

Course Title:**The Avant-gardes as Anti-Culture: A History of “Radicalism” and “Excess”****Course Description:**

This course examines the historical Avant-gardes’ aesthetic and ideological principles as expressions of a paradox-based mode of engagement with art and the world that has marked the last 100 years of theoretical, literary, and media production much more profoundly than generally acknowledged.

We start by examining Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, and Futurism through the lens of Deleuze’s definition of the paradox as not a contradiction but an enactment of the “genesis of the contradiction” – therefore, as an attack on disjunctive/ oppositional/ hierarchy-based modes of thinking and acting. We then discuss a number of philosophical and theoretical texts fundamentally wired into the logic of the historical Avant-gardes’ aesthetics and ideologies (by Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan, Hardt and Negri, Nail, and others). Finally, we examine a

s

r level of sophistication.

s have been discussed in theory and criticism primarily as
dedicated on rejection and negation, with the implication that
y and positivity. The notion of the ethical weight of the Avant-
ion that had failed to resist the criminal march of history
ry and criticism only towards the end of the twentieth century
destructive aspects of a great number of historical Avant-garde
(Voices like Adorno’s or Deleuze and Guattari’s remained
iew, for decades.)

ussions can help us uncover is twofold: first, that there are
y in the Avant

- Analyze the impact of early twentieth-century Avant-garde movements on later developments in theory and criticism, as well as in the arts;
- Evaluate the aesthetic and ideological principles, as well as the cultural aims associated with the presence of Expressionist, Dadaist, Surrealist, Cubist, and Futurist elements in contemporary literary and media products;
- Develop skills for presenting academic material orally and debating on various academic topics in a seminar context;
- Expand skills for effective critical analysis and textual interpretation;
- Expand skills for writing logically organized and clearly argued essays on literary and theoretical topics;
- Expand research and documentation skills.

Readings:

All the readings will be made available online OR included in a course reader.

Method of Evaluation & Marks Distribution:

Short Essay (20%): A formal academic analysis of an Avant-

This is a tentative list of topics & readings. You will receive an **updated version** in **Week 1**. All the readings will be made available online OR included in a course reader.

Week 1: The Historical Avant-gardes as “Anti-Culture”

“I am afraid we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar.”

(Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 19 iii.5)

Introductory lecture on Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, and Futurism.

Class discussion of one painting in each style.

Brief introduction to some major critical theorizations of Avant-garde art (Poggioli, Bürger, Calinescu, Innes, Deleuze and Guattari).

Brief introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s work with the figure of the paradox.

In-class reading and discussion: Artaud, *Spurt of Blood* (short play – photocopies provided in class).

Week 2: The Paradox and the Socio-Historical Machine

“Carroll, yes; Camus, no.” (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 71)

“New theologians of a misty sky (the sky of Koenigsberg) and new humanists of the caverns sprang upon the stage in the name of the God-man or the Man-god as the secret of sense. Sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between them.” (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 71)

Readings:

-Fragments from Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*; Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*; Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*; Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

-Selection of short Dada and surrealist texts TBA.

Lecture and discussion: the figure of the paradox, black humour, machines, anti-production, and “microfascisms”; ,ach Td [nse

-Fragments from Bergson, *On Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*;

-Fragments from Blau, *Reality Principles: From the Absurd to the Virtual*; Bradley, *Brecht and Political Theatre*

-Fragments from Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*; Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (dramas)

Lecture and discussion on the competing notions of ethical representation and political commitment that emerged during and after WWII. (One major theoretical and aesthetic direction relates explicitly to the Dada and Surrealist movements.)

Week 8: Postwar Meaning-Making II: Is Someone/ Anyone Watching?

“The master in any case: we don’t intend (listen to them hedging), we don’t intend (unless absolutely driven to it) to make the mistake of inquiring into him. He’d turn out to be a mere high official, we’d end up by needing God. (We have lost all sense of decency admittedly, but there are still certain depths we prefer not to sink to.) Let us keep to the family circle, it’s more intimate. We all know one another now, no surprises to be feared. The will has been opened: nothing for anybody.” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, *Three Novels* 374-75)

Readings:

-Fragments on humour and irony from Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*; Lacan, *The Formations of the Unconscious* (Seminar V); Critchley, *Very Little, Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature and Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*

Dadaist/ surrealist attempts to destabilize meaning and contemporary criticisms of the inscription of systemic racism and heteronormativity into language.

Week 11: Against Propaganda: Avant-garde Strategies of Resistance

“Bus bench for humans only. Report non-humans. Beware: Non-human secretions may corrode metal!” (Sign on bus bench in *District 9*)

Readings:

-Fragments from Herman & Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*; MacLeod, *Still Manufacturing Consent: Propaganda in the Information Age*.

Viewings: doctored videos recently discussed in the news; short fragment from *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009).

Lecture and discussion: the Avant-gardes’ questioning of “photographic” representation and its relevance for contemporary debates surrounding “fake news.”

Week 12: Conclusion: Avant-garde “Radicalism” and “Excess” Today – Part I

“Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow” (The name of Stephen Colbert’s officially registered SuperPAC, 2012)

Readings:

-Fragments on the revolutionary potential of the “multitude” from Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*

-Fragments from Nail, *Re td [(S)l.eil*,