

## **HAA 2400: Special Topics Modern [CRN 23271]**

Spring 2013, Tuesdays 2:30-5:20

Prof. Kirk Savage

Office hours: Tuesdays 12-2, or by appt.

<http://haa2400.tumblr.com>

### **The Living and the Dead**

The “vast hosts of the dead” (Joyce) surround us and guide us in life, no matter what our own beliefs about ancestors and afterlife happen to be. What people make of death and the dead organizes their lives in the present – and vice versa. The dead are central not only to the spheres of ritual and religion, but to those of politics, history, and collective memory as well. “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living,” Marx wrote memorably. But the same interdependence can be seen more positively and productively: in the words of historian Vincent Brown, “death and life are not only opposites but also mutually constitutive states of being made meaningful by the practices that define them.”

This seminar will explore a range of issues connected with these mutually constituted states of life and death, mortality and immortality. In the process we will engage explicitly with the new interdisciplinary research “constellations” that now structure HAA. While we could talk about all of them, the course material will focus on identity, agency, and mobility. Specific topics will range widely, from slavery to war to commemoration to portraiture, but our emphasis will be less on content than on method and approach. For that reason paper topics are also flexible. To the maximum extent possible I would like students to work on research topics that are close to their own areas of interest. I plan to have the course culminate in a “symposium” in which all the seminar participants present their research publicly in pithy, interesting talks.

#### **1. Our goals**

- To broaden your thinking about your own research interests, to ask new questions, to try new approaches.
- To sharpen your ability to do idea-driven scholarship, to give you multiple opportunities to practice applying complex concepts to concrete cases.
- To learn how to benefit from collaboration and feedback, to create and use an intellectual community that works for you.

N.B. At the middle and end of term I will ask you to self-assess how well you are meeting these goals.

#### **2. Our m.o.**

The structure of each class meeting will be similar. We will spend the first half of the meeting discussing the assigned reading. In the second half of the meeting we will

focus on a case study, usually presented by a group of students. The case studies are meant to ground key ideas from the reading in a concrete site or work of art or visual culture. Sometimes this process of grounding can be very frustrating, and can feel like failure. But failure can be just as illuminating (sometimes more so) than success. Only by trying to put ideas into contact with actual places, artifacts, and images do we begin to understand how useful they can be.

We will experiment with using various tools on Courseweb and social media to communicate as groups and to share ideas, post images, and offer commentary for the class as a whole. I am very open to your suggestions in this respect.

In the process you will be devising your own term project and using the ideas from the course and the intellectual community of the class to propel your project forward.

N.B. Unless otherwise noted, the readings are available on Courseweb. Several of the books are also on reserve at Frick Fine Arts Library.

### **3. Assignments and grading**

1. *Case studies.* Over the course of the semester, ten case studies will be presented, eight of them by groups of students. There will be four groups of three students (give or take), so each group will present twice. Do not think of the presentation as a ritual performance; think of it as a vehicle for subsequent class discussion and engagement. Or to put it more bluntly, the resulting discussion is more important than the initial presentation.

The presentation should therefore be no more than 20-25 minutes, allowing a full hour for class discussion. The group should think hard about how to get discussion going and how to guide it. What do we need to know about the case to discuss it intelligently and usefully? What are the key questions and issues it raises?

I will give a group grade for each case study, and the two totalled together will count toward 25% of your final grade.

2. *Term projects.* In most cases this will be a research paper of 20-25 pages, on a topic you develop out of your own interests. The course content is flexible enough that everyone in the class should be able to define a topic that intersects directly with their own subfield and areas of interest. You will work on the paper in stages, with an initial proposal due in class Feb 19, rough drafts circulated for feedback in early April, a symposium presentation probably on April 23, and the final paper due Sunday April 28. I encourage you to talk as often as you can to me and to your fellow students about your paper, and to use our web tools to try out ideas, pose questions, and present images.

I'm also open to the possibility of a different format for your final project. If any of you have ambitions in the area of digital humanities, for example, it may be possible to do a project of this kind in conjunction with our Visual Media Workshop. Whatever the format, I will ask for a significant written component.

3. *Self-assessment*. I am serious about the course goals, and about holding myself and you accountable to these goals. Self-assessment makes the process more transparent. If we all understand from the beginning that you are agents in the process, and not passive recipients of an education, then you take more responsibility for the outcomes. With this in mind, I will ask you to write a self-assessment at the middle and end of term on how you are meeting the course goals; you will grade yourself on your progress toward the goals. I do reserve the right to differ from your assessment, and to push it higher or lower, but more typically I will use your own self-assessment, which will count toward 25% of your final grade.

#### 4. Class calendar

##### Part 1: Introduction

By way of introduction we will read about two ancient cultures, in Egypt and China. Egypt is an obvious choice, since it has long been identified with death in EuroAmerican tradition. Many EuroAmerican funerary forms (e.g. pyramid, obelisk) were transmitted through ancient Egypt. But Assmann's classic text (originally in German) argues that Egypt offers more to us than a strange death obsession: it helps us understand the origins and character of culture itself. The text on ancestor memory in early China pushes most of us into even more unfamiliar territory. This is deliberate: I want us all to engage in a process of cross-cultural translation, to learn to step outside our own cultural context and examine it as if we were strangers to it.

Jan 8            *Themes/constellations*

Jan 15          *Death and culture*

Reading: Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Cornell, 2005), 1-112.

Case study #1: Death and salvation in the Frick Fine Arts Building. The FFA is in effect a mausoleum to Henry Clay Frick, though without his body (which resides nearby in Homewood Cemetery). Built by his daughter and based on the prototype of the Italian Renaissance, the building also represents her vision of cultural salvation – a saving remnant of a dead culture cloistered from the corruption of the modern world.

Jan 22          *The problem of translation, or what can a western modernist learn from ancient China?*

Reading: K.E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* (Harvard, 2011), 1-74.

Case study #2: Ritual, performance, and lineage in the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial, Oakland. Erected in 1907-1910 as a huge memorial to Allegheny County's Union soldiers, and a meeting space for surviving veterans, the building's shell echoes the ancient mausoleum at Halicarnassus. The S&S now houses a museum to veterans of all wars in corridors lined with immense bronze tablets bearing the names of thousands of Union soldiers – all long dead.

## Part 2: Constellations

The idea is to jump quickly into three of HAA's new research constellations, focusing on one per week. Each week pairs a theoretical reading on the key term with a historically based investigation and a locally based case study. By this rapid immersion in three concepts/frameworks, you should be in a better position to decide on a direction for your own term project. We will conclude Part 2 with preparation and discussion of your initial paper proposals.

Jan 29            *Identity*

Reading: 1) Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-36. 2) Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 23-53, 95-127.

Case study #3: Identity politics at the Columbus monument, Schenley Park. Sponsored by local Italian-American organizations, one of many such Columbus monuments across the country, the monument's fortunes turned in 1992. Since then it has been repeatedly vandalized, serving as a platform for commentary on the Indian genocide – and for anarchist graffiti.

Feb 5            *Mobility*

Reading: 1) Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Harvard, 2012), 1-43, 155-194. Available through Pittcat. 2) Richard White, "What is Spatial History?" at: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29>

Case study #4: Itinera: a digital humanities project to be discussed by Drew Armstrong, Director of Arch Studies, and Alison Langmead, Director of the Visual Media Workshop.

Feb 12           *Agency*

Reading: 1) Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), 10-50. 2) Jessica Rawson, "The Agency of, and the Agency for, the Wanli Emperor," in *Art's Agency and Art History*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Blackwell, 2007), 95-113. 3) Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill & Wang, 1981), #5 ("He Who Is Photographed").

Case study #5: A comparison of two portraits in local collections: Valentine Green, mezzotint of George Washington, 1781, in CMOA; and Frank A. Rinehart, photograph of Bull Ghost, 1900, in UAG.

Feb 19            Discussion of paper proposals

## Part 3: Mixing It Up

Here we focus more intensively on the modern world, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Nation, war, and trauma loom large. In the initial drafts of this syllabus I tried to

group the readings into units defined by a constellation. But in the real world of scholarship, good work often resists this kind of pigeon-holing. Part of the fun here is to see how each of these works engages multiple constellations. Some key concepts may be more active than others, but throughout these readings there is overlap and interaction among them. In the end the constellations should not be rigid or exclusionary, but rather productive and expansive. Approach the assigned content, and your own term projects, in this spirit.

Feb 26            *Death and power*

Reading: 1) Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge, 1991), 133-161 (“The Dead King”). 2) Joseph Clarke, “The Sacred Names of the Nation’s Dead: War and Remembrance in Revolutionary France,” in *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2010), 21-41.

Case study #6: Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Arc de Triomphe* project, 2011, documented in *Public Art Dialogue*, vol 3, no 1 (Sept 2012): 282-287 and his *Abolition of War* (Black Dog, 2012). A renowned contemporary artist reimagines one of the most powerful war memorials anywhere as the World Institute for the Abolition of War.

Mar 5            *Death and powerlessness*

Reading: 1) Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Perspective* (Harvard, 1982), 1-15. 2) Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard, 2007), 1-8, 122-52 (Introduction, “The Living Dead”). 3) Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *American Historical Review* (2009): 1231-1249. Available through Pittcat.

Case study #7: The most famous image of the Middle Passage, a print of the slave ship *Brookes*, 1788, discussed in Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (Viking, 2007).

**Mar 12            Spring Break**

Mar 19            *“He was your son; but now he is the nation's”*

Reading: 1) Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (Vintage, 2008), 211-271 (“Accounting,” “Numbering,” “Surviving”). 2) Extract from Henry Ward Beecher, Thanksgiving Sermon, 1863, from *The Independent*, Dec. 3, 1863, p. 2. PDF.

• Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), 1-22. Available online through Pittcat.

Case study #8: One of the first ever photographs of battlefield corpses, Alexander Gardner’s *Contrast: Federal Buried, Confederate Unburied, Where They Fell*, produced in various formats, 1862-63. To be presented by the instructor.

Mar 26            *Death and mass trauma*

Reading: W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (Modern Library, 2004), 3-68, available through Pittcat.

Case study #9: The problem of human remains in the post-WWII reconstruction of Warsaw, as analyzed by architectural historian Jerzy Elzanowski, “Ruins, Rubble and Human Remains: Negotiating Culture and Violence in Post-Catastrophic Warsaw,” *Public Art Dialogue*, vol 3, no 1 (Sept 2012): 114-46.

Apr 2            *Ghosts and heroes*

Reading: Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (UC Press, 2006), 1-50, 103-153.

Case study #10: A multifaceted heritage site of museums, monuments, and landscapes at the Son My Vestige Site, Vietnam, as described in:

[http://studiesonasia.illinoisstate.edu/seriesIII/Vol%204%20No%201/s3v4n1\\_Kucera.pdf](http://studiesonasia.illinoisstate.edu/seriesIII/Vol%204%20No%201/s3v4n1_Kucera.pdf)

Apr 9            Discussion of paper drafts

Apr 16          Discussion of paper drafts

Apr 23          Symposium?? in evening?? or on Friday the 19<sup>th</sup> ??

Apr 28          **Final papers due**