutes in length. You will begin class and will be responsible for introducing the material under discussion that day. The main point of the seminar is to offer a reading of the text, to engage with it critically, always with a mind to helping us all understand the work better and to generating discussion. My main goal for this course is for all of us to read the works together in an effort to come to terms (to understand, be confused, disquieted, by . . .) with them. I would very much like your seminars to contribute to this, which is to say that I encourage you *not* to speak (or read) *at* your audience but to engage with us.

Within 48 hours of your presentation, please send me the notes you used for your presentation.

Short Paper (Due February 12)

In this paper, I would like you to write a brief essay (4-5 pages) on a very focused aspect of the work of Benjamin or of Horkheimer and Adorno. You might pick one of the sections of Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility," for example, and discuss it critically. Or you could pick phrase, passage, or specific issue from "The Culture Industry" to discuss.

Participation

The participation grade will assess the quality of your engagement in and contribution to the seminar. As such, it is not a measure of loquacity but rather of preparation, thoughtful and helpful interventions in class, attention to and engagement with the seminars and to class discussion more generally.

In order to participate, you have to attend class. You have **2** "free passes," which is to say that you can miss two classes without penalty. Each subsequent absence without documented illness or compassionate grounds will result in you forfeiting two marks (out of twenty) on your participation mark. This said, your goal should be to attend every meeting of the course.

Schedule of Classes

- January 6: Introduction
 January 8: Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (hereafter referred to as “artwork essay”)
- January 13: Benjamin, artwork essay, Preface, sections I-V; Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Capital*
 January 15: Marx, *The German Ideology*
- January 20: Benjamin, artwork essay, VI-X; Benjamin, “Little History of Photography”
 January 22: Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry” (94-115)
- January 28: Benjamin, artwork essay, XI-XII; Benjamin, “The Storyteller”
 January 30: Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry” (115-136)
- February 3: Benjamin, artwork essay, XIII-XV; Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*
 February 5: Surrealism, Dada
- February 10: Benjamin, artwork essay, Epilogue; Riefenstahl, *The Triumph of the Will*
 February 12: Riefenstahl, *The Triumph of the Will*
- February 17, 19: Reading Week. No Class.*
- February 24: Lanzmann, *Shoah*
 February 26: Lanzmann, *Shoah*
- March 3: Spiegelman, *Maus I*
 March 5: Spiegelman, *Maus I*
- March 10: Spiegelman, *Maus II*
 March 12: Spiegelman, *Maus II*
- March 17: Kafka, *The Trial*
 March 19: Kafka, *The Trial*, Benjamin, “Franz Kafka”
- March 24: Kafka, *The Trial*
 March 26: Kafka, *The Trial*, Derrida, “Before the Law”
- March 31: Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”; “On Lyric and Society”
 April 2: Paul Celan, “Todesfuge” (Deathfugue)
- April 7: Conclusions, Adieu