

# Seminar in the Humanities: Modernity and Postmodernism

Honors 0021 - 1 credit hour

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**Course Description:** This course is an exploration of the contemporary humanities through cultural criticism, philosophy, and art. This class does not assume any prior knowledge. HONORS 0021 is useful for students contemplating graduate study in the humanities, for those interested in learning the vocabulary and culture of this field, and for those with an avocational interest in developing a critical toolbox to more fully experience contemporary culture and art. Topics include what it means to study in the humanities, the vocabulary that is used in this field, and exposure to some of the major thinkers revered by today's humanities scholars. 12 students.

**Texts:**

Cahoone, Lawrence, ed. *From Modernism to Postmodernism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003 and handouts.

(All readings are in *From Modernism to Postmodernism* unless otherwise noted.)

**Syllabus**

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**Date      Topic**

Week 1    Class introduction  
Lawrence Cahoone, "Introduction": 1-13

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**Philosophy**

*THEMES: Truth, Reality, and Knowledge*

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Week 2    Modern and Proto-Postmodern examples

René Descartes, from *Meditations on First Philosophy*: 19-26  
[Optional reading: Hume, from *A Treatise on Human Nature*: 27-31]  
Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," "The Madman," "How the 'True World Finally Became a Fable,'" and *The Dionysian World*: 109-117

Postmodern examples

Week 3

Jean-François Lyotard, from *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*: only 259-260 (1st section of essay)  
Michel Foucault, from "Truth & Power": only 252-253  
Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?": 447-456

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## Science and Philosophy of Science

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### Week 4 Modern

Charles Darwin, from *The Origin of Species*: 88-95  
Max Weber, from "Science as a Vocation": 127-131

### Week 5 Early Postmodern and Postmodern examples

Thomas Kuhn, from "The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions": 200-208  
[Optional readings: Sandra Harding, from "From Feminist Empiricism to Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies": 342-353; Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the Seventeenth-Century Flight from the Feminine" 354-369]  
Paul Feyerabend handout: "Anything Goes"

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## Language

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### Week 6 Modern and Postmodern examples

Ferdinand De Saussure, from *Course in General Linguistics*: 122-126  
Handouts: Jacques Derrida's "Letter to a Japanese Friend" and others  
[Optional reading: Jacques Derrida, "*Difference*," 225-240]

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## Theater

*THEMES: Sexuality and Feminism*

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### Week 7 Modern examples

Sigmund Freud, from *Civilization and its Discontents*: 144-148  
Tennessee Williams, "Night of the Iguana"

### Week 8 Postmodern examples

Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One": 254-258  
[Optional reading: Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" 390-401]  
Caryl Churchill, "Cloud Nine"

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## Visual Art

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Week 9 Modern and Postmodern examples

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism": 118-121

Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs": 310-318

Handout from Janson's "History of Art,"

See Courseweb External Links for examples of Marcel Duchamp, Jenny Holzer, and Barbara Kruger.

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**Architecture**

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Week 10 Modernist and Postmodern examples

Le Corbusier, from *Towards a New Architecture*: 132-138

Robert Venturi, from *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*: 403-409

Charles Jencks, from "The Death of Modern Architecture" and from *What is Post-Modernism?*: 457-463

Handout from Janson's "History of Art"

See Courseweb External Links for examples of Le Corbusier and Frank Gehry

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**Film**

*THEMES: Economics and Representation of Culture*

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Week 11 Modern and Postmodern examples

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Bourgeois and Proletarians": 75-81

Film: Vittorio De Sica: "The Bicycle Thief" (watch in class)

Frederic Jameson, from "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism": 564-574

Friday Night Movie: Oliver Stone: "Natural Born Killers"

Week 12

Discuss films and readings

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**Literature**

*THEMES: Writing and Reading and Writing*

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Week 13 Modern examples

Roland Barthes handout, excerpt from S/Z

Ernest Hemingway: "A Very Short Story" and T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"

Week 14 Postmodern examples

Jean Baudrillard handout: "The Map Precedes the Territory"

[Further, optional reading: Baudrillard, from *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 421-434]

Jorge Luis Borges: "The Library of Babel," "On Exactitude in Science," and "Pierre Menard, Author of

the *Quixote*"

Week 15 Wrap-up; summary

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**Grading:**

Grading for this course is Satisfactory/No Credit ("pass/fail"). Successful completion of the course requires the following:

- attending and participating in all classes (maximum two absences)
- posting a discussion question/observation to our Courseweb site each week before class, as well as reading others' postings and being prepared to discuss them
- functioning as co-facilitator for one week, contextualizing the readings for the class and helping to facilitate discussion