

Summer 2014

HUM 390 || Images of Eroticism

Dr. Robert C. Thomas, E-mail: theory@sfsu.edu

Monday / Wednesday 9:00 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. || in HUM 408

Office: HUM 416, Office Hour: 1:15 PM— 2:15PM

Course Website: <http://imagesoferoticism.com/>

IMAGES OF EROTICISM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a critical study of the relations between eroticism and forms of human expression, including that form of expression we have come to name “pornography.” The historical formation of the concept of “pornography,” including its relation to modernism/modernity, will be foundational for this course. Equally foundational will be those works that seek to simultaneously challenge and re-conceptualize the concept of pornography (e.g. *In the Realm of the Senses*). We will consider works of literature in the canon of erotic literature (Bataille, Ballard), theoretical texts (Foucault, Bataille, Williams, Kendrick), historically censored films, recent “hard-core art” films (*Shortbus*, *9 Songs*), alt porn (*New Wave Hookers*) and narrative films such as *Crash*. In addition to our work on the concept of pornography, we will think pornography is a genre of film (i.e. a form of expression that makes use of cinematic conventions). Genre films (which are probably the majority of the films that you see) are those that feature scenes you have seen so many times before, in so many different ways, that you expect to see them again and again depending on the type or genre of film (western, zombie, porn, action, etc.). Genre films don’t just employ cinematic conventions, they also teach us about social conventions, and pornography is no exception (this is particularly true with regard to constructions of gender and sexuality). While the first half of the course focuses on foundations for critically thinking about obscenity, pornography, and sexuality, the second half (more or less) will, in addition to other work, follow Linda Williams in looking at “hard-core” films as a genre. This will enable us to look at the social conventions surrounding sexuality and gender expressed in these works. Students will learn to think critically about various aspects of pornography, censorship, obscenity, sexuality, desire, gender, feminism, gay and lesbian sexuality, sadomasochism, and other subjects in a cross-cultural and comparative framework. Throughout this course we will endeavor to think our relation to these subjects in the context of the historical present. Please be aware that my courses typically build (over time). If you do not read the assigned readings, if you are absent during the discussion, if you are not otherwise engaged with what we are covering, you will do poorly in the class. While we are doing some really cool things in this course, this is still a challenging class. Please don’t take the course if you have no interest in doing this work. Above all, we are not watching films to get people “off” but to analyze them critically. Many of the films we will watch in class will be graphic and sexually explicit, including “hard core” images of sexual acts. Some of the films we will watch have been previously banned and/or heavily censored. The social reaction against these films will form a part of our critical study. While we will all have strong reactions to some of these films, we will endeavor in this class to think critically—beyond the level of mere reaction. It is not just that some of these films shock us that is important to our study, but what that shock is meant to do (critically).

Prerequisites: ENG 114 or consent of instructor

REQUIRED TEXTS BOOKS (available at the SFSU bookstore)

- Georges Bataille – *Story of the Eye*
- J.G. Ballard – *Crash*
- Julie Maroh – *Blue is the Warmest Color*
- Linda Williams – *Screening Sex*
- Linda Williams – *Porn Studies*

ON-LINE ESSAYS AND ARTICLES (posted to the course website)

- J.G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (selection)
- Georges Bataille, *Erotism* (selections)
- Michel Foucault, “22 January 1975” from *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974 – 75*
- Michel Foucault, “Introduction” to *Herculine Barbin*
- Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum* (selections)
- Laura Kipnis, “How to Look at Pornography” from *Pornography: Film and Culture*
- Oshima Nagisa, “Sex, Cinema, and the Four-and-a-Half-Mat Room,” “Theory of Experimental Pornographic Film,” “Sexual Poverty” and “Text of Plea” from *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*
- Beatriz Preciado – *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (selections)
- Tasker, "Permissive British Cinema?"
- Christopher Weedman, "Optimism Unfulfilled"

FILMS

- Gregg Araki – *Kaboom* (USA/France, 2010)
- David Cronenberg – *Crash* (USA, 1997)
- Abdellatif Kechiche – *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d' Adèle)* (France, 2013) •
- Eon Mckai — *Neu Wave Hookers* (USA, 2006)
- John Cameron Mitchell – *Shortbus* (USA, 2007) •
- Nagisa Oshima – *In the Realm of the Senses (Ai No Corrida)* (Japan, 1976) •
- Jerzy Skolimowski – *Deep End* (USA/Germany/Great Britain, 1970) •
- Kate Williams – *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization* (USA, 1999) (selections) •
- Michael Winterbottom – *9 Songs* (Great Britain, 2005)

- Short Films • Fernand Legar/Dudley Murphy – *Ballet Mécanique* (France, 1924)

ASSIGNMENTS

Students are responsible for completing all the assigned course work and are expected to regularly attend and participate in course discussions. Reading difficult texts is a major component of this course. Students are expected to come to class prepared, which means that you have done the

assigned reading before class. Always bring the assigned reading material (for each particular day) to class. Always take notes. My lectures, comments, and rants constitute an important “text” for the course. There will be two short (2-page) essays, a final (6-page) essay, and a final exam required. There will be a handout on the essay assignments before each essay is due (see the schedule). Your essays must demonstrate mastery of the reading material and course lectures for the assignments (your grade will be based on this). See the Segment Three requirements below for more info. No papers will be accepted via e-mail (no exceptions). No rewrites and no late papers. Plagiarism in any of the course assignments, in any form, will be dealt with harshly and will be forwarded to the Dean’s Office for appropriate action. Plagiarism on any assignment will also result in a grade of zero. You must receive a letter grade on all assignments in order to complete the course. (Please note that Wikipedia is NOT a critical source and cannot be used for college writing. The same is true of IMDB.) The final exam will consist of ten questions and test whether students have done the required readings and been in attendance for the course lectures. If you do not read the course material, if you skip out on the course lectures, you will fail the exam. Students are responsible for all of the course content and materials even if they are absent (absences of more than one class session can result in your final grade being substantially lowered). No incompletes will be given. Students need to include a S.A.S.E. if they want their final papers returned to them. There will be study questions for many, although not all, of the works we study. Make use of them. They give you a road map for the course material. Study questions will be posted to the course website under Articles (sometimes before and sometimes after we have covered the material). They are meant to remind you of key concepts, ideas, and questions. Remember to fully read any essay prompts. The biggest mistake students make on their essays is not following the instructions on the prompts. I give you all of this information to help you do well in the course and get a good grade. Take advantage of it!

Warning: This is a difficult and challenging course. Please note that we are not watching films so that you can be “entertained” by them, but in order to critically study and analyze them. While we are doing some really cool things in this course, the purpose is to challenge you. It’s worth remembering that this is a University course and it’s supposed to be challenging. **If you do not do the course readings, you will be completely lost in this class. This syllabus is part of the course materials.** You are provided with a copy of the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and are expected to know the information contained within it the same way you are expected to know the information contained in the articles, books, and lectures. I reserve the right to grade you down based on your inability to “read” the syllabus and **any other written directions. Refer to the syllabus before asking me questions (that I have already answered in writing).**

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Cell phones are to be turned off in class. If you are caught text messaging in class, surfing the web, or playing video games, or engaging in any other non-course related activity, you will be required to leave the classroom. No eating in class (unless you bring enough to share with everyone). No electronic recording in the classroom.

AGREEMENT Enrollment in this course constitutes your agreement to abide by all of the above rules and policies.

SEGMENT III WRITING REQUIREMENT

To meet the segment III writing requirement, you will be required to write at least 10 pages of critical writing. These papers are "formal" and will be read and graded by the professor. You will be expected to argue coherently, to support your arguments with detailed examples from the works analyzed, to edit your papers for spelling, grammar punctuation and agreement, and to meet recognized standards for notes and bibliography when relevant. All of the above will be taken into account in the grading of these assignments.

SEGMENT III NOTICE

This course satisfies part of the General Education, Segment III requirement in the cluster "Human Sexuality." From the Registrars Office: "Students may take Segment III courses for GE credit. Upon completion of Segment I and a total of at least 30 units of Segment I and Segment II GE. Students no longer need to wait until they have 60 units to begin fulfilling their Segment III requirements." <http://www.sfsu.edu/~admisrec/reg/dars.html>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify, distinguish and appraise the ways in which different cultures at different moments of their histories and different levels of the same culture represent, in both verbal and visual modes, the search for, the experience of and the consequences of sexual pleasure.
2. Master the techniques used for analyzing the representation of eroticism in both verbal and visual modes of cultural production. Master skills necessary for literary and art historical analysis.
3. Identify and recognize the relationships between a variety of historical, psychological, cultural and economic contexts and the works of erotic art which are produced in these contexts.
4. Investigate the relationship between two different modes of cultural expression-the verbal and the visual-and their advantages and disadvantages as means of representing eroticism.
5. Master the writing skills necessary to write analytical papers comparing erotic works of different forms and from different cultures.
6. Analyze the ways in which different ethnicity, social and economic status, cultural traditions and gender choice give rise to different notions of what constitutes the erotic and how best to represent that in art, music and literature.

STATEMENT ON DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email: dprc@sfsu.edu, <http://www.sfsu.edu/~dprc/facultyfaq.html#1>

GRADING

- Attendance and participation 10%
- First Paper 20%
- Second Paper 20%
- Final Paper 40%
- Final Exam 10%

DVD's that SFSU does not own will be on reserve at the Library. They will be placed on reserve *after* the films are shown in class.

Tentative Course Schedule

WK 1

June 9th

Introduction and handout of course material

Film: *9 Songs*

June 11th

Introduction to Pornography and Censorship

Read: Walter Kendrick, "Preface" and "Origins" from *The Secret Museum*

Film – "Road to Ruin" from *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization*

Linda Williams, "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction," in *Porn Studies*

Short Film – Andy Warhol – *Blow Job*

(Optional Ara Osterweil, "Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*" in *Porn Studies*)

WK2

June 16th

First Essay (2-pages) Due on Kendrick and *Pornography*

Read: Oshima – "Sex, Cinema, and *the Four-and-a-Half-Mat Room*," "Theory of Experimental Pornographic Film" in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State* (website); Linda Williams, "Hard Core Eroticism" from *Screening Sex*

Film – *In the Realm of the Senses*

June 18th

Read: Deborah Shamoan – "Office Sluts and Rebel Flower Girls" in *Porn Studies*;

Michel Foucault – "Chapter Three: January 22, 1975" from *Abnormal*; Michel

Foucault – "Introduction to Herculine Barbin"; Beatriz Preciado, "The History of Technosexuality" from *Testo Junkie*

Film – *Kaboom*

WK3

June 23rd

Second Essay (2-pages) Due on Oshima

Read: Tasker, "Permissive British Cinema" and Weedman, "Optimism Unfulfilled"

Film – *Deep End*

Read: Laura Kipnis, "How to Read Pornography"

Film – *New Wave Hookers* (selections)

June 25th

Film — *The Devils*

"The Desecration and Resurrection of Ken Russell's *The Devils*" (short)

Assignment: "Raising Hell" by Mark Kermode

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/81/>

WK4

June 30th

Final 6-Page Essay Assignment Handed Out

Read: *Blue is the Warmest Color*

Film – *Blue is the Warmest Color*

July 3rd

Read: Bataille – *Story of the Eye*, Bataille — *Eroticism* (selection)

Film – "Ballet Mecanique"

WK5

July 7th

Read: J.G. Ballard, *Crash*; and “Car Crash,” “Sex” (from *Quotes*, pp 238-247, 263 – 279), “Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan” (from *The Atrocity Exhibition* pp 105 - 107)

Film – *Crash*

Short film – *Towards Crash*

July 9th

Read: Linda Williams, “Philosophy in the Bedroom: Hard-Core Art Film Since the 1990’s” in *Screening Sex*

Film – *Shortbus*

Final Exam (last 1/2 hour of class)

July 10th

Final (6-page) Essay Assignment Due in HUM 416 @ 1 PM