Alienation and Self-Identity

LSHV 367 01

Professor Ruf

Spring 2021

Thursdays 6 – 8:30pm

Syllabus



(Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #4)

**Description**

In the last two hundred years, Europeans and Americans have frequently used the notion of alienation in conceiving of themselves. In fact, we might characterize these two centuries as a time in which, paradoxically enough, humans’ identity has been integrally linked with being, in some sense, ‘strange.’ The course will attempt to make sense of the many links and tensions between alienation and self-identity -- or strangeness and the self -- by examining strong voices in the development of the contemporary identity. While we will discuss all of the works in class, primary responsibility for composing a theory of the complex relationship between alienation and identity will rest upon the participants in the course. All written assignments will offer opportunities to articulate and develop those theories, as will class discussion and class presentations. The course will culminate in an examination of the artist Lucas Samaras for his modeling of the strange self.

**Readings**

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Divinity School Address and “Experience” (available on Canvas)

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science (Random, 1974) ISBN 0394719859 (selections, book to be purchased)

J.B. Pontalis, Love of Beginnings (selected chapters, available on Canvas)

Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (Harvest, 1989) ISBN: 0156907399 (book to be purchased)

**Schedule**

Jan. 14 Introduction and Theory: Selves Pluralistic and Strange

The Common Sense Self of Mechanics, Medicine, and Technology

PowerPoint presentation: Selves in Art (Vermeer, Casper David Friedrich, Picasso, Cindy Sherman, Lucas Samaras, Edward Hopper, Chuck Close)

Jan. 21 Emerson, The Divinity School Address

Jan. 28 Emerson, “Experience”

Feb. 4 Nietzsche, The Gay Science

**(paper #1 due)**

Reading: sections 1-4, 11-14, 19, 21, 23, 38, 43, 46, 48, 54-56,

57-58

Feb. 11 Nietzsche, The Gay Science

Reading: sections 76, 107, 108-143, 276-285, 301, 340-41, 343-47, 370-71, 381-83

Feb. 18 Nietzsche

Readings: Any sections not completed in previous classes

Feb. 25 Woolf, To the Lighthouse

**(paper #2 due)**

Reading: pp. 3 – 124

March 11 Woolf, To the Lighthouse

Reading: pp. 125 – end

March 18 Woolf, To the Lighthouse

March 25 Pontalis

**(paper #3 due)**

Reading: Chapters 1 – 5

April 8 Pontalis

Reading: Chapters 6, 7

April 15 Pontalis

Reading: Chapters 10 – 12

April 22 Cindy Sherman (photos on Canvas)

April 29 Final Exam

**Course Requirements**

1. Class attendance

Presence at the first class meeting is strongly advised.  Absences are not expected, though I do realize that most people in the course are working and unexpected work obligations may occur. More than one absence should be exceedingly rare.

2. All readings

3. Three papers (5 pages long), taking a position on the most definitive element in the nature of

the self, due after reading and discussing Emerson, Nietzsche, and Woolf

4. Final exam lasting two hours analyzing the photographs of Cindy Sherman for the “self” that

is evident in them and tracing connections to the selves discussed in class during the

semester. The final exam will be taken online, on the same day and time as the class.

**Grading**

Short papers: 50% of final grade for all

Class participation: 25% of final grade

Final Exam: 25% of final grade

**Honor Code:**

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Office hours: Tuesdays 4:30 – 5:30