

RCAH 202 THE VISUAL PRESENCE OF THE PAST

RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE IN THE ARTS & HUMANITIES
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, SPRING 2012
TIME TR 10:20-12:10
CLASSROOM SNYDER C301

PROFESSOR DYLAN MINER
EMAIL DMINER@MSU.EDU
OFFICE HOURS TR 9:20-10:20
OFFICE C230J SNYDER HALL
PHONE (517) 884-1323

COURSE DESCRIPTION

History is not dead! In fact, as humans we cannot escape the 'presence of the past' and the manner that history continues to shape our contemporary lives. In this course we will examine the past and investigate how looking at the past will better suit us to comprehend the present. We will be particularly interested in how the past is represented in contemporary visual culture. By understanding contemporary culture and its historical situatedness, we will then become better equipped to adequately change it. In the vein of the common Aymara adage: "*Qhiparu nayraru uñtas sartañani.*" Looking back, we will move forward.

This course will focus on three distinct modes of 'representing the past': writing, comics, and documentary cinema. While my section of RCAH 201 investigated the *transcultural* relations that emerged between and amongst people in the 'contact zones,' 202 will analyze the way that, as consumers and producers, we mediate this historical and sociological material. By understanding this material critically, we may begin to construct a more democratic and egalitarian society. In the tradition of the often mistranslated Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is *also* to change it."

Using visual culture as the site of inquiry, this course will investigate how and why the past influences our contemporary cultural practices. Focusing on the domains of comics (or graphic novels) and documentary cinema, students will begin to see how the past remains germane in everyday activities and how we are all active in constructing the past. These artistic media have been chosen as exemplars of how and why the past is relevant in the present.

OBJECTIVES

Due to the interdisciplinarity of this course, the goals and objectives are likewise multiple. By reading, discussing, analyzing, and engaging course material, in addition to participatory and creative activities, students will accomplish the following:

- Interpret the meaning of signs;
- Identify the different ways 'artists' articulate the past;
- Construct a vision that connects the past, present, and future;
- Explain how and why we create meaning through art and visual culture;
- Examine the complex role that history plays in contemporary cultural practice;
- Articulate an understanding of documentary theory and comic studies.

The course will also help you meet general liberal learning outcomes, as outlined by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. These include, but are not limited to:

- Develop a robust *knowledge of human cultures and the natural world*;
- Improve *intellectual and practical skills*, such as inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, communication, visual literacy, and problem solving;
- Enhance *personal and social responsibility* through direct civic participation, ongoing intercultural competency, and continued ethical reasoning and action;
- Demonstrate *integrative learning* by synthesizing creative and analytical thinking across disciplinary fields.

READINGS

01. Patricia Aufderheide. *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University, 2007 (\$12). ISBN: 0195182707
02. Chester Brown. *Louis Riel: A Comic-strip Biography*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2006 (\$18). ISBN: 1894937899
03. Peter Kuper. *Diario de Oaxaca*. Oakland: PM Press, 2009 (\$29). ISBN: 1604860715
04. Marjane Satrapi. *The Complete Persepolis*. New York: Pantheon, 2007 (\$25). ISBN: 0375714839
05. Joe Sacco. *Palestine*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2002 (\$25). ISBN: 156097432X
06. Douglas Wolk. *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*. New York: Da Capo, 2008 (\$17). ISBN: 0306816164
07. ADDITIONAL READINGS > available as PDFs on angel.msu.edu. Log on with netID and password. Students will also be expected to screen occasional films outside class. These will be available in either the RCAH language lab or on reserve at the library.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

film essay(s)	15%
comic essay(s)	15%
documentary video	25%
comic project	25%
class participation	20%

ATTENDANCE |

As part of the Residential College in the Arts & Humanities, attendance is expected!! Although I will not be actively 'taking roll,' you will be obliged to reflect upon classroom activities and discussion. Therefore, continued absences will alter your ability to comprehend the overall themes of the course. Moreover, your presence in the classroom is needed for full participation credit. As such, your attendance may positively and/or negatively affect your final grade through multiple venues.

PARTICIPATION |

Active discussion is paramount to intellectual development. As such, 20% of your final grade is based on participation combined with weekly and in-class writing assignments. You are expected to arrive to class sessions fully prepared and on time. In the classroom, this includes having thoroughly read all assigned readings and prepared to critically and creatively discuss the material. You are expected to speak during each and every class, however quantity of participation is not a surrogate for quality. Your participation grade will take into consideration the frequency, as well as excellence, of your participation in classroom discussions.

OUTSIDE SCREENINGS |

Because we are dealing with cinema, which is time prohibitive, students are expected to view one film per week outside of class. These are listed on the syllabus as 'Outside Screenings.' These films will be available either in the RCAH language laboratory or on reserve on the fourth floor of the main library. The location will depend upon the film's circulation within the university library system, as well as if I have a copy in my own collection.

Although it may not always be convenient to schedule times to view the films, *you are required to view all outside films during the week that they are scheduled*. I advise that you set aside a specified time each week when you will screen a documentary, just as you would schedule in time for readings. Because of the time committed to outside screenings, the amount of reading and writing have been adjusted accordingly.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM + INTEGRITY |

In agreement with Article 2.3.3 of the *Academic Freedom Report* which states that ‘the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards,’ it is expected that students neither plagiarize nor copy from a peer’s intellectual or creative work. In addition, the RCAH adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in *General Student Regulations* 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades, and in the All-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades, which are included in *Spartan Life: Student Handbook + Resource Guide* (<http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm>). Students who engage in academically dishonest activities may receive a 0.0 on that given assignment or for the overall course.

POLICY ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES |

Students with disabilities that may interfere with completing your assigned course work may speak with me, as well as contact the *Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities* to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 [voice] or 355-1293 [TTY].

NOTE |

This is a working document. Additional readings | assignments may be inserted or altered as this course organically develops. This will, of course, depend on the interests and needs of the class, as well as the time constraints of the academic semester.

SECTION ONE DOCUMENTARY CINEMA

WEEK 01 JANUARY 10 + 12

THINKING ABOUT THE PAST

- T MEMORY V. HISTORY Introduction
- R INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTARY Nichols, 'What Types of Documentaries...,' PDF

OUTSIDE SCREENING None

WEEK 02 JANUARY 17 + 19

EXPOSITORY DOCUMENTARIES

- T DOCUMENTARY & CIVIL RIGHTS Aufderheide, Chapter One
SCREEN | Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notion* (1987, 56 minutes)
- R DOCUMENTARY & ANTHROPOLOGY Aufderheide, Chapter Two
SCREEN | Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (1922, 79 minutes)
John Grierson, *Man of Aran* (1934, 76 minutes)
Edward Curtis, *In the Land of the War Canoes* (1914, 47 minutes).

OUTSIDE SCREENING | 01. Claude Massot, *Kabloonak* (1994, 103 minutes)
02. Edward R. Murrow, *Harvest of Shame* (1960, 54 minutes)

WEEK 03 JANUARY 24 + 26

OBSERVATIONAL DOCUMENTARIES

- T ETHICS OF DOCUMENTARY Lewis, 'Why Documentary?,' PDF
SCREEN | 01. Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1997, 120 minutes)
02. Tracey Deer, *Club Native* (2008, 78 minutes)
- R OBSERVATIONS AND EVIDENCE None
SCREEN | 01. Abraham Zapruder, *Zapruder Film* (1963)

OUTSIDE SCREENING | Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (1935, 110 minutes)

WEEK 04 JANUARY 31 + FEBRUARY 02

PARTICIPATORY DOCUMENTARIES

- T PARTICIPATORY FILMMAKING Fregoso, 'Tracking the Politics of Love,' PDF
SCREEN | 01. Lourdes Portillo, *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*
(1985, 64 minutes)
02. Lourdes Portillo, *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena* (1999, 47 minutes)
- R INTERACTING WITH HISTORY None
SCREEN | Nick Broomfield, *Kurt and Courtney* (1998, 95 minutes)

OUTSIDE SCREENING | 01. James Spooner, *Afro-Punk* (2003, 66 minutes)
02. Martín Sorrondeguy, *Beyond the Screams* (1999, 30 minutes)
03. Paul Rachman, *American Hardcore* (2006, 100 minutes)
04. Rick Ernst, *Get Thrashed* (2007, 100 minutes)
05. Kerri Koch, *Don't Need You* (2006, 40 minutes)

WEEK 05 FEBRUARY 07 + 09

REFLEXIVE DOCUMENTARIES

- T WHOSE VOICE? Buck, 'Leaving Los Angeles,' PDF
SCREEN | Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, 137 minutes)

R TRUTH & ETHICS Misiak, 'Not a Stupid White Man,' PDF
Miner in Norway DOCUMENTARY PROPOSAL DUE
SCREEN | Michael Moore, *Roger and Me* (1989, 91 minutes)

OUTSIDE SCREENING | 01. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989, 108 minutes)
02. Mike Figgis and Jeremy Deller, *Battle of Orgreave* (2004, 60 minutes)

WEEK 06 | FEBRUARY 14 + 16 | PERFORMATIVE

T DOCUMENTING PERSONAL HISTORY None
SCREEN | Rea Tajiri, *History and Memory* (1991, 30 minutes)
Excerpts from Reality Television

R HISTORY, NARRATIVE, AND JUSTICE None
SCREEN | Barbara Kopple, *Harlan County, USA* (1976, 104 minutes)

OUTSIDE SCREENING | 01. Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou [Land Without Bread]* (1932, 43 minutes)
02. Marlon Riggs, *Tongues Untied* (1996, 56 minutes)

WEEK 07 | FEBRUARY 21 + 23 | STUDIO TIME

T CONCLUDING CONVERSATION ABOUT DOCS None

R WORK ON DOCS + EDITING DEMO None

OUTSIDE SCREENING | Student Choice

WEEK 08 | FEBRUARY 28 + MARCH 01 | STUDIO TIME

T WORK ON DOCS None

R WORK ON DOCS None

OUTSIDE SCREENING | None

SPRING BREAK | MARCH 06 + 08

SECTION TWO | COMICS

WEEK 09 | MARCH 13 + 15 | UNDERSTANDING COMICS

T How to Read Comics Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, PDF.
Wolk, 118-134

R HISTORY OF COMICS Ware, PDF.
Screen | Terry Zwigoff, *Crumb* (1994, 119 minutes)

WEEK 10 | MARCH 20 + 22 | COMICS AS HISTORY, COMICS AS ART

T VISIT MSU COMICS COLLECTION Wolk, 3-88

R COMICS AS HISTORY Art Spiegelman, *Maus*, PDF.
Wolk, 336-346

WEEK 11 | MARCH 27 + 29 | COMICS AS STORYTELLING

T COMICS AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY Sartrapi, *Persepolis*
SCREEN | *Persepolis* Wolk, 359-364

R COMICS AS REPORTING Ware 136-150
Sacco, *Palestine*

WEEK 12 | APRIL 03 + 05 | COMICS AS DIARIES

T RADICAL DIARIES Kuper, *Diario de Oaxaca*

R CATCH-UP DAY None

WEEK 13 | APRIL 10 + 12 | COMMUNITY-BASED COMICS

T COMICS AS ALTERNATIVE HISTORY Ware, 154-169
Yang, *American Born Chinese*, PDF
Stavans and Alcaraz, *Latino USA*, PDF
Kiyama, *Four Immigrants Manga*, PDF

R COMICS AS COLONIZATION Dorfman, *How to Read Donald Duck*, PDF
Dorfman, 'March into History', PDF
Various comics, PDF

WEEK 14 | APRIL 17 + 19 | STUDIO TIME

T SCREEN | Sean Meredith, Paul Zaloom, and Sandow Birk, *Dante's Inferno* (2008, 78 minutes)
None

R OPEN STUDIO None

WEEK 15 | APRIL 24 + 26 | CLASS CRITIQUES

T SCREEN STUDENT DOCUMENTARIES None

R READ + DISCUSS STUDENT COMICS None

WEEK 16 | FINALS WEEK

T No Class. Individual Meetings

NOTE |

This is a working document. Additional readings | assignments may be inserted or altered as this workshop organically develops. This will, of course, depend on the interests and needs of the workshop, as well as the time constraints of the academic semester.