

**FROM DADA TO DANK MEMES:  
REVOLT, REVULSION, AND DISCONTENT  
THEOCRIT 9152-001  
DR. ANDREW WENAUS  
Fall 2018**

**Lecture:** Tuesday 9:30am-12:30pm

**Location:** STVH 3165

**Office hours:** Tuesday: 1:00pm-3:00pm

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**Course Description:**

This course examines the complex trajectory of Dadaism as it continues to resonate both with and against our present political and cultural climate. Early twentieth-century avant-garde art shifted from an ethos of art for art's sake to art as lived experience and revolutionary gesture. Dada was motivated by disgust towards the political and social establishment of its time. Rather than inspired by an individual's spontaneous overflow of pathos, the quintessential Dadaist poem is an arbitrary re-assembly of already-available text and images. For Dadaists, not only does this approach to art change a life, it also responds to changes in Modern life. Yet, this reimagining of the empirical and political self as an already-constituted "automated self" proves to be a challenge to artistic and public life to this day. From the collage of Max Ernst's proto-graphic novel *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934) to the cut-up experiments of William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin, and J.G. Ballard in the 1950s and 1960s to the remix fiction of Kathy Acker and Jeff Noon in the 1980s and 1990s, there is an emphasis on how ready-made and re-arranged text/image is both constituting and constructive. These practices are expressed as liberating; digital technology makes these processes widely accessible and practically limitless. Today this unlimitedness is met equally by enthusiasm and nihilism. This extreme polarization is perhaps more obvious today than ever before. In the twenty-first-century, for example, the conflation of popular music with the trash bin of consumer imagery makes up the neon anti-capitalist aesthetic of "vaporwave." With deep resentment and disgust toward the present economic and political state of things, perpetually mutating and mindboggling internet memes ultimately express protest toward the economic and social moment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Just as the Dadaists captured the process of random reassembling as an act of political resistance, the digital era demands that we either, to borrow Douglas Rushkoff's dictum, learn to program or be programmed. But what does this ongoing Dadaist impulse mean and how can the many tendrils of discontent affect radically differing political agendas? How does the Dadaist assault on rationality serve ends as different as revolution and nihilism? Beginning as a revolutionary Modernist movement, influencing Surrealism, metamorphosing into the darling of the post-War advertising industry, re-invigorated by the Situationist International and post-punk, and currently influencing the proliferation of "dank memes" and their simultaneous

adoption by both progressives and the Alt-Right, Dada has a presence as complex and pressing today as it was over a century ago. Ultimately, the purpose of this course is to critically examine a question at the core of Dada: what is the best way to express disgust and to disrupt the consensus reality of an era in a significant way?

### **Course Learning Objectives**

Successful students who complete the course will be able to:

- Achieve an understanding of Dada
- Achieve a sense of the historical trajectory of Dada in different media and the theoretical commentaries associated with the movement
- Develop skills for effective critical analysis, close reading, and textual interpretation
- Develop skills for writing logical, organized, and clear essays on literary topics
- Develop skills for presenting academic material orally and moderating discussion amongst colleagues and peers in a seminar context
- Expand skills for engaging in secondary sources as a means of informing, interrogating, and engaging in critical debate

### **Description of Class Method**

Courses will be lecture and seminar style. Please be prepared to engage in discussion at each class.

### **Course Materials**

#### **Readings:**

Photocopies: Available at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

*The DADA Reader: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Dawn Ades. (2006)

Nagle, Angela. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (2017)

Tanner, Grafton. *Babbling Corpse: Vaporwave and the Commodification of Ghosts*. (2016)

#### **Viewings:**

*Adult Swim: Various Shorts*

*Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!* Dir. Tim Heidecker, Jonathan Krisel, and Eric Wareheim (2007)

*The Eric Andre Show*

*Cool 3D World*

Various Online Videos and Memes

## Method of Evaluation and Marks Distribution

Assignment	Due Date	(%)
Short essay (6-8 pages)	Week 4	25
Seminar Presentation	Week 6-12 (in-class)	30
Research paper (12-15 pages)	Week 13	35
Attendance and Participation		10

### Short Essay

**Value: 25%**

**Length: 6-8 pages**

In consultation with me, you will develop a topic that engages with Dada. The purpose of this exercise is to guide your thinking toward the experience and interrogation of the process and meaning (or destruction thereof!) of Dada and online meme processes. While this short essay will not be a research paper, it must be a formal academic treatment of a specific concern. More details to follow.

### Seminar Presentation

**Value: 30%**

**Length: 15-20 minutes (In-Class)**

In consultation with me, you will develop a critical intervention into a text from our reading list. You will prepare a 15-20 minute oral presentation (about 6-8 pages) that defends a clearly defined thesis. The seminar presentation will then be followed by a 10-15 minute question period where you will respond to questions and comments from your classmates and professor.

### Research Paper

**Value: 35%**

**Length: 12-15 pages**

You will engage with secondary source material as a means of intervening and offering insight into an established literary debate. Be eccentric and daring! Just be sure that your writing is clear and lucid, your flow of ideas is logical, and you stress the significance of your argument through close reading and critical analysis. More details to follow.

### Participation

Regular attendance and involvement in class and seminar discussion is essential. The intensity and thoughtfulness with which you pursue the seminar topic and research paper in consultation with me will also have a bearing on your participation grade.

### Late Submissions

Essays are due on the specified date. They are to be handed in at the beginning of class. Late essays will be penalized **3% per day** including weekends. Essays submitted more than a week (7 days) late will received a grade of 0/F. If you cannot submit your essay on time due to illness or on compassionate grounds, you will need a letter from a physician or academic councilor of your home faculty indicating that you were ill or unable to attend to your work during the time in question.

## Weekly Reading Schedule

WEEK	Readings	Assignment
1	<b>Introductions</b> <b>Overview of the Course</b>	
2	<b><i>The DADA Reader</i></b> Hugo Ball “Cabaret Coltaire,” 20 Tristan Tzara “Note for the Bourgeoisie,” 21 Alberto Savino, “A Musical Puking” 30-31  <b>Photocopy</b> Richard Dawkins, “Memes: The New Replicators” from <i>The Selfish Gene</i> ) Wendling, Mike. “Introduction.” <i>Alt-Right: From 4Chan to the White House</i> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Why am I a Destiny?” Franz Marc “The “Savages” of Germany August Macke “Masks” Emil Nolde, "On Primitive Art."	
3	<b><i>The DADA Reader</i></b> Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto 1918,” 36-42 Hans Richter, “Against Without for Dada” 48-49 Otto Flake, “Thoughts,” 51-53 Tristan Tzara, “In-between – Painting (as we approach the point of tangence,” 54-55 Walter Serner, “The Swig about the Axis,” 58-61 Tristan Tzara, “Dada is a Virgin Germ,” 66  <b>Photocopy</b> Baudrillard, Jean. “After the Orgy” and “Transaesthetics” from <i>The Transparency of Evil</i> . Hugo Ball, “Dada Fragments” Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case" Henri Bergson, from <i>Creative Evolution</i> Sigmund Freud, from “On Dreams” Giorgia de Chirico, “Mystery and Creation” George Grosz and Wieland Hertzfelde, “Art is in Danger”	
4	<b><i>The DADA Reader</i></b> Max Ernst, “The Old Vivisectionist,” 68 Raoul Hausmann, Central Office of Dadaism “Put Your Money in dada!,” 86	<b>SHORT ESSAY DUE</b>

	<p>---. "The German Petit Bourgeois is Cross," 88-89          ---. Dada Club, "Join Dada," 90          Dadaco, "What is dada?," 99-104          Francis Picabia &amp; Tristan Tzara, "[Automatic Text]," 119"</p> <p><b>Photocopy:</b>          Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"</p>	
5	<p><i>The DADA Reader</i>          Francis Picabia, "DADA Manifesto," 125          Paul Eluard, "In the Plural," 126          Henri-Pierre Roche, "The Blind Man," 148-152          Mina Loy, "In...Formation," 152          "The Richard Mutt Case" 154          Tristan Tzara, "Eye-Cover, Art-Cover, Corset-Cover          Authorization," 159</p> <p><b>Photocopy:</b>          Georges Bataille, from "Critical Dictionary"          Francis Picabia, "Thank you, Francis"</p>	
6	<p><i>The DADA Reader</i>  <i>Littérature</i>, 161-179          "Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement," 181-200          Paul Dermér, "What is Dada!," 248          Theo van Dosburg, "Dadaism," 288-289          George Grosz, "George Grosz," 308-310          Max Ernst, "The Old Vivisectionist," 68</p>	<p><b>SEMINAR          PRESENTATIONS</b></p>
7	<p><b>Online:</b>  <a href="#">André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)"</a>  <a href="#">Breton, "What is Surrealism?"</a>  <a href="#">André Breton &amp; Leon Trotsky, "Towards a Free          Revolutionary Art"</a>  <a href="#">Louis Aragon, "A Wave of Dreams"</a>  <a href="#">Salvador Dalí, "The Conquest of the Irrational"</a>          Max Ernst, from <i>Une Semaine de Bonté</i></p> <p><b>Photocopy</b>          Georges Bataille, "The Absence of Myth"          Georges Bataille, "Max Ernst, Philosopher!"</p>	<p><b>SEMINAR          PRESENTATIONS</b></p>

<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>Photocopy</b>          Georges Bataille, “Surrealism and How it Differs from Existentialism”          Guy Debord, “Writings from the Situationist International”          Jean-Paul Sartre, from “Anti-Semite and Jew”</p>	<p><b>SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS</b></p>
<p><b>9</b></p>	<p><b>Photocopy</b>          Vilem Flusser “The Image” from <i>Towards a Philosophy of Photography</i>          Vilem Flusser “The Technical Image” from <i>Towards a Philosophy of Photography</i>          Vilem Flusser “The Apparatus” from <i>Towards a Philosophy of Photography</i>          Vilem Flusser “Our Program” from <i>Post-History</i></p>	<p><b>SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS</b></p>
<p><b>10</b></p>	<p>Tanner, Grafton. <i>Babbling Corpse: Vaporwave and the Commodification of Ghosts</i></p> <p><b>Photocopy</b>          Dick Hebdige “Bricolage” from <i>Subculture: the Meaning of Style</i>.</p> <p><b>Online:</b>  <a href="#">Jacques Derrida, “What is Ideology” from <i>Spectres of Marx</i></a>  <a href="#">Jeff Noon, “The Ghost on the B-Side”</a></p>	<p><b>SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS</b></p>
<p><b>11</b></p>	<p><i>Babbling Corpse</i> continued</p> <p><b>Online:</b>  <a href="#">Douglas Rushkoff “Trump is a Media Virus”</a>  <a href="#">Bullock, Penn and Eli Kerry “Trumpwave and Fashwave”</a></p> <p><b>Photocopy</b>          Mark Fisher, “The Slow Cancellation of the Future” from <i>Ghosts of my Life</i></p> <p><b>Online:</b>  <a href="#">Nick Land, "The Dark Enlightenment"</a>  <a href="#">Mencius Moldbug (Curtis Yarvin), “A Formalist Manifesto”</a></p>	<p><b>SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS</b></p>
<p><b>12</b></p>	<p>Angela Nagel, <i>Kill All Normies</i></p> <p>The Dark Enlightenment and Neoreaction (NRx) cont.</p>	<p><b>SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS</b></p>

<b>13</b>	Angela Nagel, <i>Kill All Normies</i> (cont.)  Review and Conclusion	<b>RESEARCH PAPER DUE</b>