

## VISIBLE HISTORY

The past is visible. That means many things. The past has left many different sorts of artifacts: not simply texts of various kinds, themselves visible, but also objects of daily and religious life, images, buildings, instruments of music, navigation, and the sciences. With the emergence of “documentaries,” the past seems to have become visible in another way—perhaps drawing upon those artifacts to “reconstruct.” Are these “visible” in the same ways? This class will explore methods historians use for analyzing objects, images, buildings, even as we use those methods to interrogate films that claim to document the past in some way.

Courses under the title “The Historian’s Craft” are designed to teach you a variety of skills essential to the practice of history: asking certain kinds of questions, finding and evaluating sources, developing and presenting an interpretation, planning further research, and communicating your findings to others clearly. This is also a “Comm-B” course, intended to develop your communication skills through writing and oral presentations. In this course, we shall concentrate on learning how to analyze visual evidence of a range of different kinds. To do so, students will be asked both to write a number of very brief analyses of specific visual sources and to research one kind of visual evidence at greater length, developing a method of analysis, through reading secondary literature, and, for the final paper, applying that method to a single visual source.

Each student is expected to participate fully in this class. That means attendance at lecture, active participation in oral discussions, and working closely with your trusted writing partner. Failure to participate in any of these ways will affect your grade.

### ***Requirements:***

The craft of history rests upon reading, listening, speaking and writing analytically. In this class, students will practice all of these skills, foremost in discussion sections.

#### *Reading:*

📖 There is one required text, Michael Baxandall’s *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, which students are asked to complete by their first section meeting. A range of other works, offering models of visual analysis, are on Reserve at College Library.

#### *Listening:*

👂 For everyone to be able to listen, there must be

• **no distractions:** no cellular devices, no surfing the web, no email, no other activities than listening to others, and no earphones. Anyone texting, emailing, surfing, or using their laptops for anything other than notes will lose the privilege of using a laptop for the semester.

👂 when your screen is elsewhere, not only are you, but those around you will find it more difficult to listen.

Listening is not a passive activity. Historians listen with a number of questions in mind:

- 1) What is the argument, the claim this historian is making?
- 2) What is the evidence for this claim?
- 3) Is the evidence anomalous—exceptional in some way—or representative?
- 4) Might there be other kinds of evidence that would challenge this claim?
- 5) Is the claim persuasive, that is, does the historian build an argument, step by step, showing the listener each step of the analysis?
- 6) Can you think of other questions one asks?

In history classes, then, we listen to others—to lecture, but also to other participants. We listen to our sources, each one of which has a “voice”—though it was created at some point in the past, human hands made that source.

👂 Each person in our classes brings analytic skills and a different perspective. Those perspectives help all of us to analyze more complexly and more circumspectly.

*Writing:*

👁 Every student in this class will hone the skill of visual analysis, through a series of brief analyses of different kinds of visual evidence, as detailed in the schedule of weekly meetings. Those analyses are due in lecture, Thursday of the week they are assigned.

📖 In addition, every student will identify one piece of visual evidence at the beginning of the semester that s/he wishes to explore in greater depth over the semester. In discussion section, each student will in 5-minute oral presentations

- ◆ introduce the visual evidence s/he has chosen
- ◆ present a brief bibliography on that kind of visual evidence: what are the methods scholars have developed for analyzing this visual evidence?
- ◆ present brief conclusions:
  - what can one say about this piece as evidence of the past?
  - what does it reveal of the past?
  - how does it change our understanding of the past?

In addition, this assignment has multiple written components:

- 📖 a one-page preliminary bibliography, formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style:  
[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/16/ch14/ch14\\_toc.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/16/ch14/ch14_toc.html)
- 📖 an annotated bibliography, also formatted according to the CMS
- 📖 a one-page description of your method of analysis
- 📖 a 1500-word essay analyzing your visual evidence:
  - what can it tell us about the past?
  - what are its limits, ambivalences, puzzles?
  - how does it change your understanding of the past?

the essay will be due first in rough draft to your trusted writing partner April 4,  
who will present it to discussion April 17  
final revisions due to your trusted writing partner April 25

Essay due May 10

**Plagiarism** is about how we think about ourselves in relationship to other scholars. It comprises one crime—claiming the ideas of others as our own or intellectual theft—and the failure to treat our own perspectives as valuable to the larger community of scholars. For the University of Wisconsin’s policy, see: <http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html>

*Required* 📖:

Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1988):  
ISBN: 0-19-282144-X

*Help:*

For writing:

The Writing Center: <http://www.writing.wisc.edu/>

The Chicago Manual of Style:

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/16/contents.html>

For research: Memorial Library staff

Useful Links:

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>

<http://guides.library.jhu.edu/evaluatinginformation>

<http://archive.org/index.php>

<http://www.dunedinlibraries.govt.nz/heritage/reed-gallery/signs-and-symbols>

[http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/insight/yvard\\_collaboratinginstitutions/yvard\\_collaboratinginstitutions\\_01.html](http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/insight/yvard_collaboratinginstitutions/yvard_collaboratinginstitutions_01.html)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jk\\_rowling\\_the\\_fringe\\_benefits\\_of\\_failure.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/jk_rowling_the_fringe_benefits_of_failure.html)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc&feature=player_embedded)

## Weekly Meetings

1/22 Introduction: Teaching Our Eyes to See as Historians

1/24 Topography

📖 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, entire.

1/29 Water

1/31 Coastlines

👁️ First analysis: choose one map and write 250 words describing how the map represents water. Pay attention to line and color. How does water define space? How did the cartographer define space using water?

🔹 Identify one kind of visual evidence, in consultation with teaching staff.

2/5 Cartography I

2/7 Cartography II

👁️ Second analysis: write 250 words describing how cartographers differentiate space. What are the signifiers for mountains? What is the relationship between somatic experience and signifier? Can you “know” what a mountain is from a map?

🔹 5 minute presentation of your visual evidence in discussion

2/12 Objects

2/14 Material Culture

👁️ Third analysis: make a list of twenty words to describe a single physical object. Exchange that list with your trusted writing partner and discuss the limits of those words, as well as the knowledge they communicate.

\*\* developing a vocabulary for talking about things.

2/19 “Images”

2/21 “Images”

👁️ Fourth analysis, first analysis of “Las Meninas”:

<http://www.museodelprado.es/en/visit-the-museum/15-masterpieces/work-card/zoom/1/obra/the-family-of-felipe-iv-or-las-meninas/oimg/0/>

“First impressions”: in 100 words, describe what first strikes the eye in this painting.

🔹 bibliographies: methods for analyzing visual evidence

📖 One page preliminary bibliography on your visual evidence due in section.

2/26 Portraits

2/28 The Visual Language of Cloth

- ☞ Fifth analysis, second analysis of “Las Meninas.” Analyze the clothing in 250 words. How does Velázquez communicate information about cloth? Describe each figure’s clothing, with attention to your vocabulary. Exchange this description with your trusted writing partner and compare the language for cloth.

\*\* cloth as historical evidence

3/5 Gesture

👤 Vatel

3/7 Placement of Figures

- ☞ Sixth analysis, third analysis of “Las Meninas.” Describe the relationships among the different figures in 250 words. Pay particular attention to hands and heads.

\*\* gesture as historical evidence: problems and limits

3/12 The Human Body

3/14 From Vesalius to Your Doctor’s Office

- ☞ Seventh analysis: choose one of Vesalius’s representations of the human body: <http://archive.nlm.nih.gov/proj/tp/flash/vesalius/vesalius.html> and a modern medical image. Please provide a copy of or specific hyperlink for each image you are analyzing. In 100 words, compare the visual information each is seeking to convey. How is each seeking to teach you what to think about the body? What information might be unintended?

\*\* representation and the body:

3/19 Bones

3/21 Blood

📖 Annotated Bibliography due. Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/16/ch14/ch14\\_toc.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/16/ch14/ch14_toc.html)

Spring Break

4/2 “Historical Film”

4/4 Film: Luther

📖 Rough draft due to your trusted writing partner

\*\* analyzing films of the past

4/9 Representing Space

4/11 Architecture as Historical Evidence

- 👁 Eighth analysis: fourth analysis of “Las Meninas”: How does Velázquez represent space?  
How does he signal to the viewer that the space is fictive?  
\*\* space as a historical source

4/16 Interiors

4/18 Exteriors

- 👁 Final analysis, choose one kind of representation of architectural space—a floor plan, an elevation, a painting of an interior—and in 150 words, analyze it as historical evidence. What can we learn about lived experience from it? What are its limits as evidence?
  - 📖 oral reports on rough drafts
  - 📖 one-page description of your method of analysis

4/23 Urban Topographies

4/25 Landscapes

- 📖 Polished draft due to your trusted writing partner for revisions
- \*\* landscapes and history

4/30 Film: Lincoln

5/2 Film: Lincoln

- 📖 Writing partner’s marked draft due back
- \*\* “history” and film

5/7 “Documentaries” – Representing Lives

5/9 Seeing History

5/10 📖 Final essay due