HRS 202: WESTERN AESTHETICS—TRADITIONS AND REVISION

Catalog Course Description: Introduction to critical methodologies in the Humanities and to techniques of formal analysis as applied to specific eras and artworks in Western cultural history. Prerequisite: Graduate standing.

Course Objectives and Themes: HRS 202 is a seminar course in which weekly class sessions and writing assignments are geared to acquainting students with Western aesthetics and cultural theory. At a minimum, students who successfully complete the course will be able to describe the historical development of Western civilization; identify their major artistic, literary, philosophical, and religious movements and explain their significance; identify their major cultural achievements and explain how these evince their most essential cultural values; apply the techniques of graduate-level research in the liberal arts in leading and participating in class discussions, making orals presentations to the class, and producing high-quality written presentations of their research.

In this seminar, we will take a Cultural Studies approach to the Western tradition—in other words, we will analyze the concept of Western culture itself, as it has evolved and redefined from Antiquity to the present age of globalization. At the center of the discussions are both literary productions and key theoretical readings that have problematized perceptions of Western culture and the “non-West.”

Readings available at the Hornet Bookstore: (Note: any editions of these readings are fine, I usually ordered the cheapest one available)

- Herodotus, The Histories
- Anthony Grafton, New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery
- Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto
- Herman Melville, Benito Cereno
- Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project
- Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes
- Edward Said, Orientalism
- Marjane Satrapi, The Complete Persepolis

SacCT: Additional readings as well as the syllabus and other information will be posted on a SacCT course web page. Please make sure that you have access to it. If you email me, use my saclink address above, I check it more often.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance and productive contribution to class discussions (30%). Since the seminar is based on class discussions, attendance and active participation is essential. To enhance the quality of the readings and discussions, you need to be prepared to ask four questions (not the answers) about the weekly assignments. I might call on you to bring up your questions in class.

2. Four 2-page response papers to the weekly readings (20% total). The responses should be double-spaced and address the cultural context of the reading and the possible questions it poses. You don’t need to prepare separate questions on days when you write a response paper.

3. Leading a discussion on one of the weekly topics (10%). Each student (with my help) will lead a discussion of one week’s session. You will be responsible for providing background of the week’s reading and preparing questions and discussion points.

4. Presentation on a visual source or artistic style (10%). Each student will also give one presentation (ca. 10 minutes) on one of the visual, artistic, or architectural themes. I have suggestions, but you are free to come up with your own topic.

5. Research paper/interpretative essay (12-15 pages, double-spaced) on a topic of your choice (30%). The paper can either research one of the course topics in more depth, or it can be an interpretative essay. You need to turn in an outline and a list of sources (primary and secondary) 2–3 weeks before the semester’s end. Printed sources are generally preferable to online sources. Plagiarized submissions will be graded ‘0’ and referred to Students’ Affairs

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND WEEKLY READINGS
Note: Scheduled Readings are tentative and subject to change

Week 1 (September 3): Introduction
Read: Raymond Williams, “Culture” (from Keywords): http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/9573_019598ch01.pdf

Week 2 (September 10): The Invention of the West
Read: Herodotus, The Histories
Visual Culture: Classical Antiquity

Week 3 (September 17): The Christian Moment in the West
Read: Excerpt from Judith Herrin, The Formation of Christendom; excerpt from Johan Huizinga, The Autumn of the Middle Ages (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: Medieval Art and Architecture

Week 4 (September 24): New Worlds, New Ways of Seeing
Read: Grafton, New Worlds, Ancient Texts; Petrarch, “The Ascent of Mount Ventoux”:
http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/petrarch-ventoux.asp.
Visual Culture: Renaissance Art and Architecture
Week 5 (October 1): The Enlightenment and Its Aesthetics
Read: Johnson, *Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*; excerpts on Enlightenment aesthetics (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: Enlightenment Art and Architecture

Week 6 (October 8): The Invention of Culture
Read: Herder, “Yet Another Philosophy of Mankind” (on SacCT); Wordsworth and Coleridge, “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: Romantic Art and Architecture

Week 7 (October 15): American Cultural Exceptionism?
Read: Melville, *Benito Cereno*; excerpts from Emerson, Whitman (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: American Art

Week 8 (October 22): Materialist Aesthetics
Read: Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*; Adorno & Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry” (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: Realism/Impressionism

Week 9 (October 29): Western Expansion and the Female Gaze
Visual Culture: Feminist Aesthetics

Week 10 (November 5): Modernist Aesthetics
Read: Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*; excerpt from Baudelaire (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: Surrealism

Week 11 (November 12): Culture and Anthropology
Read: Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture”; Levi-Strauss, excerpt from *Tristes Tropiques*
Visual Culture:

Week 12 (November 19): Postmodern Spaces
Visual Culture: Postmodern Art and Architecture

Week 13 (November 26): tba
Read: tba

Week 14 (December 3): Postcolonial Cultural Studies
Read: Said, *Orientalism*, Spivak and Gunew (on SacCT)
Visual Culture: tba

Week 15 (December 10): Culture and Globalization
Visual Culture: tba