

# Chronocriticism: It's About Time

"Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills all its pupils."—Hector Berlioz



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**T**ime: it's that thing that keeps everything from happening at once. But just what is it, precisely? Flip to a dictionary, and the OED dedicates some seventy-five thousand words ( $\approx$  200 pages) to answering that very question, and the answers are not very satisfying. This course will serve as an introduction to Time Studies, or "chronocriticism". Chronocriticism is the amalgamation of what is a widespread interest in temporality that cuts across the traditional disciplinary landscape and sweeps up wide swaths of contemporary culture. Time is an oft overlooked and underexamined metaphor that fundamentally shapes the ethics of individuals and cultures. In this course, we will reflect on our own personal assumptions about what time is, we will read how philosophers have tried to define it, how historical assumptions of it reverberate in culture, how cosmologists conceive of it structuring our universe, how physicists debate its existence, how artists use it as a medium, and how science fiction short stories and movies dreamed it could be different. We will learn some of the many ways to re-imagine and re-evaluate what is at stake with the assumptions underlying our personal and collective temporal metaphors. Our subject is slippery, so our methods will be necessarily diverse. By the end of this class, you will be a trained chronocritic.

## Required Books:

*Documents of Contemporary Art: Time* ed. Amelia Groom (2013)  
*Time: A Vocabulary for the Present*, ed. Amy J. Elias (2016)

Note: This course can be a lecture course or a seminar. Assignments would be tailored to the availability of local collections relating to the course materials. Each set of readings has been paired with an optional film. Another way to organize this syllabus is dedicate each week to a different discipline, i.e., "Time in History," "Time in Physics," "Time in History," "Time in Archaeology," "Time in Contemporary Art," "Time in Literature," "Time in Film," "Time in Cognitive Science," et alia. The following presents what I think are the best selected readings for each week, though there are many, many more on each topic. Generally: < 100 pages per session.

## Week 1 Timely Introductions

- Oxford English Dictionary* definition of Time. [Online](#).
- Augustine of Hippo, extract from *Confessions* (397-98 CE); trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 230-32; 243. Book (Groom).
- Joshua Foer, 'A Minor History of Time without Clocks', *Cabinet*, no. 29 (Spring 2008) 14-17. [Online](#).
- George Kubler, extracts from *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) 2; 5; 8; 13; 17. Reader

## Week 2 Time as Line

- Daniel Rosenberg, 'The Trouble with Timelines', *Cabinet*, no. 13 (*Futures* issue) (Spring 2004) 85. [Online](#); selections from *Cartographies of Time* (2012). PDF.
- Sigfried Kracauer, "Ahasuerus, or the Riddle of Time," *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 139-163. PDF.
- Paul J. Kosmin, one of the following chapters: "Introduction," "**Rupture and Historiography**," "Periodization and Apocalypse," in *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018). PDF.

## Week 3 Time Machines & Time Travel

- Mark Twain *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Chapters 1-5. [Online](#).

- b. H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895). [Online](#).
  - c. Larry Niven, "The Theory and Practice of Time Travel," in Larry Niven (ed), *All the Myriad Ways* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971) [Online](#).
- Film: Matt Groening, "The Late Philip J Fry," *Futurama* (2010).

#### Week 4 🕒 Past, Deep Past

- a. Tim Morton, "A Quake in Being: An Introduction to Hyperobjects," in *Hyperobjects* (2013). 1-24. PDF.
  - b. Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial* 64 (January 3, 1918). [Online](#).
  - c. Wai Chee Dimock, 'Deep Time: American Literature and World History', *American Literary History*, 13.4 (2001), 755–75. PDF.
  - d. Essays by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Carl Zimmer in Rachel Sussman, *The Oldest Living Things in the World*, (Chicago University Press, 2014). PDF.
- Film: Chris Stenner et alia, *Das Rad*, (2013). [Online](#).

#### Week 5 🕒 What is Contemporary?

- a. Amelia Groom, "This is so Contemporary!", *Frieze Masters*, no. 1 (September 2012) 62-71. Reader.
- b. Giorgio Agamben, "What is Contemporary?" in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) 39-56. Reader (Groom).
- c. Keith Moxey, "Is Modernity Multiple?" *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). 11-22. PDF.
- d. Elizabeth Freeman, "Synchronic / Anachronic," in Joel Burgess and Amy J. Elias (eds), *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*. (New York: New York University Press, 2016) 129-143.
- e. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nance Condee, eds., "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1-19. PDF.

#### Week 6 🕒 Future, Long Now

- a. Brian Fies, *Whatever Happened to the World of Tomorrow?: A Graphic Novel* (New York: H N Abrams, 2009). 1-41. Graphic Novel.
  - b. Timothy Morton, "The First Thread" *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). 1-30. PDF.
  - c. Langdon Jones, 'The Great Clock', *New Worlds Quarterly*, (1966). PDF.
  - d. Stewart Brand, *The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility*, 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999). Chapters 1, 2, 6, 15, 22. PDF.
  - e. Amelia Groom, 'Sisyphus', in *Reality Considerations (for the sake of)*, ed. Eleanor Ivory Weber (Sydney: 55 Sydenham Road, 2012) 12-15. Reader.
- Film: Andrew Stanton, *Wall-E* (2008)

#### Week 7 🕒 Out of Time: Death & Immortality

- a. *Ecclesiastes* 1:1-11, [available online](#).
  - b. Geoff Ryman, "Everywhere," *Interzone*. No. 10 (February, 1999), 6-9. PDF.
  - c. Francisco Goya, Saturn Devouring His Son (1819-1823), Museo del Prado. [Image here](#).
  - d. Robert Heinlein, "All You Zombies—!" *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, March 1959. [Online](#).
  - e. Ambrose Bierce "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," *The San Francisco Examiner*, July 13, 1890. PDF.
  - f. Paul Chan, 'A Time Apart', in Klaus Biesenbach, ed., *Greater New York* (New York: MoMA PS1, 2010) 84-5. Reader (Groom).
- Film: "San Junipero," *Black Mirror*. Season 3, ep. 4. (UK: Charlie Booker, 2011). Video.

## Week 8 🕒 Remembering Time

- Andreas Huyssen, "Introduction," *Past Presents: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (California, Stanford University Press, 2003). 1-11. PDF.
- Images selected from Robert A.M. Stern, *New York 1930; New York 1900; New York 1880*. PDF.
- Jorge Luis Borges, extracts from 'A New Refutation of Time', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964) 218; 222-4; 231. Reader (Groom).
- Henri Bergson, extracts from *Matiere et memoire* (1896); trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, *Matter and Memory* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1911); reprinted edition (New York: Zone Books, 1988) 188; 189-93. Reader (Groom).

Film: *La Jetée*, Chris Marker (1962)

## Week 9 🕒 The Day

- Philip Monk, extracts from 'The Split of the Unconscious: 24-Hour Psycho', in *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (Toronto: The Power Plant, 2003) 59-60; 76. Reader.
- Excerpts from *Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf), *Ulysses* (Joyce), and *Remembrance of Things Past* (Proust). Handout.
- Rosalind Krauss, 'Clock Time', *October*, no. 136 (Spring 2011) 213-17. Reader (Groom).
- Marina Abramovic, 'When Time Becomes Form', in Adrian Heathfield, ed., *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2009) 351-2. Reader (Groom)
- Harlan Ellison, "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman," (*Galaxy*, Dec, 1965). PDF.

Film: Christian Marclay – *The Clock* (2010). (Excerpt [Online](#)).

## Week 10 🕒 Cosmic Time, Entropic Time

- Pamela Zoline, "The Heat Death of the Universe," *New Worlds*, July 1967. PDF.
- Jennifer L. Roberts, "The Deposition of Time," *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). PDF.
- Sean M. Carroll, "Time is Personal," and "Time is Flexible," in *From Eternity to Here: The Quest for the Ultimate Theory of Time* (New York: Dutton, 2010). PDF.
- Lee Smolin, "Introduction," in *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

Film: *Interstellar* (2014)

## Week 11 🕒 End Times, Apocalypses

- Roy Scranton, "Coming Home," in *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2015), 13-27. PDF.
- "The Machine Stops" by E.M. Forster, *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*. (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1909). ([Online](#)).
- Have a look at both the *The Rapture Index* ([Online](#)) and *The Doomsday Clock* ([Online](#)).
- Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*, First edition. (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2015).
- Rebecca Roanhorse, "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience," *Apex Magazine*, August 8, 2017. [Online](#).

## Week 12 🕒 Conclusions: Other Metaphors

- Michael Serres, extract from 'Science and the Humanities: The Case of Turner', *SubStance*, vol. 26, no 2 (1997) 15-16.
- Alan P. Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

Film: Shane Carruth, *Upstream Color* (2013)

## Assignments

2-3 written assignments responding to the readings, or that are built in conjunction with local collections, exhibitions, or other such timely opportunities.

### Diagnostic Assignment: Personal Time [300-500 words]

*[This first exercise is a reflection, and is meant to give students the opportunity to demonstrate their level of writing, as well as give me some insight into their personalities]*

Prompt: How do you imagine time? What metaphor do you most often employ? Does your understanding of it change under different circumstances, and if so, how? How do you organize it (or do you?) What sorts of things outside of you influence your perception of time? How much of it is there? When did it begin? Keep in mind: however you frame these questions inherently scaffolds major assumptions about what time is, which necessarily *precludes* other possibilities.

Time Journal: Every journal is a time journal. As the semester goes on, I'd like you to keep a small notebook on your person at all times. Jot down any time you come across something temporally strange, or anytime you see something we've read or analyzed appearing someplace unexpected. Has your perception of time changed over your time? This journal can also double as a writing journal if you should please, a place for keeping track of other thoughts, ideas, or simply words and vocabulary you learn. I will be looking at this journal once or twice during the semester, but if for any reason you'd prefer I not read your journal, we can fold pages you'd rather I not see, or we can work something else out as an alternative.

