RHET 3330 - Changing Words, Changing Worlds

MT 122 Core 11:40 – 1:00
Office hrs: MT 1:00 – 3:00 and by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Changing Words, Changing Worlds engages students with contemporary discourse within the humanities. It takes as its point of departure a seminal work that frames our understanding and concepts within a field of study relating how this key text acted as a trajectory creating a paradigm shift and permeating into other, seemingly irrelevant, fields of enquiry. By analyzing the interplay between language and ideas, students will be able to relate to how discourse within one area of the humanities is infiltrated becoming a reference point for other fields.

This particular course will take as its point of departure the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Fredreich Engels. It examines how concepts and discourse of this specific text paved the way for a novel approach to conceiving of other areas within the humanities. Through readings and writing, students will acquire an understanding of how this seminal work influenced our concepts of language, theatre, art, cinema, literature, history and architecture.

During this course students will
• Learn how to read arguments and language of a text within its political, historical and economic milieu.
• Analyze how work produced in the humanities, regardless of its form, positions itself either against or in line with a seminal work.
• Recognize the interplay between different fields of the humanities.
• Understand how thought expressed in language leads to paradigm shifts within a field a field of enquiry.
• Appreciate impact of text, language, point in time, kairos, on perception within a particular field
• Learn how a seminal work can infiltrate and impact our perceptions and understandings of other fields
• Position their arguments within current discourse of the humanities
• Critique works produced within the humanities.
• Relate current works within the discipline to the seminal works of others in the field
• Construct texts that are aligned with the conventions of various genres in the humanities
• Conduct academic research using varieties of print, visual and electronic resources, in addition to primary data collection techniques when appropriate
• Provide critically relevant feedback for research within the field.
• Develop awareness and recognition of writing conventions within the field and different field related publications

Assignments (detailed descriptions below)

1. Researching “The Creation of Historic Narrative”. (40%)
2. This is the Building. (15%)
3. This work of art is… (10%)
4. WikiArt (10%)
5. Class thoughts. (10%)
6. The Blog (10%)
7. Presentation (5%)

Selected Readings :

Barthes, Roland “The Death of the Author”. 1968
Benjamin, Walter, On the Concepts of History, (1940)
Berger, John . Ways of Seeing (1972, Penguin)
Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno ‘The Culture Industry as Mass Deception’ (1944) extract in Rivkin & Ryan, p.1037-1041 (extracts also available online)

* This is an initial list, still subject to change.

Disclaimer: I created this syllabus based on what, at this point in the semester, know about how I wish the course to develop. However, since we will be involved in the Khalifa work, I am not sure how much time/effort/writing this will imply so I am keeping the possibilities open.
Weekly Syllabus

**Week 1:** Introduction to the course.
In-class writing assignment “Me and the Humanities”  
**Assigned Reading:** *Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes.

**Week 2:** *Death of the Author* and the *Manifesto* (8&19 Sept)

**Assignment 1:** The class creates a list of humanities-related academic journals and post links on course website.
**Assignment 2:** Students prepare for a game that requires them to adopt the personas of different contemporary characters with different affiliations to discuss the relevant of the Communist Manifesto to the current times.
**Assignment 3:** Ss watch *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang

In class Writing: Reflection on implications of the Communist Manifesto on different aspects of humanities. (700 words)

**Week 3:** *The Manifesto* (22&26 Sept)

In class: Ss play Communist Manifesto game
Ss are introduced to “This Work of Art is …” Assignment.
**Assignment 1:** Read “The Negation of the Autonomy of Art” by Burge.
**Assignment 2 (due week 8):** Ss are assigned to read the book “Ways of Seeing” by John Berger.
**Assignments 3:** Ss decide on the focus on “This Work of Art is…” Assignment.

**Week 4:** Art around Cairo (29 Sept & 3 Oct)

In class Discussion of assigned readings and how they relate to one another and to the Communist Manifesto
Class visit to an art gallery or a performance.
**Reading:** A current review to an event published in one of the journals (possibly the New Yorker).
**Writing:** One-page response to the visit (using skills acquired from in-class discussion and readings)
**Reading Assignment:** Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves.

Visit to Darb 4 October
**Week 5: The Museum (10&13 Oct)**

T introduces the concept of an encyclopedia entry and an artifact/building/event description.

Discussion of assigned reading.

**In-class exercise:** Analysis of the contents, language and genre of encyclopedia entry.

**Activity:** Museum visit. Ss visit a museum (based on teacher’s recommendation) and analyze state of artifacts description.

Ss individually decide on what they will write their encyclopedia entry or artifact description on.

**Assignment 1:** “This work of Art is…” During the previous weeks, T should arrange for 1 conference with Ss to discuss focus of their assignment.

**Reading Assignment:** Walter Benjamin “On the Concepts of History” (due week 7).

**Week 6: WikiArt and the Museum (17&20 Oct)**

**In class Writing:** Ss write a report on museum visit and relate arguments presented to reading on museums.

**In class group activity:** Ss work in groups to peer edit encyclopedia entries and artifact descriptions.

**Assignment 2 due:** “WikiArt”

**Week 7: History and Marx (24 & 27 Oct)**

**In class Discussion:** Walter Benjamin “On the Concepts of History”

**In class research:** Group Presentation of an event in history that reflects ideas posed by Benjamin in his work.

**Week 8: Berger and Seeing (31 Oct & 3 Nov)**

In class Discussion: Discussion of Ways of Seeing by John Berger. Relating arguments presented to earlier readings in the course.

**Assigned Reading:** “The Culture Industry as Mass Deception’ Horkheimer and Adorno

**Week 9: The power of the Word (7&10 Nov)**

T introduces : Researching Marx and the Humanities”.

**Out of class Assignment:** Ss watch a film of teacher’s choice.

Ss write a report on implications of reading on contemporary media referring to arguments posed by 2 writers.
**Week 10:** Marxism and Cinema (14&17 Nov)

**Assignment:** Research areas for “Researching Marx and the Humanities” due. In class Discussion of Metz reading with reference to assigned movie that students watched.

**Week 11:** Conferencing Week and Class Presentation (21&28 Nov)

Conferences: Discussion of outline  
Class Presentations of research papers.

**Week 12:** Working on papers (Dec 1&5)

Draft of research paper due.  
Class group: Peer editing of draft 1  
“Literature Post Marx” due.

**Week 13:** More Conferencing (8&12 Dec)

Return of drafts (instructor's and peer's copies).  
Class discussion of common difficulties or problems. Volunteers share portions of Humanities Paper. Conferencing

**Week 14:** Finalizing paper (15 Dec.)

Final deadline for revisions  
Group analysis of a sample draft  
Revision and proofreading as critical components of the writing process