THE POETICS OF HISTORY

HIS/HOS 597 / ENG 592
D. Graham Burnett
Jeff Dolven

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 arbitraging past and present.

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
Stendhal, The Charterhouse of Parma, part two

Week 5: History as a Science of Emancipation

White, Metahistory, 267-330
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

Midterm break

(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)
Georg Lukács, "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

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

Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 263-368
W.G. Sebald, *Rings of Saturn*

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

Cathy Park Hong, *Dance Dance Revolution*