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ENGL 539A: Modernism, Mass Bodies and Crowd Politics
Winter I 2015-2016
SYLLABUS

Dr. Judith Paltin
Judith.Paltin@ubc.ca

BuTo 623 Office hours: TR from 1-1:50, and by appointment
Office phone: 604-822-4080 (email may reach me more quickly)

Course Rationale:

This seminar course explores fictional, empirical, and theoretical variations on the historical and narrated worlds of the collectivity, its marginalized and its revolutionists. We will examine case studies of crowds, and paradigmatic figures in modern and contemporary fiction, and collective forms of identity, those through which the “core of the self” extends outward, acquiring new repertoires of experience. We will explore theories of agency, and phenomena such as group aggression and utopianism, the sophisticated judgments of crowds, populisms and authoritarianisms, bare life and biopolitics.

Course Description:

From the late nineteenth century until after the two world wars the crowd appears as a peculiar obsession in sociology, psychology, economics, political science, and in popular and intellectual news-streams. In this period, “mass psychology” became a recognized disciplinary field of research and speculation, and the site of social, political and commercial engineering projects. It was argued that the political strategies of the future would center on the persuasion and control of crowds, and that new technologies of doing so were already taking shape. Anxieties and fantasies, both popular and scientific, collected around theories of crowd dynamics. Virtually irresistible group forces were described as producing the mob’s powerful appetite for violence, its subservient and/or rebellious behavior, the crowd-altered individual’s alleged primitivism, femininity or infantilism, evasion of social and moral debts, disavowal of respect for property rights and detachment from institutions. Now crowds are in the headlines once again, from

Egypt, China, and India to the Ukraine and Venezuela. The energy underlying some of these phenomena arguably comes directly from the modernist period. It seems an appropriate moment to rethink the crowd and some of the standard stories about its genealogy, when global migrations, digital crowd-sourcing, and crowd movements such as Occupy are receiving wide attention.

This seminar course will draw on the literary as an archive for this genealogy, as an underused resource in crowd studies, and the modernist archive in particular, as a moment that serves as a hinge from the nineteenth-century citizen-crowd to the contemporary 21st-century multitude as described in postcolonial and biopolitical theories. As we proceed, we will build a theory of the performativity of the crowd.

Requirements and Grading

40% -- a holistic participation grade which includes 1) attending class meetings and making contributions to the seminar conversation that are informed by the assigned readings, 2) making one oral presentation which analyzes important features of an assigned reading and places it within a "field" or pertinent academic debate, and 3) submitting a journal entry of ~2-3 double-spaced pages for each class meeting in response to material you will select from that week's assigned and suggested readings. The writing need not be polished, but please attend to the basic organization and expression of your ideas.

60% -- research/critical paper of 4500-6000 words (15-20 pp) due on December 15.

Texts ordered in bookstore (see full entry in reading schedule)

Le Bon, Forster, Woolf (*Jacob's* and *Mrs. Dalloway*), Eliot, O'Casey, Conrad, course reader

Reading Schedule (may be subject to change):

Sept. 8, Week 1 – Introduction, “The Age of the Crowd”: 1815/1915/2015

Charles Baudelaire, “Les Foules.”

Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, “Collective,” “Common,” “Democracy,” “Equality,” “Masses,” “Popular,” “Society.” Bennett, Grossberg, Morris, eds. *New Keywords*, “Body,” “Society.”

Suggested: John Plotz, “The Return of the Blob: Or How Sociology Decided to Stop Worrying and Love the Crowd.”

Sept. 15, Week 2 – Crowd Anxieties

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man of the Crowd.”

Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.

Walter Benjamin, “The Artwork in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

Sept. 22, Week 3 – Crowd Aesthetics

E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

Sigfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament.”

Andrew Uroskie, “Far Above the Madding Crowd.”

Jeffrey Schnapp, “The Mass Panorama.”

Sept. 29, Week 4 – The Mass Body, the Modern Sensorium

Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*

Georg Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life."

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."

Oct. 6, Week 5 -- Crowds and Affect

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

From Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*

From Wilfred Bion, *Experiences in Groups*

From Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire."

Oct. 13, Week 6 – Mass Intoxication and Demagoguery

James Joyce, "Cyclops."

From Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*.

From Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*

From Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

Oct. 20, Week 7— Authority, Discipline and Deviance

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*

Giorgio Agamben, "The State of Exception as a Paradigm of Government."

Michel Foucault, "Panopticism."

Suggested: King Vidor, "The Crowd" (1928) [VHS (sic) on reserve at Koerner Library]

Oct. 27, Week 8 – Bare Life and Biopolitics

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, continued

Hannah Arendt. "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man."

From Nikolas Rose, "Politics and Life."

Nov. 3, Week 9 – Expansive Identities

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

From Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self*.

Anke Gleber, "Female Flanerie and the *Symphony of the City*."

Suggested: Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927) – available on youtube at time of writing

Nov. 10, Week 10 – Crowd Chaos, Complexity, and the Strange Attractor

Sean O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*

From Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*

From David Ruelle, *Chance and Chaos*

Suggested: M.M. Bakhtin, "The Dialogic Imagination."

Nov. 17, Week 11 – "The Street As Stage": Group Performativity and Acting Out

--review/catch up on fiction: all texts are fair game for this discussion

From Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

From Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

Gayatri Spivak, "Planetary."

Nov. 24, Week 12 – The Virtual Crowd, Memetic Theory

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 1.8

Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto."

From Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*

Chantal Mouffe, "An Agonistic Approach to the Future of Europe."

Dec. 1– Crowd Style and the Virtuositic Multitude

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 1.8, continued

From Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*

From Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

From Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*

No journal entry due today. Instead, bring a half-page intervention to present.