

# The Position of the Child in Society

Com 10M



Everybody's wearin a disguise  
to hide what they've got left behind their eyes.  
But me I just can't cover what I am  
wherever the children go, I'll follow them.  
- Bob Dylan

Save the children!  
-Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman*

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**Office Hours:**  
Mondays: 1- 2pm  
Wednesdays: 12:30- 1:30pm

## Topic Description:

Queer Theory and Disability Studies, among others, return our attention to the insights and subversive power afforded by those deemed abject, damaged, or superfluous under capitalist modernity. Children have not always been included in these discourses, yet some strands of critical theory have seen in the child an extra-sensory and emotionally authentic subject either outside of or prior to corruption by the instrumentalism and compulsory productivity of the adult public-sphere.

This class will listen to the wonders that are said to be stored in the world of children, reflecting on who children are and the function they are assigned by society. We will read and discuss several major novels and the affinal form, short-stories, from across genre and nationality, including authors such as Anaïs Nin, Henry James, Toni Morrison, and Ousmane Sembène. Reading will also include critical essays, such as by the Marxist 'mystic' Walter Benjamin, which extrapolate how the position of the child (in literature) informs the critique and transformation of capitalism. These questions will bring us into contact with several aspects of the childhood experience: liberation from adults, child abuse, childishness, solipsism, heightened sensitivity, love, and maybe growing up.

## Required Texts:

Texts are available in the campus bookstore.

| <u>Author</u>   | <u>Title</u>                            |
|-----------------|---|
| Toni Morrison   | <i>The Bluest Eye</i> (1970)            |
| Henry James     | <i>What Maisie Knew</i> (1897)          |
| Walter Benjamin | <i>Berlin Childhood ca. 1900</i> (1938) |

Other books and essays will be posted to the Canvas course site Files tab.

## Attendance and Announcements:

We meet once weekly on Wednesdays, attendance is vital.

Announcements will be posted approximately once per week after class, and occasionally at other times with important information or resources. I will list study questions, optional additional reading, and assignment specifics.

**Film Project:**

A group assignment will be emailed shortly. Consult the list of films or petition for one of your own selection. Next week partners will be assigned based on preference and film selection. Presentation should be about 5 minutes of clips, 5 minutes of analysis, and 5+ minutes for questions and class discussion. Film list: *The White Ribbon* (2006), *The Return* (2003), *Crooklyn* (1996), *Over the Edge* (1979), *Wassup Rockers* (2005),

**Grades and expectations:**

Com 10 is a 2-unit, pass/no pass course. There will be no written component. Students will be expected to complete the reading, participate in discussion, and present assigned material once or twice each. At times, short quiz responses will allow me to verify that the reading has been done.

**Disclaimer/tolerance:**

The topic for Winter quarter, 'Mental Health', at times compelled students to share personal information and to risk exposing their vulnerabilities with classmates. While this may not as readily be the case for us, consider the possibility not only that material may be sensitive for others (and require empathic listening), but that our discussions will greatly benefit from just this sort of sensitivity and capability of tapping into the unconscious.

## **Class Schedule:**

Week 1:

*The Bluest Eye* parts 1,2;

Jack Zipes lecture on Young-Bruehl: “‘Childism’ and Child Abuse”

Week 2:

*The Bluest Eye* parts 3,4;

“Barn Burning”, Faulkner;

Lancy Lecture: “Cherubs, Chattel, & Changelings”

Week 3:

Greene: “The Destructors”;

Freud, *2nd and 3rd Essays on Sexuality*;

Anton Chekhov, “Grisha”, “At Home”, “Vanka”, “Children”

Week 4:

*What Maisie Knew*, Chapters 1-19

Week 5:

*What Maisie Knew*, finish

Week 6:

*Oliver Twist*, through chapter 17

Week 7:

*Berlin Childhood ca. 1900*

Zipes, “Benjamin and the Children’s Public Sphere”

“Theses on the Concept of History”, Benjamin

Week 8:

Marx, *Capital Vol. I* (selection), “Machinery and Large-Scale Industry”

Kluge and Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience*, “The Public Sphere of Children”

Week 9:

Pacheco, *Battles in the Desert*

“Delivered from Capitalism: Nostalgia, Alienation and the Future of Reproduction in

Tretyakov’s *I Want a Child!*”, Christina Kiaer

Film: *Tomka and his Friends* (1977)