As you walked past this bulletin board over the past several weeks or days, occasionally glancing at this image, you probably assumed that what you saw was Diego Velázquez’s painting, *Las Meninas*. As a philosophy student in a continental-inflected program, your thoughts ran to the opening of Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* and the analysis he offers of it there. But now that you’ve paused to read, look again. Are you transfixed by that “compelling line” from the painter’s gaze to the void of reflective subjectivity Foucault identifies in Velázquez? In this still image from Eve Sussman’s 2005 video *89 Seconds at Alcazar*, what is pictured (as in Foucault’s reading of Velázquez) is the identification of representing aesthetic mastery with a “privileged and inescapable space of sovereignty.” Yet Sussman presents representation itself as that which resists the “representation effect” of the sovereign. By allowing Velázquez’s familiar figures congeal in their expected postures and positions only for a brief instant of a 10-minute sequence of motion, Sussman’s piece effects a radical temporalization of Velázquez’s image that addresses the construction and decomposition of the painting together with its history as an exemplary object of theoretical and critical discourse.

This seminar will examine the roles that confrontations with early modern philosophy, literature, and images have played in the formulation of key positions in contemporary continental thought. Our goals will be 1) to interrogate and evaluate the philosophical and historical methodologies at work in such conjunctions, 2) to consider more broadly the role that early modern texts have played in the formation of contemporary theoretical discourses, and 3) to directly engage those same texts on their own terms. We will begin by reading the first half of *The Order of Things* together with the myriad of texts Foucault uses to build it (Wilkins, Della Porta, Bacon Arnauld, Diderot, Linnaeus, Buffon, etc.). Possible additional pairings include: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, or Nancy with Descartes; Benjamin with several Baroque Trauerspiele and emblem books; Althusser with Machiavelli; Negri, Balibar, or Gatens with Spinoza; Derrida or DeMan with Rousseau or Pascal; Deleuze with Hume; Husserl, Agamben, or Harman with Leibniz; Schmitt or Birmingham with Hobbes, etc. The syllabus will be flexible enough to accommodate the particular interests of those enrolling in the course. Participants will be responsible for several brief presentations, an analytic protocol, and a research paper.