

ENG 4936: Honors Seminar on “The Real”

meeting time: T 7/TH 7-8; screenings W E1-E3 (115 Rolfs Hall)

professor: Roger Beebe

email: rogerbb@ufl.edu

phone: (352) 294-2865

office hours MW 8 Per., Turlington 4370 (or by request)

overview

This course is a broad-ranging exploration of the ways in which reality has been represented or deployed in a variety of discourses and media. The course will begin with an introduction to the philosophical concept of the real, stretching from Plato to Descartes to Baudrillard. The course will then explore realisms in both painting and literature, mapping the changing notion of realism from the 1850s to the present. The second half of the course will be dedicated to cinematic and televisual strategies for representing reality, beginning with the documentary tradition and continuing on to experimental film, certain forms of narrative cinema, and reality television.

texts

You will be required to purchase only one text: *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* by Stephen Crane. (You may purchase any edition you find; used copies should be plentiful and cheap.) All of the other selections we will be reading will be available either through ISIS or directly from me (as a pdf that I will email to you the week before we are to read it). However, if I were you, I'd want to have a number of the texts to refer back to and to dig deeper in over the coming years. The books excerpted in weeks one through four are especially noteworthy, but I also think Bill Nichols' *Representing Reality* would be worth spending your hard-earned dollars on. If you have questions about recommended editions, do let me know, and I'll be happy to point you in the right direction.

screenings

Wednesday screenings are mandatory, even if you have seen the film being screened before. I re-watch every film, and I don't think there's any other way to be able to summon the kind of detail necessary for our discussions in class. If you absolutely can't make one or several screenings, please let me know in advance, and we can work something out, but it's my great preference that you see it projected in the classroom where the screen size will be bigger and the distractions fewer than if you were to watch it at home.

Also, for those who are not film students, it would be a good idea to bone up on your film terminology. The Yale Film Analysis website at <http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/> is a great resource that can help you develop that critical terminology on your own. If I see that you're collectively struggling, we may need to take some time during the semester to address this issue.

assignments

You will be required to write two papers this semester, one after the first six weeks of 5-7 pages; the other at the end of the semester of 10-12 pages. We will discuss the assignments in detail several weeks before they are due. Know that I take grammar very seriously, so please allow yourself enough time for revising and polishing your drafts.

grading

The basic grading breakdown is as follows:

Paper 1	25%
Paper 2	50%
Participation	25%

This is an honors seminar, so I hope it won't be necessary to quiz you to make sure that you are reading, but if I start to sense that you aren't doing the reading, I will institute daily reading quizzes and will make that 15% of your grade, with 5% taken from each of the three categories above.

For the papers, you will be graded equally on your ideas (the rigor of their elaboration, the brilliance of your insights) and on your expression of those ideas (the clarity of the overall form of your essay, the mechanics of individual sentences). An A paper must excel in both of those areas. Papers with significant problems in one or the other will fall in the B range. Papers with problems in both will receive Cs. Only in cases of willful malfeasance will I give out lower than that, but don't push your luck.

For your class participation grade, do note that it's worth a full quarter of your final grade. I expect everyone in a seminar of this size to contribute at least once in each class discussion. Being an intellectual is as much as your ability to think and perform on the spot as it is about your ability to express yourself in writing, so I really do think this is an important component of your experience of the class. If you tend to be nervous about speaking up, now's the time to get over that.

attendance:

All students are allowed three (3) unexcused absences. Unexcused absences include all absences that are not accompanied by either a note from a dean or doctor, including absences from the screenings. If you have a cold and don't feel like coming to class, that counts as unexcused unless it's severe enough to merit a trip to the hospital. I'm not suggesting that you should come to class sick—please don't—but that's what your 3 days are for—not for just blowing class off. After three absences, I will subtract 1/2 letter grade from your final grade per additional absence. There is no easier way to fail my class than by not showing up. Don't put yourself in that position.

late work:

Work submitted after the due date will be marked down. The only exception is for medical reasons—again only with a doctor's excuse—and must be brought to my attention BEFORE the assignment is due. For each week that the assignment is delayed, it will be marked down a full letter grade. Again, this is a very easy way to get a very bad grade.

WEEK-BY-WEEK OVERVIEW

WEEK ONE

TUES (1/10): Introduction

THURS (1/12): Descartes's Meditations I & II

WEEK TWO

TUES (1/17): Plato's Republic, Book VII

WED (1/18): *The Matrix* (the Wachowskis, 1999)

THURS (1/19): Baudrillard, *Simulations* (excerpts)

WEEK THREE

TUES (1/24): Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

WED (1/25): *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) or *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999)

THURS (1/26): Slavoj Zizek, from *Looking Awry*

WEEK FOUR

TUES (1/31): Ferdinand de Saussure, from *Course in General Linguistics*

WED (2/1): *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992)

THURS: (2/2): Judith Butler, from *Gender Trouble*; assign first papers

WEEK FIVE: REALISM in PAINTING

TUES (2/7): Realism (Courbet, Millet.) trompe-l'oeil/photorealism.

THURS (2/9): Abstraction(s) as realism(s)? Impressionism. Minimalism. Anti-illusionism. Non-objective art. (Robert Ryman, "Painting the paint.")

Readings: Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" and Noël Carroll, "Anti-Illusionism in Modern and Postmodern Art"

WEEK SIX: REALISM in LITERATURE

TUES (2/14): Stephen Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* and

Emile Zola, from *The Experimental Novel*

WED: (2/15) *Salesman* (Albert & David Maysles, 1968)

THURS (2/16): Alain Robbe-Grillet, from *For a New Novel* and excerpts from *La jalousie*

WEEK SEVEN: EXPOSITORY/OBSERVATIONAL DOCUMENTARY

TUES (2/21): Bill Nichols, from *Representing Reality*

WED (2/22): *High School* (Frederick Wiseman, 1968)

THURS (2/23): *The Battle of San Pietro* (John Huston, 1945)

WEEK EIGHT: INTERACTIVE/REFLEXIVE DOCUMENTARY

TUES (2/28): Nichols cont.

WED (2/29): *Reassemblage* (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1983); *Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, 1986)

THURS (3/1): Michael Moore, *Roger and Me* (clips)

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 3-11

WEEK NINE: EXPERIMENTAL DOCUMENTARY

TUES (3/13): reading TBA

WED (3/14): *Confederation Park* (Bill Brown, 1999), *In Order Not to Be Here* (Deborah Stratman, 2002), *Leche* (Naomi Uman, 1998)

THURS (3/15):

WEEK TEN: EXPERIMENTAL DOCUMENTARY 2

TUES (3/20): Hayden White, "The Modernist Event"

WED (3/21): *Speaking Directly* (Jon Jost, 1973)

THURS (3/22): *It's not my memory of it: three recollected documents* (Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, 2003)

WEEK ELEVEN: THE BODY

TUES (3/27): porn: Linda Williams, from *Hard Core*

WED (3/28): *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980)

THURS (3/29): gore: Barbara Creed, from *The Monstrous Feminine*; Carol Clover, from *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*

WEEK TWELVE: CINEMATIC REALISM

TUES (4/3): André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema"

WED (4/4) POSSIBLE FILMS: *Rome: Open City*; *Paisa*

THURS (4/5): Godard as neo-neo-realism?

WEEK THIRTEEN: OTHER CINEMATIC REALISMS

TUES (4/10): Christian Keithley, from *The Wind in the Trees*

WED (4/11): *Jeanne Dielman, 13 Quai du Commerce* (Chantal Akerman, 1975) and *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992)

THURS (4/12):

WEEK FOURTEEN: REALITY (and) TV

TUES (4/17): Jane Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology"

WED (4/18): *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998)

THURS (4/19): *Spin* (Brian Springer, 1995)

WEEK FIFTEEN: "the passion for the real"

TUES (4/24): Alan Badiou from *The Century* (2005)