

COMP LIT COURSE GUIDE

FALL 2026 - SPRING 207

Fall Quarter

COLT 103 – Visual Culture: Images, Screens, Worlds

Allan

Visual Culture explores how images—from photography and cinema to video and social media—shape perception, meaning, and experience. Through essays and screenings, we experiment with ways of seeing and interpreting visual media and the worlds they make visible. The course is designed both as an introduction to the field and a space for creative and critical experimentation. Drawing on film theory and cultural criticism, we practice techniques of visual analysis and engage theories of the image, all culminating in an exploration of algorithmic visions in the age of generative AI.

COLT 231 – Media, Technology, Literature

Brundan

This course invites you to read literary texts in connection with a wider world of media technology as we explore how contact with journalism, photojournalism, and advertising shaped literary genres. We will consider European cityscapes as spaces of crime, poetry, and eye-catching advertisements, speculative fiction inspired by journalistic techniques and their technologies, and imagined lives intertwined with war reporting and ‘true crime’ media. This course makes connections between different media (photography, art, written texts, film, advertising), inviting us to consider how our lives are changed by our own media-driven interactions.

COLT 301 – Approaches to Comparative Literature

Brundan

COLT 301 offers an introduction to literary theory, with an emphasis on comparative study in a global context. Students learn the fundamental theories and methods of Comparative Literature, reading selections from a wide variety of theoretical schools including psychoanalysis, linguistics, French feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and translation studies. This term we will be focusing on the concept of myth, both in terms of what makes a cultural myth and how philosophers and others have used myth in their theories. Coursework will culminate in a student project involving one artifact chosen by the student (text, painting, film, digital artwork, graphic novel, etc.) to be analyzed within the critical framework of the course.

COLT 305 – Expanding the Archive: Piecing Fragments and Filling Silences

Balbuena

The “archive” roughly refers to our records of the past. How are our memories recorded and included in the archive? How is history recorded and remembered? Which voices are registered in the archive, and which forgotten? What is preserved and what is discarded? How can we add to the archive and inscribe those about whom no words were written? Our approach to this broad interrogation of the archive is interdisciplinary and will be done with hands-on exploration. We will look at fields that include literature, genealogy, geology, visual arts, history, gender studies, and museum studies, among others. As a class, we will visit collections (digital and otherwise), and learn how they are created and maintained, and we will create and exhibit our own collections. We will learn how some scholars are reading ice cores as archives, and others are writing biographies with objects. We’ll try our hand at the latter, so as to expand the archive with non-textual sources. We will visit the University of Oregon’s Library Special Collections and Jordan Schnitzer Art Museum. We will also see the collections and the “behind-the-scene” operations of the Blavatnik Archive. This class provides strong foundations in digital archiving and management, including, but not limited to, copyright and fair use issues; data collection, storage, back-up, and organization; and metadata and Omeka site building.

COLT 410/510 – Nabokov

Presto

This course is devoted to the major works of Russian American author Vladimir Nabokov, whose ability to navigate national, cultural, generic, and linguistic boundaries makes him one of the most compelling figures in world literature. We will not only read his famous American novels—*Lolita*, *Invitation of a Small Fool*, and *Pale Fire*—but will also look at several of his

earlier Russian-language texts, which are all available in English. Aside from giving you an appreciation for one of the world's finest fiction writers, this course will enable you to delve into some of the theoretical issues at the very core of comparative literary studies.

COLT 415 – Capstone Seminar

Marlan

As a culminating experience in the major, the capstone asks advanced students to develop an independent research project involving both fields of concentration. All projects are comparative—traversing linguistic areas or disciplines. In addition to workshoping student works-in-progress, we will study assigned scholarly essays and exemplary student essays that model various theoretical and stylistic approaches. We will examine these essays from a craft perspective, for their rhetorical gestures, scholarly voices, and argumentative strategies. Because of COLT's disciplinary breadth, projects can take a wide variety of forms, scholarly and creative. Students may submit their final projects for possible publication in our online journal, *Nomad*.

COLT 613 – Translation Studies in Critical Practice

Teo

In this course, we will consider open-ended definitions of translation as they have been adapted through critical practice, tracing how the analytical terms of translation (such as difference, transformation, translanguaging, and untranslatability) have been mobilized for three modes of inquiry: historiography, race and ethnography, and world literature. Our readings will include theoretical essays, literary and aesthetic critical readings, as well as a small selection of literature and film discussed in those critical readings. Students will be able to build on the course's reading list in light of their research interests, working toward either an exam list and syllabus or a conference-style paper. Readings may include Rey Chow, Talal Asad, Naoki Sakai, George Steiner, Walter Benjamin, Tejaswini Niranjana, Lydia Liu, Shaden Tageldin, Vince Rafael, Emily Apter, Bliss Cua Lim, and Rebecca Walkowitz.

Winter Quarter

COLT 102 – The Language of High and Low

Calhoon

With an emphasis on the social components of literature and its institutions, this course will orbit loosely around the words *ghetto* and *bourgeois*, the histories of which point to the role of the enclave in the formation of communities. Their potential for ambiguity—the fact that these words can carry both positive and negative connotations—make them useful indicators of the complexity that defines the ever-shifting boundary between “inside” and “outside.” This boundary will prove important for us, for it is here that the kindred processes of assimilation and differentiation *take shape*. An introductory analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks' “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed,” which recounts a Black man's attempt to move his family onto “a street of bitter white,” will serve to introduce the concept of the *vernacular* as it relates to distinctions of *race* and *class*. This will in turn help lay the groundwork for a sustained investigation of the common tongue and its role in linking the boundary between *inside* and *out* to that between “high” and “low.” Following a brief discussion of Aristotle's association of comedy with the lower classes, we will move through a series of moments in which the “low” is sometimes stigmatized, sometimes mined as a source of creative vitality (the latter of which can itself be a stigma). These include: Dante's choice of vernacular Italian for his *Divine Comedy*; Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into vernacular German; the low-brow dives of Eastcheap in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*; the aristocracy's ridicule of the ascendant merchant class in Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman*; class and sexuality in Strindberg's *Miss Julie*; wealth and assimilation in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; the “pain that words contain” in Derek Walcott's “The Schooner *Flight*.”

COLT 232 – Animation: The Enchanted Life of Images

Allan

Animation: The Enchanted Life of Images explores how images come to life and why animated movement has long been associated with magic, wonder, and imagination. Beginning with early experiments depicting motion, the course traces the development of motion photography and comics art as media that blur the boundary between the living and the artificial. Analyzing stories from Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* to Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* and Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie* to Gerard Johnstone's *M3gan*, we examine philosophical and cultural questions about animated images, artificial life, and the futures that enchanted images allow us to imagine.

COLT 303 – Theory of the Novel

Brundan

What makes a novel a novel? What are the special moves that novels make? In this course, we will read novels alongside literary theory to explore how the novel functions as a genre, from its use of narrative to its expression of subjectivity and its representation of reality. You can expect to encounter theories from formalism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, narratology, and translation studies alongside the following novels: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Nobel prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*, and Anne Garétt's *Sphinx*.

COLT 304 – Theories of Drama

Akcamete

This course introduces an overview of theories of drama from antiquity to the present. Throughout the term, students will explore how ideas about what drama is and what it should do have evolved across cultures and historical moments. Drawing on plays, films, and theoretical texts from around the world, students will examine diverse dramatic traditions, forms, and approaches to dramatic texts, including theories of tragedy, comedy, characterization, realism, anti-realist movements, and performance.

COLT 360 – Love at Large

Presto

Love at Large explores the problem of gender and identity through a constellation of texts that defies the conventions of the bourgeois family, monogamy, heteronormativity, and capitalist modernity. We will begin our survey with a reading of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, turning to a consideration of literary and cinematic texts by Alexandra Kollontai, Ursula Le Guin, Abram Room, and Virginia Woolf among others. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which these works respond to moments of cultural change and social and political upheaval.

COLT 380 – The Doppelgänger (Async)

Brown

"Film is in its essence a world of doubles."--Nicholas Royle

As media theorist Friedrich Kittler and others have noted, cinema from its very inception has been haunted by doubles through the celluloid and digital "ghosts" of the actors' bodies. Considered both in terms of its intermediality with literary evocations of the uncanny and with respect to the ghostly effects of the cinematic apparatus itself, this seminar will examine the figure of the doppelgänger and its variations (twins, clones, split personalities) in films such as *Bilocation* (2013), *Black Swan* (2010), *The Dark Half* (1993), *Dead Ringers* (1988), *Doppelgänger* (2003), *The Double* (2013), *Enemy* (2013), *The Prestige* (2006), and *Us* (2019).

COLT 380 – Tokyo Cyberpunk (Async)

Brown

Introducing the history, forms, and discourses of Japanese "cyberpunk" in contemporary film, anime, and other forms of visual media, this course explores the urban dreams (and nightmares) that constitute cyberpunk's posthumanist vision of Neo-Tokyo. Viewed not as a reflection of contemporary Japanese society but rather as its defamiliarization, Japanese forms of cyberpunk are investigated alongside Western examples of posthumanism as sites of contestation for competing ideologies and the delineation of new possibilities of existence, new forms of being, at the intersection between carbon- and silicon-based forms of intelligence and data-processing. Treating Japanese cyberpunk not merely as a literary movement or aesthetic style but more importantly as a philosophical discourse with distinctive questions and premises—i.e., as a philosophical "problematic" with its own sociohistorical specificities and transnational trajectories—we will investigate the cyberpunk city as an "abstract machine," the cyborg's "organs without a body," and the rhizomatic processes of cyberculture.

COLT 410/510 – Representing the Holocaust

Balbuena

The magnitude and unique character of the Holocaust raised questions about the human condition and the human nature, about the divine and its relationship to mankind. It has been argued that the Holocaust defies human comprehension and logic, and challenges language's expressive powers—the extension of its horror cannot be fully expressed or transmitted, and yet, it must be. But how to represent it? How to say the

unspeakable? How can art mediate this reality? How can art help in remembering this reality? Can literature, or, more so, poetry, make the past present, rescue it from oblivion? How can we remember what we have not lived? How can we remember other people's memories through art? These are some of the questions that we will ask in this class on representations of the Holocaust. This course will center on literary responses to the Holocaust, embracing a transnational and multilingual perspective and including writers from first, second and third generation. We will also discuss a few films and listen to music. Readings will be in English but students who have the option of reading works in the original will be encouraged to do so.

COLT 460/560 – Surrealism and Psychoanalysis

Librett

Surrealism was an avant-garde movement in literature, the visual arts, and film that arose (out of Dada) in France during the 1920s, in the wake of World War I and the Dada movement. Led by André Breton, the surrealists wanted to fuse dream with reality to create a *higher* reality, a “*sur-reality*” they endowed with revolutionary significance. One main source of inspiration for the movement was Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud posited the unconscious mind as the center of the psyche, and the dream as the “royal road” to the unconscious. We'll study Freud's theory of dreams and the unconscious, and then its application and displacements in surrealist literature and visual arts. Writers, artists, and filmmakers studied include: Leonora Carrington, Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Louise Bourgeois, Luis Bunuel, David Lynch, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, René Magritte, and Jacques Lacan.

COLT 614 – Archives/Media/Memory

Allan

Archives / Media / Memory examines the archive as a central problem and method for historical and cultural analysis. Approaching the archive as both a repository of texts and images and as a set of artistic practices, the course asks how history is produced, mediated, interrupted, and reimagined across media—including films by Larissa Sansour and Harun Farocki, literary works by Saidiya Hartman and Sinan Antoon, and essays by Ariella Azoulay, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Tina Campt. Over ten weeks, we develop sustained practices of archival reading, comparative interpretation, and critical citation in literature, film, photography, and law. Our course ultimately situates archival media as essential to rethinking the historical methods and the aesthetics of form at the core of our discipline.

Spring Quarter

COLT 101 – Imagining Jerusalem: Literature, Maps, and the City in World Culture

Balbuena

Why have certain cities captured the human imagination across centuries and cultures? This year's COLT 101 explores Jerusalem as one of the world's most imagined, mapped, narrated, and symbolically charged cities. Situated at the crossroads of religions, empires, and trade routes, Jerusalem has inspired writers, artists, pilgrims, travelers, and political dreamers from antiquity to the present. Through poetry, fiction, maps, painting, photography, film, and graphic narrative, students will examine how cities become literary and cultural symbols. Readings range from biblical Psalms and Persian poetry to Romantic and modern literature by writers such as William Blake, Edgar Allan Poe, François-René de Chateaubriand, Alphonse de Lamartine, Yehuda Amichai, Amos Oz, and Sayed Kashua. We will also study visual and graphic representations of the city, including historical maps and contemporary graphic novels. More broadly, the course asks how literature and art transform real places into imagined spaces shaped by memory, religion, desire, exile, nostalgia, and conflict.

COLT 232 – Slavic Vampires

Hokanson

The figure of the vampire, so powerful in contemporary popular culture, goes back in Eastern Europe to at least 1047, where it is attested in the Russian Primary Chronicles. Its most famous iteration is doubtless in the form of Dracula, or Vlad Tepes, “The Impaler,” a Wallachian ruler of the fifteenth century brought by Bram Stoker into European literature. Utilizing literary, folkloric, artistic and filmic texts, the class will explore the figure of the vampire in its Slavic context and development in the cultures of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and examine the kinds of creative works informed by the tradition. Students will read and analyze primary sources and compare them, in some cases, with filmic adaptations. Issues of gender, class, religion and ethnicity play an important role in the development of Slavic vampire literary and visual lore. The figure of the vampire is a complex one, raising such

issues as the ethics of human behavior, the implications of human reaction to disease, death, and those considered, in myriad ways, “the other,” and the scapegoating of figures seen as outsiders.

COLT 302 – Playing with Poetry

Teo

"The toy," writes the French poet of modernity Charles Baudelaire, "is the child's earliest initiation into art." Must poetry be about learning the rules? Is poetry confined to the formal expression of feeling? In this class, we approach poetry in the spirit of poets who worked through playful experimentation that pushed the boundaries of genre and convention. By learning those rules and breaking them in equal measure, they created often stunning and provocative ways of interacting with their debts to literary tradition and its ethico-political structures of knowing, power, and capture. Students will learn the fundamentals of poetics (including its associated terminology) and skills of close formal analysis through active and dynamic poetic exercises. Throughout, we imagine the poetic text as an object with which we interact—that is, we treat it as a toy and understand reading as a process of play. Through these modes of play, we build enabling habits of mind, unseat ideological patterns of thought, and guard against dogmatic impositions of thinking. Like the poets we read and transform, we will learn the rules of poetry in order to bend and break them—and in order to write something new, something better.

COLT 305 – The Critique of Civilization

Calhoon

This iteration of COLT 305 will focus on a tradition of critical writing that made “civilization” (the word, the concept) its object. Beginning with Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) and perhaps also his *Totem and Taboo* (1913), we will explore a range of readings, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1755) to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) and on to certain more recent, key writings on the “problem” of civilization, in particular Norbert Elias’s *The Civilizing Process* (1939/1969), and Jean Starobinski’s *Blessings in Disguise, or, The Morality of Evil* (1993). As part of our endeavor, we will consider the relevance of this body of critical work for the critical condition we find ourselves in today.

COLT 390 – Poetry Is Not a Luxury

Middlebrook

A course for the poetry-curious as well as the poetry-experienced, COLT 390 explores poetry as an art that helps attune us to the situation of living. As a USDIA-satisfying course, we will attend in particular to ways in which poetry is socially- and culturally inflected. Audre Lorde distinguishes between two kinds of poetry. One arises from a perspective that views life as “a problem to be solved” and one that understands life as “a situation to be experienced and interacted with.” Lorde regards the former as a Eurocentric concept and the latter as a position adopted by many—though not all—of Eurocentrism’s others. This course is for people who want to explore that second approach. Working in the medium of language, we will develop our capacities to attend to what Joy Harjo calls “heart” and Lorde describes as our powerful inner sense of, “this feels right to me.” We will discuss how the various traditions woven into the rich fabric of American culture inform that sense, and how a wide range of writers have incorporated it into their poetry. Our work will entail a combination of careful reading and hands-on experimentation with creating poems of our own as we explore how poetry helps attune us to the situation of living. Please be aware that this is a screens-free, AI-free course.

COLT 450/550 – World Theatre

Akcamete

In this course, you will be introduced to the rich tapestry of 20th-century theater from across the globe. Throughout the term, we will analyze various dramatic works within their historical and cultural milieu, delving into the complex relationship between culture, society, and theater. With close readings and comparative analyses, we will explore multiple stylistic and thematic approaches. Our exploration will include a critical and dramaturgical examination of historical events, cultural movements, and artistic trends, alongside discussions on how the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality have shaped theatrical landscapes. By tracing a variety of traditions, movements, and themes, we will aim to forge connections among works from different cultures and cultivate an appreciation of global dramatic and performative traditions.

COLT 462/562 – Linguistic and Literary Landscapes of the Levant

Balbuena

This advanced Comparative Literature course explores multilingualism, language contact, and cultural production in the eastern Mediterranean, with particular attention to Hebrew, Arabic, and diasporic and

immigrant languages across Israel/Palestine and the broader Levant. Through literature, film, music, media, and the linguistic textures of everyday public life, students examine how languages interact, compete, overlap, and shape cultural identity. The course introduces the study of linguistic landscapes—the visible presence of language in public space through signs, advertisements, street names, media, and other forms of cultural expression—and considers how multilingual environments reflect histories of migration, nationalism, colonialism, religion, and diaspora. Readings include bilingual poetry, multilingual prose, and works that engage translation, code-switching, and layered linguistic identities. Students will also encounter music, film, television, and journalism produced across diverse linguistic communities. The course also introduces key concepts in linguistics and sociolinguistics—including dialect, diglossia, language change, and language choice—with special attention to their importance for literary and cultural analysis.

COLT 618 – Histories, Theories, and Cultures of New Media

Kelp-Stebbins

What is new about new media? How does the distinction between analog and digital media expand the field of representation and alter the possibilities of techno-practice? What do the history of technology and the history of data offer to the study of media? Our class will provide an orientation to the theory and history of new media by exploring different traditions in media theory across generations, regions, languages, and methodologies. We will explore distinctions between comparative media studies, media archaeology, new media, and the history of technology with readings drawn from scholars working in distinctive theoretical traditions and different national contexts. In addition to weekly readings, students will be working on a final project in dialogue with debates and conversations from class. Authors we will read include: Friedrich Kittler, Cornelia Vismann, Bernhard Siegert, Wendy Chun, Simone Brown, Lisa Parks, Marshall McLuhan, and others.