



CONFÉRENCE UNIVERSITAIRE
DE SUISSE OCCIDENTALE



CUSO Doctoral Workshop in Modern and Contemporary Literature in English

Alternate Wednesdays, 16.15-18.45

Bâtiment Philosophes, Room 204

The CUSO Doctoral Workshop in Modern and Contemporary Literature in English meets fortnightly in Geneva, and is attended by PhD students, post-docs, staff and advanced MA students (by invitation) working on all areas of modern and contemporary literature in English. Our sessions include works in progress, guided readings of important theoretical texts, career development sessions (including on conference presentation, grant application and important milestones of the PhD), and workshops led by visiting speakers. This is a supportive and convivial space in which younger and more advanced researchers learn together about topics of common interest in modern and contemporary literature, culture and thought in the anglophone world. Researchers from across Switzerland are warmly encouraged to join us; PhD students from other CUSO universities will have their travel costs reimbursed.

5th October:

Dr. Greg Jones-Katz, (Institute of Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen)

“The Neoliberal Animation in America of Theory as a 'Cognitive Good'”

Euphoria for speculation, generalization, and abstraction swept through the American academic humanities in the late 1960s and the 1970s. “Suddenly, an Age of Theory,” Elizabeth Bruss observed. This paper explores how and why Theory, in classrooms, at institutes, centers, and conferences, and in publications, became a “cognitive good” in the sense given by Rens Rod and colleagues: an epistemic tool of “knowledge-making disciplines,” circulated “with the purpose of knowledge production” and “transferred across disciplinary boundaries.” This story is also part of the longer “history of critique.” Like the modernists who sought freedom from conformist attachments, Theorists, by way of interpreting art’s power to demystify and undermine social bonds seen as cruel and repressive, performed a Sisyphean labor that subverted the “ties that bind.” The progressive political effects of the development and trading of Theoretical cognitive goods were legion. Coming intellectually of age in and after the post-Sixties breakdown of the appearance of consensus, Theorists extended the broader post-1960s artistic critique of culture’s stress on individualism, imagination, antiauthoritarianism, and freedom. Yet Theorists also ironically came to firmly personify the hyper-individualist neoliberal work ethic. The “industry of high-tech theory,” Camille Paglia observed, was an industry “as all-American as the Detroit auto trade.” Indeed, the neoliberal ethos and disposition, or what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello elaborated as a postsixties “ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism,” animated Theory and possessed Theorists, as well as spaces that circulated Theory, such as the Theory and History of Literature book series, Theory journals, and the Critical Theory Institute. Meanwhile, capitalism disarmingly incorporated the nature, scope, and social effectiveness of critique by way of Theory (i.e., the valorization of a post-structuralist cultural politics) in American higher education, thereby enabling the formation of the “university” as a theater for culture war conflicts, ultimately shifting attention inside and outside the academy away from underlying changes in capitalism.

19th October:

“Geneva City of Refuge” (SAUTE 75th Anniversary Event) Philosophes 201, 19.00

Conversations about Geneva as sanctuary, refuge, and space of writing throughout history. Interventions from members of the English department, UNHCR representative and a theatre practitioner. Followed by an apéro.

2nd November:

Dr. Nell Wasserstrom (Boston College)

“*Nachträglichkeit* Revisited: Literary Modernism, Late Style, and the Temporalities of Reading”

This work-in-progress brings together two strands in recent thought: the (mostly anglophone) literary critical elaboration of “late modernism” (illuminated as it has been by scholars such as Jed Esty, Tyrus Miller, and C.D. Blanton) and the (mostly francophone) philosophical and psychoanalytic elaboration of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (known in English translations of Freud as “deferred action” and in French as *après-coup*). The latter makes one read anew the “lateness” of the former; the former provides generative ground on which to explore the specifically literary dimensions of the latter. The two strands are therefore mutually illuminating, leading us to a new understanding not only of late modernism as the crucial juncture of 1939-1941 that exceeds typical generic, nationalistic, and disciplinary distinctions, but also of *Nachträglichkeit* as a more capacious, disruptive logic of belated temporality that subverts the ways in which it has come to be codified as a self-identical psychoanalytic “concept.” Focusing on the final works of Sigmund Freud (*Moses and Monotheism* [1939]), Walter Benjamin (“On the Concept of History” [1940]), and Virginia Woolf (*Between the Acts* [1941]), my book project argues that the singular conjunction of late style and late modernism reveals an intensification of the obsession with belatedness that has haunted modernism since its origins.

23rd November:

Reading Professionalization: Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “The University and the Undercommons,” group reading led by Simon Swift (UNIGE)

7th December:

Graduate Student works-in-progress:

Caroline Martin (UNIGE), “Textual Ideology and Narrative Point of View in New Woman Short Fiction: Case Studies in Contextualist Narratology”

Will Edwards (UNINE) “Elegance, Anachronism, and the Whig Voice in Regency Era Poetry”

21st December:

In Memoriam: Leo Bersani, group reading led by Patrick Jones (UNIGE)

Programme convenor: Simon Swift (contact me at Simon.Swift@unige.ch to be put on our mailing list).