



NATURE, VIRTUALITY, AND RE-ENCHANTMENT

English 5010: Studies in Fiction — Dr. Alf Seegert
Spring 2014 — M,W 1:25-2:45

About a century ago, sociologist Max Weber famously declared that modernity had, through the combined powers of industrialization and technical rationality, brought about “the disenchantment of the world.” This disenchantment drained soul and meaning from the cosmos, leaving people alienated from themselves and nature, and rendering the earth a wasteland. **In this class we will examine two primary methods that literature and film have used in an attempt to “re-enchant” our experience of the world around us in the past century.**

First is the attempted return to wild, animate nature by challenging rationalized, mechanical interfaces and reclaiming one’s own sensuous, carnal body. Texts here include D.H. Lawrence’s scandalously sexy 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and David Abram’s evocative philosophical meditation on language, ecology, and the body, *The Spell of the Sensuous*.

The second method of re-enchantment in contrast aims not to escape virtuality and mechanism, but rather to embrace—and ultimately, to ensoul—them. Texts here include Martin Scorsese’s love-letter to cinema and machine automata, the 2011 film *Hugo*. We will also read Max Barry’s hilarious and oddly moving novel *Machine Man* (2011). Throughout the semester we will also encounter attempts to bring nature and technovirtuality together, as in Andrew Stanton’s 2008 film *WALL-E*. Other texts include Terry Gilliam’s 1985 film *Brazil* and Joe Wright’s 2007 film version of *Atonement*. We will also read selections from recent critical writings on modernity and re-enchantment, including Jane Bennett’s *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, Patrick Curry’s work on magic vs. enchantment, and Michael Saler’s notion of “disenchanted enchantment” from the book AS IF.