

# THE POETICS OF HISTORY

HIS/HOS 597 / ENG 592

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How is history *invented*? Which is to say (invoking a sublated sense of "invent"), how is the past both "made" and "discovered"? This course, co-taught by a historian of science and a literary critic, explores the borderlands between the archive and the imagination. We will consider the shape of historical knowledge and also the texture of historical experience—the feeling *of* and *for* the past. Readings will canvass relevant bodies of philosophy, theory, and historiography, and we will reconnoiter adjacent genres, including the historical novel and poetic imitation. Weekly assignments will experiment in the practices of historical invention.

Central to the course will be each student's choice of a historical *punctum*: a particular past date to which to return weekly, each time endeavoring to invent/conjure that lost moment under the auspices of the given readings. Those inventions will take the form, at the outset, of prose imitations of the idiom of a given historian, but *experiment* in method and medium will be encouraged as the semester proceeds. (If Michelet made movies, what would they look like? Admitting of several counterfactuals, What cartoons would Borges have drawn for *The Masses*?)

Periodic in-class exercises may test our pedagogical resources for time travel. The aim is to explore, individually and as a group, the widest range of techniques for arbitrating past and present.

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## **Week 1: Introduction –**

no assigned reading

## **PART I: MEANING & REPRESENTATION**

### **Week 2: History as a Problem of Poetics**

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 1-80

Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, chapter 1

Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*

### **Week 3: Hegel as Comedy**

White, *Metahistory*, 80-134

Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Hackett edition), 3-12, "The Methods of History"

Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics* (Oxford edition), 75-81, "Development of the Ideal into the Particular Forms of the Beauty of Art"

Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, part one

### **Week 4: Realisms, Michelet to Burkhardt**

White, *Metahistory*, 135-266

Jacob Burkhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Penguin edition), 35-40, "The Smaller Despotisms," and 344 to 353, "General Spirit of Doubt"

Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, part two

### **Week 5: History as a Science of Emancipation**

White, *Metahistory*, 267-330

Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, (Penguin edition), chapters 26 and 27, "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation," and "Expropriation of the Agricultural Population From the Land"

John Keene, *Counternarratives*, 1-158

### **Week 6: History as Thought Itself**

White, *Metahistory*, 331-end

Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Hackett edition)

John Keene, *Counternarratives*, 161-304

**m i d t e r m      b r e a k**

(start reading: Ali Smith, *How to Be Both*, beginning either with "Eye" or "Camera")

## **PART II: EXPERIENCE & PRESENCE**

### **Week 7: Ghosts, Illusions, Effects**

Ali Smith, *How to Be Both* (finish the book)  
D. Graham Burnett, "Facing the Unknown," *Cabinet* 40:  
(Winter 2010/11): 39-46.  
Georg Lukacs, "Narrate or Describe?" (from *Writer and Critic*)  
Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect" (from *The Rustle of Language*)  
Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, chapters 1 and 2

### **Week 8: Bodies, Objects, Forms**

*NB: this week we will do a walk-through of the new exhibition at the Princeton Art Museum – "Confronting Childhood"*

George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*  
Jeff Dolven, *Senses of Style* (excerpts)  
Robin Coste Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, part two, and the "Epilogue"

### **Week 9: Anachronics and Echoes**

Alexander Kluge, *History and Obstinacy*, 81-118.  
Kluge/Richter, *Dispatches from Moments of Calm*  
Kluge, *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (film; excerpts)  
Erica Battle, *Rachel Rose: Wil-o-Wisp* (catalogue essay; we hope to secure excerpts of Rose's unreleased film as well).

### **Week 10: Archives, Residue, and Contamination**

Susan Howe, *Singularities*  
Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*  
Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004): 3-22  
Carolyn Steedman, "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust," *The American Historical Review* 106, vol. 104 (2001): 1159-1180

## **Week 11: Masks, Masques, Death**

Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 263-368

W.G. Sebald, *Rings of Saturn*

Joshua Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing* (film)

## **Week 12: Poetics of the Future (History)**

Cathy Park Hong, *Dance Dance Revolution*