

# HIS 385

## HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: An Introduction

D. Graham Burnett

Mondays & Wednesdays, 11:00 am - 12:20

This course is intended as an introduction to the general problem of historical consciousness. How has the past been conceived in different times and places? How has knowledge of the past been sought, expressed, and conveyed? How does the past remain “present” – practically, politically, psychologically? What are the implications (existential, ethical, epistemic) of our being historical creatures? By means of readings in disciplinary history, creative literature, and philosophy, and through select encounters with works of visual art, poetry, and film, this class will investigate the history (and diversity) of historical reflection. We will pursue our investigation on two simultaneous “tracks” running in parallel (though cross-circuits are expected). One line across the semester will be a series of sequential readings focused on the “classic” history of modern (largely European) historiography and philosophy of history from the Enlightenment to the twentieth century (e.g., Hegel, Ranke, Marx, Burkhardt, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer). Following one of the very greatest scholars of this subject, Hayden White (1928-2018), and his controversial and demanding *Metahistory* (1972), we will be especially concerned with the relationship between historical writing and the literary imagination (and we will read several works of historically preoccupied fiction along the way). In what ways is historical study “scientific”? In what ways is it an “art”? On the second “track,” and in conjunction with our core historiographical trajectory, we will weekly, generally on Wednesdays, concern ourselves with a series of specific (often contemporary and sometimes experimental) efforts to activate and/or engage the past. It is to be hoped that these case-studies will resonate with our efforts to understand the evolution of modern historical study.

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### Class 1: INTRODUCTORY SESSION (no pre-meeting assignment)

### Class 2: History, Writing, Time

Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), Preface & Introduction (“The Poetics of History”).

Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), Chapter 1, “Is Time Historical?” Online:

<https://books.openedition.org/ceup/810>

W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo* (New York: New Directions, 1999), Chapter 1, “Beyle, or Love is a Madness Most Discreet.”

### **Class 3: Chronology, Narrative, and the Uncanny**

WATCH: *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) circa 90 minutes. Online:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6-K-arVl-U>

### **Class 4: Imagination, Irony, Metaphor**

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapter 1, "The Historical Imagination between Metaphor and Irony."  
W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo*, pp. 33-112 (the first part of Chapter 2, "All'estero").

### **Class 5: Presence, Absence, Place**

John Keene, "Mannahatta," from *Counternarratives: Stories and Novellas* (New York: New Directions, 2015).  
Richard McGuire, *Here* (New York: Pantheon, 2014).

### **Class 6: The World Spirit Achieving Itself**

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapter 2, "Hegel."  
G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988 [1837]), Chapter 1, "The Methods of History."  
W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo*, pp. 112-167 (the second part of Chapter 2, "All'estero," and Chapter 3, "Dr. K Takes the Waters at Riva").

### **Class 7: Loss and Restoration (Lacunae)**

WATCH: Julian Baumgartner, "Restauration of Ave Maria" (2014), 11 minutes. Please watch twice, first time the ASMR version; then the narrated one. Online:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNwpINKSTVY&t=3s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G1C3aBY62E&t=3s>  
D. Graham Burnett, "Facing the Unknown," *Cabinet* 40: (Winter 2010/11): 39-46.

<p><b>First project-piece due</b> (Bring to class seven, ready to show/discuss): "inpainting exercise"; working with gaps.</p>
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### **Class 8: Faithfulness to the Past (and its People)**

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapters 3 & 4, "Michelet" & "Ranke."  
Leopold von Ranke, three excerpts (1824, 1830, 1860), from Fritz Stern, ed., *The Varieties of History* (New York: Vintage, 1973).  
W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo*, pp. 167-end (Chapter 4, "Il Ritorno in Patria").

### **Class 9: Searching for Remains (Picking up the Pieces)**

WATCH: *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010) circa 90 minutes.  
Maria Theresa Hernández, "Reconditioning History: Adapting knowledge from the past into the realities of the present," in Alun Munslow and Robert A. Rosenstone, eds., *Experiments in Rethinking History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 56-75.

## Class 10: Renaissance, Tradition, Novelty

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapters 5 & 6, “Tocqueville” & “Burckhardt.”  
Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Penguin, 1990 [1860]), excerpt.  
Ali Smith, *How to be Both* (New York: Anchor, 2015), first 79 pages. NB: editions of this book can differ in the ordering of the story elements (this is an intentional feature of the work); I am not sure we will all end up with the same version, which could be interesting – or annoying? :)

## Class 11: Anachronics and Archives

Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, “Plural Temporality of the Work of Art,” Chapter 1 of their *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010).  
Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of the Archive* (New York: New Directions, 2014).

Second project-piece due (Bring to class eleven, ready to show/discuss): “anachronic archive” exercise.
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## Class 12: The Unfolding of What Must Occur (Revolution!)

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapters 7 & 8, “Historical Consciousness and the Rebirth of Philosophical History” & “Marx.”  
Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1867]), Vol. 1, Chapter 26, “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation.”  
Ali Smith, *How to be Both*, the next 79 pages.

## Class 13: *Satura*, Melancholy, Punctum (Photography & Death)

Roland Barthes, “Time as Punctum,” Section 39 of his *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).  
Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000 [1973]).

## Class 14: The Unhistorical (and the *Superhistorical*)

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapter 9, “Nietzsche.”  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980 [1874]).  
Ali Smith, *How to be Both*, the next 79 pages.

## Class 15: Reenactment, Return, Performance (Guilt)

WATCH: *The Act of Killing* (2013) circa 120 minutes.  
Rebecca Schneider, “Reenactment and Relative Pain,” Chapter 1 of her *Performing Remains* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

### **Class 16: Anti-Irony, Aesthetics, Endings**

Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Chapter 10, "Croce," and "Conclusion."  
Ali Smith, *How to be Both*, the last 79 pages.

### **Class 17: Metafiction, Parafiction, Fabulation**

Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 129 (2009): 51-84

Nettrice R. Gaskins, "Deep Sea Dwellers: Drexciya and the Sonic Third Space," *Shima* 10, no. 2 (2016): 68-80.

CONSIDER: Ayana V. Jackson's current exhibition at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art, "*FROM THE DEEP*":  
[www.si.edu/exhibitions/deep-wake-drexciya-ayana-v-jackson%3Aevent-exhib-6673](http://www.si.edu/exhibitions/deep-wake-drexciya-ayana-v-jackson%3Aevent-exhib-6673)

### **Class 18: The Critique of Historical Reason**

Charles R. Bambach, "William Dilthey's Critique of Historical Reason," Chapter 4 of his *Heidigger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

William Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life" (a posthumous fragment, circa 1910), from William Dilthey, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 226-241.

Robin Coste Lewis, *To the Realization of Perfect Helplessness* (New York: Knopf, 2022), pp. 1-173.

### **Class 19: Monuments and Museums (and Forgetting)**

REVIEW/CONSIDER: "The Princeton & Slavery Project":  
<https://slavery.princeton.edu/>

WATCH: New Red Order's "Culture Capture: Crimes Against Reality" (2020), 9 mins.

WATCH: "Inhaling the Spore" (2004), 35 mins.

Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (New York: Verso, 2008 [1997]), Preface and Introduction, "Histories of Forgetting."

<p><b>Third project-piece due</b> (Bring to class nineteen, ready to show/discuss): "monument proposal" exercise.</p>
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### **Class 20: Being in Time (History and Phenomenology)**

Charles R. Bambach, "'The Time is Out of Joint': The Young Heidegger's *Destruktion* of Historicism," Chapter 5 of his *Heidigger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985 [1925]), we will read a short excerpt from the end of this difficult text, from "Care and Discoveredness," ff (pp. 297-320).

Robin Coste Lewis, *To the Realization of Perfect Helplessness* (New York: Knopf, 2022), pp. 174-end.

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### **Class 21: Memory, Trauma, Witness**

- Carolyn J. Dean, "Erasures: Writing History about Holocaust Trauma," from Frank Biess and Daniel M. Gross, eds., *Science and Emotions after 1945: A Transatlantic Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- WATCH: Jan Karski testimonial in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), circa 10 minutes:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpg-wFJFxRQ>
- WATCH: Yehiel De-Nur testifying at the Eichmann Trial (1961), watch up to about minute 11:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3-tXyYhd5U>
- WATCH: "This Is Your Life, Hanna Kohner" (1953), circa 25 minutes:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4ckFEnn5Bo>

### **Class 22: Historicity as a Hermeneutic Principle (Gadamer I)**

- Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004 [1960]), the first half of Chapter 4, "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience," pp. 268-336.

### **Class 23: Historically Effected Consciousness (Gadamer II)**

- Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004 [1960]), the second half of Chapter 4, "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience," pp. 336-382.

### **Class 24: The Angel of History**

- Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940), from Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 4 (Cambridge, MA: 2003).
- Gianni Vattimo, "The End of (Hi)Story." *Chicago Review* 35, no. 4 (1987): 20-30.
- WATCH: Damon Pham, "Promise Burden Prompt Origin Defense Palette Call" (2022), circa 30 mins:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTMu5P8L8oM&t=81s>