

## READING CULTURES: COLLECTIONS

### Humanities 14000 (Autumn 2012)



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“Collections” is the first part of the Reading Cultures core sequence. Reading Cultures addresses the formation, circulation, and transformation of cultural subjectivities and values across geographical and chronological realms. Using a wide range of texts and employing methods from cultural and social analyses, we will examine the ways in which varied cultural and historical practices coalesce and come to define communities, places, and subjects. This academic year, our intellectual journey will revolve around three major analytical foci: *collections*, *travel*, and *exchange*.

“Collections” proposes a look at the ways in which the practice of collecting defines the local and global community of which we are part. Cultural objects and practices organize and give meaning to the places we inhabit and to the communities to which we belong. Through analyses of museum exhibits, antique collections, anthologies of stories, and historical archives, to mention but a few, we will examine the processes by which cultural collections become meaningful and the types of meanings they produce. Collections, once created, arranged, and displayed, take on a life of their own, inviting new interpretations and triggering unpredictable public responses. In this class, we will consider not only how individual and groups relate to existing cultures but also the ways in which people reorganize and invent new cultural practices and meanings. Among the texts we will examine this quarter are *The Arabian Nights*, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*.

Required texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore. **All secondary readings will be available on the course's Chalk site.**

*The Arabian Nights* (Norton, 1990; ISBN 9780393331660)

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Norton, 2000; ISBN 9780393974997)

Zora Neal Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Harper, 1990; ISBN 9780061350177)

Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Penguin Classics, 2009; ISBN 978-0143105985)

### **Films:**

*Citizen Kane*, Dir. Orson Welles, RKO, 1941

*Exit Through the Gift Shop*, Dir. Thierry Guetta (with Joachim Levy), Paranoid Pictures, 2010

### **GRADE BREAKDOWN:**

Attendance and participation:	20%
Two 4-6 page papers on give topics	20% each
Final Essay (6-8 pages)	30%
2 Questions/week	10%

**Please note: Attendance and participation in all Writing Seminars is required to pass this class!**

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

#### **1. Attendance and Participation:**

Regular attendance, constructive class participation, and consistent and engaged reading of assigned texts are required from all registered students. In order to keep track of student attendance, I will pass around a sign-in sheet at the start of each class meeting—it is your responsibility to make sure that your name is on that sheet. Absences are excused for personal illness, family emergencies, jury duty and religious holidays. If you have to miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining notes and keeping up with all your assignments. Every unexcused absence will negatively impact your attendance and class participation grade.

### **WRITING SEMINARS**

You will also attend a series of Writing Seminars led by a dedicated intern. These small-group sessions will help prepare you for upcoming assignments and hone your skills in analyzing evidence, developing critical arguments, and revising drafts for clarity, structure, and style. Attendance is required for a passing grade.

### **Questions**

Every Monday before 1PM, you must post on Chalk two non-factual questions about that week's assigned text. Questions will represent 10% of your final grade. Questions posted after 1PM, on Monday, will NOT be given consideration.

This exercise has three main objectives: 1). to prompt you to articulate and share with the class any questions you might have about the text; 2) to encourage you to think critically about a text; 3). and to help you to identify potential topics for your essays this quarter.

Please do not ask factual questions whose answer is already given in the book (E.g. “What is the name of the main character’s sister? How does X theorize “nationalism”?). Instead, your questions should prompt interesting analysis of a text (E.g. “How does the trope of garbage function in DeLillo’s *White Noise*?”).

### **LATE WORK:**

All assignments are due in class on the date given in the syllabus. I will NOT accept any late work. If you have an irresolvable conflict or emergency when an essay is due, please let me know in advance and I will consider your situation.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with the University’s policy on academic honesty, which can be found online at <<http://writingprogram.uchicago.edu/lounge/plagiarism/guidelines.htm>>. The work that you submit or present is expected to be the product of your own ideas, formulated in your own original language (with appropriate citation of external sources, where necessary), and written for this course alone. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or about how external sources may be used, I strongly encourage you to speak with me before submitting your work. All cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean and will result in a failing grade, in addition to possible disciplinary action. **Please note: Submitting to this class work written for another class will be considered plagiarism.**

### **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION**

It is the policy of the University of Chicago to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as amended. It is the responsibility of students with disabilities, including learning-related disabilities that might qualify for [academic program accommodation](#), to notify Kimberly Gardiner, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, at 773.834.4469, as soon as possible. Appropriate, professional documentation verifying the disability and specifying recommended accommodation(s) must be provided to support the request. Assuming the documentation is current and complete, the review and decision process may take up to ten weeks. Students’ confidentiality will be protected at all times.

**SCHEDULE****Week One****10/2**

General Introductions

**10/4**Raymond Williams, "Culture," *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford UP, 1985)Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture," *Critical Terms for Literature Study* (U of Chicago P, 1995)**Week Two****10/9**Benedict Anderson, "The Origins of National Consciousness," *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1991)Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Ellis Island," from *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Heritage* (1998)**10/11**

James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture"

Carol Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual," *Civilizing Rituals, Inside Public Art Museums* (Routledge, 1995)**Week Three:****10/16**

Museum visit: Smart Museum of Art

**Screening of *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, Wed, October 17, 3-5PM, Cobb 115****10/18**Discussion of *Exit Through the Gift Shop***Week Four:****10/23***Arabian Nights*, Introduction and pp. 4-60 (incl. Foreword, Prologue, first Eighteen Nights)**10/25***Arabian Nights*, "The Three Apples" and "The Two Viziers" (pp. 181-248); Postscript (p. 518)**Paper # 1 due**

## Week Five

**10/30**

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," *Illuminations* (Shoken Books, 1969)

Fatema Mernissi, "The Tale of the Lady with the Feather Dress," *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (Washington Square Press, 2001)

Discussion of *Arabian Nights*

**11/1**

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

## Week Six

**11/6**

*The Waste Land*, continue discussion

**11/8**

Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, pp. 3-163

**Paper #2 due**

## Week Seven

**11/13**

*White Noise*, 167-241

**11/15**

*White Noise* 242-326

**Screening of Citizen Kane, Friday November 16, 3-5PM, Cobb 115**

## Week Eight

**11/20**

Film discussion

**11/22**

**Thanksgiving Break!**

## Week Nine

**11/27**

Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Introduction and Part I: "Folk Tales," ch. 1-5, pp. 1-90)

**11/29**

Neale Hurston, TBA

**Final Essay Proposal Due**

**Week Ten**

**12/4**

Maquilapolis, Film screening and discussion

**12/6**

Reading Period

**Final Essay due December 8**