

HUM 390 || SPRING 2015

Dr. Robert C. Thomas

Wednesday 7 PM – 9:45 PM

BH 226

E-mail: theory@sfsu.edu

Office: HUM 416, Office Hour: Wednesday: 6:00 PM— 7:00 PM

(Allow time for me to get across campus for class)

Office Phone: 415-338-1154 (no voice mail)

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

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), important theoretical texts (Foucault, Bataille, Williams, Kendrick, Nash, Preciado), historically censored films (*The Devils*, *Salò*), recent “hard-core art” films (*Shortbus*, *9 Songs*), alt porn (*New Wave Hookers*), 1970’s narrative porn (*Sexworld*), and narrative films that deal with issues pertaining to the social construction of sexuality (*Deep End*). We will read two brand new works in the field of porn studies this semester: Beatriz Preciado’s *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboys Architecture and Biopolitics* and Jennifer C. Nash’s *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*. In addition to our work on the concept of pornography, we will think pornography as 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 likely 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 it 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*
- Julie Maroh – *Blue is the Warmest Color*
- Jennifer C. Nash – *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*
- Beatriz Preciado – *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboys Architecture and Biopolitics*
- Linda Williams – *Screening Sex*

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

- Giorgio Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?"
- Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (selection)
- Guy Debord, "Separation Perfected" from *Society of the Spectacle*
- Michel Foucault, "22 January 1975" from *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974 – 75*
- Michel Foucault, "Introduction" to *Herculine Barbin*
- Walter Kendrick, "Preface" and "Origins" from *The Secret Museum*
- Mark Kermode, "Raising Hell"
- Laura Kipnis, "How to Look at Pornography" from *Pornography: Film and Culture*
- Oshima Nagisa, "Sexual Poverty," "Sex, Cinema, and the Four-and-a-Half-Mat Room," "Theory of Experimental Pornographic Film," and "Text of Plea" from *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*
- Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Massacre Game* (selections)
- Beatriz Preciado, "The History of Technosexuality" from *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*
- Lynn Hunt, "Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500 – 1800" from *The Invention of Pornography* (optional)

- Tasker, “Permissive British Cinema?” (optional)
- Christopher Weedman, “Optimism Unfulfilled” (optional)

FILMS

- Abdellatif Kechiche– *Blue is the Warmest Color* (France, 2013)
- Bruce La Bruce – *The Raspberry Reich* (Germany/Canada, 2004)
- Eon Mckai — *New Wave Hookers* (USA, 2006)
- John Cameron Mitchell – *Shortbus* (USA, 2007)
- Nagisa Oshima – *In the Realm of the Senses (Ai No Corrida)* (Japan, 1976)
- Pier Paolo Pasolini – *Salò or, The 120 Days of Sodom* (Italy, 1975)
- Jerzy Skolimowski – *Deep End* (USA/Germany/Great Britain, 1970)
- Anthony Spinelli – *Sexworld* (USA, 1977)
- Kate Williams – *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization* (USA, 1999) (selection)
- Michael Winterbottom – *9 Songs* (Great Britain, 2005)

Short film: Paul Joyce – *Hell on Earth: The Desecration and Resurrection of Ken Russell’s The Devils* (UK/2002)

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, 5 short in class exams, and a final exam required. There will be a handout on the essay assignments before each essay is due (see the schedule). These will only be handed out in-class. If you do not come to class, you will not receive the assignment. No digital copies of the assignments will be handed out or made available. For this reason, do not lose your copy of the essay assignments. *Pay attention when I go over the assignments in class.* Your essays must demonstrate *mastery of the reading material and course lectures* for the assignments (your grade will be based on this). No papers will be accepted via e-mail (no exceptions). No rewrites and no late papers. No incompletes. *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.* (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. If you do not read the course material, you will fail the final exam. **Warning: approximately 60% of students in previous semesters have failed the final exam because they have not done the course readings.** There will be 5 short exams held in class, as detailed in the course syllabus. These will be held at the end of the class session. You will only need a pen/pencil and paper to complete these exams, which will consist of a single question written on the blackboard. If you are not in attendance, there will be no make-ups for these in class exams.

Please be aware that from time to time I may need to contact you via e-mail. In order to facilitate this, you will need to make sure that your SFSU e-mail account is actively working. The system is not set-up to accommodate non-SFSU emails. It is your responsibility to make sure your SFSU email is working and accessible to you.

Warning: This is a difficult and challenging course. If you do not do the course readings, you will be completely lost.

The biggest mistake that students make on the essay assignments is to not actually read the assignment and/or fully follow the instructions or fully answer the questions. Additionally, if your paper does not demonstrate that you've read the assigned books, you will be graded down significantly and may not receive a passing grade. Students need to include a self addressed stamped envelope if they want their final papers returned to them.

This syllabus is part of the course materials and your road map to the class and your learning. 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 taught in the course. I reserve the right to grade you down based on your lack of knowledge of the syllabus and **any other written directions. Refer to the syllabus BEFORE asking me questions (that I have already answered in writing or in class).**

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.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

No electronic devices allowed in class. Cell phones, laptops, iPads, etc 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.

SEGMENT THREE WRITING REQUIREMENT

To meet the segment III writing requirement, you will be required to write 10 pages of 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. This course satisfies part of the General Education, Segment III requirement. Ten pages of formal critical writing, which will be graded by the professor for style and content, will be required (see below).

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

STATEMENT ON SEXUAL ASSAULT

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact: The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/ Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/> For more information on your rights and available resources: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>

STUDENT DROPS

Students who do not attend the first class meeting will be dropped. It is the students' responsibility to drop the course after the first class session. Students who stop attending but do not drop will be given a WU grade. Please be aware that a WU grade is counted as an F for GPA purposes.

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

GRADING

- Attendance 5%
- In Class Exams 5%
- First Paper 20%
- Second Paper 20%
- Final Paper 40%
- Final Exam 10%

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE FALL 2015
(Instructor Reserves the Right to Modify)

- Aug 26 Introduction and handout of course material
Film – *9 Songs*
- Sep 2 **First 2-Page Paper Assignment Handed Out (in class only)**
Introduction to Pornography and Censorship
Read: Walter Kendrick, “Preface” and “Origins” from *The Secret Museum*
Lynn Hunt, “Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500 – 1800” from *The Invention of Pornography (optional)*
Film – “Road to Ruin” from *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization*
- Sep 9 **First 2-Page Paper Due**
Film – *Deep End*
Read: Linda Williams “Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction” from *Porn Studies*
Tasker, “Permissive British Cinema” (optional)
Weedman, “Optimism Unfulfilled” (optional)
- Sep 16 Read: Beatriz Preciado, “The History of Technosexuality” from *Testo Junkie*
Michel Foucault – “Chapter Three: January 22, 1975” from *Abnormal*; Michel Foucault – “Introduction to Herculine Barbin;” Agamben, “What is an Apparatus?”
In Class Assignment on Reading
- Sep 23 **Second Paper Assignment Handed Out (in class only)**
Read: Oshima, “Sexual Poverty,” “Sex, Cinema, and *the Four-and-a-Half-Mat Room*,” “Theory of Experimental Pornographic Film,” and “Text of a Plea” in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*
Film – *In the Realm of the Senses*
- Sep 30 Study Questions on Oshima; Linda Williams, “Hard-Core Eroticism” in *Screening Sex*
“Office Sluts and Rebel Flower Girls” from *Porn Studies*
In Class Assignment on Reading
- Oct 7 **Second Paper Assignment Due**
Read: Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* Chapter One “Separation Perfected”
Film – *The Raspberry Reich*
- Oct 14 Preciado, *Pornotopia*, 9-65
In Class Assignment on Reading
- Oct 21 *The Black Body in Ecstasy* 1-26, 58-106
Film – *Sexworld*
In Class Assignment on Reading
- Oct 28 Read: “Raising Hell” by Mark Kermode
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/81/>
Film – *The Devils*

Short film – *Hell on Earth: The Desecration and Resurrection of Ken Russell's The Devils*

- Nov 4 Film – *Neu Wave Hookers* (selections)
Read: Laura Kipnis, “How to Read Pornography”
- Nov 11 **No Class – Veteran’s Day**
- Nov 18 **Final Paper Assignment Handed Out (in-class only)**
Read: Linda Williams, “Philosophy in the Bedroom: Hard-Core Art Film Since the 1990’s” in *Screening Sex*
Film – *Shortbus*
- Nov 25 **Thanksgiving Break – No Class**
- Dec 2 Read: *Blue is the Warmest Color* (begin reading final essays)
Film – *Blue is the Warmest Color*
- Dec 9 Read: *Story of the Eye*, Bataille – *Eroticism*, 1-48, Linda Williams, *Screening Sex*, 1-24.
In Class Assignment on Reading
- Dec 16 **Final Paper Due @ 7:00 PM, Final Exam @ 7:10 PM**