

## Do Our Stories Matter?

The Reality Effect:  
Documentary Film

Modern  
Metamorphoses

Apocalyptic  
Vision

TV  
NATION

Writing Back  
to the Media

### What If? Alternative Histories and Speculative Fictions

**ENGLISH 2890. SPRING 2018. 4 credits. S. Davis and staff.**

<http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl2880-2890>

ENGLISH 2880 offers guidance and an audience for students who wish to gain skill in expository writing—a common term for critical, reflective, investigative, and creative nonfiction. Each section provides a context for writing defined by a form of exposition, a disciplinary area, a practice, or a topic intimately related to the written medium. Course members will read in relevant published material and write and revise their own work regularly, while reviewing and responding to one another's. Students and instructors will confer individually throughout the term. Topics differ for each section.

**Each section limited to 17 students. Students must have completed their colleges' first-year writing requirements or have the permission of the instructor.**

**Apocalyptic Vision in Literature and Film**

Seminar 101: MWF 11:15-12:05

**Brad Zukovic**

6140

"Apocalypse" is the end of the world--or ourselves--but it also introduces new forms of being, desire and knowledge. In this course we'll analyze apocalyptic fantasies by writing critical essays: a skill (and art) that crosses disciplines. Course material includes the cult novel that inspired zombie apocalypse movies (*I am Legend*, by Richard Matheson); two accounts of apocalyptic desire (*Mulholland Drive* by David Lynch and Nathaniel West's *Day of the Locust*) and three works staging the collapse of mundane reality (Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Art Spiegelman's graphic-novel adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*).

**TV Nation: Television and Identity in America**

Seminar 102: MWF 12:20-1:10

**David Faulkner**

6141

Television mediates our national and domestic life more than we may realize. From its origins, TV—even for those who consume little of it—has represented, even regulated, our experiences of childhood and adolescence, production and consumption, politics and citizenship. It seeks to define us as people, workers, and citizens. In this course, we will develop ways to read and to write about the small screen as a cultural text. In doing so, we will explore how the genres, institutions and ideologies of contemporary television both reflect and refract our national and domestic life.

**Creative Nonfiction: Do Our Stories Matter?**

Seminar 103: MW 2:55-4:10

**Aurora Masum-Javed**

6142

Can a story take down a system? Under what conditions? This course will examine the role of the personal narrative as a political weapon. We will analyze the impact of art on the sociopolitical landscape through the works of James Baldwin, Adrienne Rich, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Rebecca Solnit, and many others. We will then interrogate our own biases,

assumptions, desires, relationships, and fears in order to write the self into a global context. The essays we craft will confront the intersections of political and personal trauma, history and family, identity and theory. Ultimately, we will ponder, "Do our stories matter? Why or why not?"

**The Reality Effect: Documentary Film**

Seminar 104: TR 10:10-11:25

**Becky Lu**

6143

We trust documentary films to portray the “real” world, yet engaged viewers understand that reality looks different from different perspectives, and documentaries have the power to shape and alter the truth in the process of reporting on it. In this course you'll practice critical reading and viewing, paying close attention to how recent documentaries construct, maintain, reimagine, and/or challenge our understanding of the world and of ourselves. In discussion and writing, we'll consider the ethics and politics of representation and the question of who speaks for whom. Films may include *Grizzly Man*, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, *Stories We Tell*, *Citizenfour*, *Cameraperson*, and *The Act of Killing*, as well as adjacent genres like reality television and mockumentary.

**Modern Metamorphoses**

Seminar 105: TR 11:40-12:55

**Sara Schlemm**

6144

In ancient myths, humans are transformed into animals, plants, and other shapes and states of being. Why do such stories haunt us in the digital age? How fluid are our own identities, and are we capable of metamorphoses of our own? To answer these questions, we will discuss contemporary ideas about gender, sexuality, epigenetics, legal personhood, digital lives, and creative autobiography. We will also develop expository writing skills through a wide range of assignments. Course materials may include Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, films such as Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, scientific journal articles, Supreme Court opinions, and other cutting-edge theories of what it means to be human - and maybe more.

**Writing Back to the Media: Essays and Arguments**

Seminar 106: TR 1:25-2:40

**Kelly King-O'Brien**

6145

Good investigative journalists write well and use their reportage to argue effectively. How can we adopt features of their writing for a variety of purposes and audiences, academic and popular? Our weekly readings will include features from the *New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, [slate.com](http://slate.com), and the *New York Times*, among others. Students will write essays of opinion and argument—in such forms as news analysis, investigative writing, blog posts, and op-ed pieces—on topics such as environmental justice, the value of an elite education, human rights conflicts, the uses of technology, gender equality, and the ethics of journalism itself. Coursework will include an independently researched project on a subject of the student's choosing.

**What If? Alternative Histories and Speculative Fiction**

Seminar 107: TR 2:55-4:10

**Ji Hyun Lee**

7967

What if the Axis powers had won World War II? What if the Great Depression had never ended? What if single-sex societies had evolved through reproductive innovation? Speculative fiction plays with such possibilities and can present us with new pasts, opening up new presents and futures. We'll read a range of alternative histories such as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, Ken Grimwood's *Replay*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*, and James Tiptree, Jr.'s “Backward, Turn Backward,” exploring the mechanisms that make these strange tales possible and bringing them into conversation with theoretical texts on psychoanalysis, political theory, and the philosophy of history. Essays and class discussions will ask: why are such alternatives so alluring?