Materialism

Why is materialism a dirty word? Through what logic has it come to be associated with crass monetary gain and excessive bodily pleasure? When did these associations begin, and why? What other senses of materialism (as a philosophy of the everyday, and as a critical corrective to idealism) lurk underneath these pejorative, immediate associations? How might they be activated? To undertake this project we examine conflicts between Christian idealism and a range of materialist philosophies—including Epicureanism, experimentalism and Marxism. Materialists became infamous for directing their attention at bodies rather than souls, at terrestrial matter rather than divine will, and at the letter rather than the spirit of scripture. We follow their lead and pay close attention to a range of texts and objects in this course. But in doing so we also consider just how various materialisms could be, how their realist correctives operated at different scales and in different contexts: from the atomic to the economic; from the corporeal to the textual. Readings include Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Saint Paul, Chaucer, Luther, Machiavelli, Castiglione, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Hooke, Leeuwenhoek, Diderot, Hegel, Wordsworth, Balzac, Marx, Stein, Ponge, Hejinian.

On-time attendance at lectures and sections is mandatory: more than two unexcused absences in lecture will result in a +/- grade reduction, as will more than two late arrivals (at either lecture or section) and more than one absence from section.

Assignments: participation in, and weekly one-page writings for, section (15%); 3 papers (#1: 10%; #s 2 and 3: 20% each), a mid-term (15%) and a final exam (20%). There is a required course reader available at New University Copy and Graphics on Waverly Place; readings from it are marked in the syllabus by R. There are also two required readings (Diderot and Hooke) on websites whose URLs are listed below.

Sept 5  Intro / Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844”
        Marx, from “The German Ideology”; “The Communist Manifesto”;
        “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”

Sept 10 Honoré de Balzac, Père Goriot
Sept 12 Balzac, Père Goriot

Sept 17 Gertrude Stein, “Melanctha” from Three Lives
Sept 19 Stein, from The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (6-64), Portraits
       (Matisse and Picasso)

Sept 24 Francis Ponge, Notebook of the Pine Woods and selected poems R

Sept 26 Lyn Hejinian, My Life (Paper 1 due)

Oct 1  Hejinian, My Life
Oct 3  Lucretius, On the Nature of the Universe
Oct 9¹ Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*

Oct 10 Catullus, Horace

Oct 15 Virgil, *Eclogues* and *Georgics* (Dryden translation) **R**

Oct 17 Virgil, *Eclogues* and *Georgics* (Dryden translation) **R**

Oct 22 Chaucer, from *The Canterbury Tales*: “General Prologue” and “Knight’s Tale”

Oct 24 Chaucer, from *The Canterbury Tales*: “Miller’s Tale” and “Wife of Bath’s Tale”

Oct 29 The King James Bible, *Romans*; *Corinthians* 1 and 2; Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans”; “The Faith of a Christian” **R**

Oct 31 Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Nov 5 Castiglione, from *The Book of the Courtier** R*

Nov 7 Erasmus, *Adages** R*

Nov 12 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Nov 14 Bacon, *New Organon* **Mid-Term** (during recitation this week)

Nov 19 Robert Hooke from *Micrographia*: Preface (to first indent “The Instrument is this”); numbered observations, labeled “Observ.” 1-5; 8, 11, 12, 14, 25, 34, 37, 38, 52, 53; all illustrations (labeled “Schem.”); spend extra time with #s 2 and 34. ([http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15491/15491-h/15491-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15491/15491-h/15491-h.htm))

Alexander Pope, epigrams **R** (**Paper 2 due**)

Nov 26 Svetlana Alpers, from *The Art of Describing* (Intro and Ch. 3) **R**

Ovid, from *Metamorphoses*, trans. John Dryden **R**

Descartes, from *The World and Other Writings* (Chapters 3-6) **R**


Recommended: Antony van Leeuwenhoek, letters 18 and 96 **R**

(You will only be responsible for the sections I project in class).

Nov 28 Hegel, from *Aesthetics*

Simon Schama, from *The Embarrassment of Riches*

Dec 3 Spinoza, from *Theological-Political Treatise* (Chapters 2 and 4) **R**

Diderot, from “Notes on Painting” (210-232) **R**

Dec 5 Denis Diderot, Encyclopedia ([http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/title/A.html](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/title/A.html))

Art, Beast, Believe, Bible (additional notes), Canon (all 3), Consecrated Bread, Cowl, Damnation, Epicureanism, Farm Laborer, Idiot, Intolerance, Irreligious, Jesuits, Machiavellianism, Natural Rights, Saint Bartholomew’s Day

¹ (note this is a Tue. meeting on a Mon. schedule)


Dec 17 Exam week begins Final Exam: TBA

Required Books

The Marx-Engels Reader
Honoré de Balzac, Pere Goriot
Gertrude Stein, Selected Writings
Lyn Hejinian, My Life ....
Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales
Lucretius, On the Nature of the Universe
The Holy Bible, King James Version
Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince
William Shakespeare, Hamlet
Francis Bacon, The New Organon
Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth

Penguin Classics: ISBN-10:

0140449159
Modern Library: ISBN: