

English S114
Summer 2025
MWF 1-3:15
Room TBD

The Present of Nostalgia

Celine Vezina
celine.vezina@yale.edu
office hours TBD

[Course policies at the *end* of Syllabus.]

Course Description

“Nostalgia has come a long way,” writes critic Gary Cross. Where is it going? This course considers what nostalgia does for us as a culture with a present that is so often characterized by its throwbacks, as media, politics, and culture are continuously shaped by idealizations of the past.

We will focus not only on nostalgia but on what surrounds it: what does the desire for the past produce? How does it change our sense of the past? The present? Perhaps most disconcertingly, how does it shape our imagination of the future? In this course, we will consider these questions and more, examining the forms that nostalgia takes, how it operates in society, and what forms around acts and performances of nostalgia such as subcultures, throwbacks, collecting, and creating.

We’ll begin with the history of “nostalgia” as a psychological term and social phenomenon, and move through prominent theorizations and surveys of how nostalgia works: in music, literature, movies, the internet, and in constructing the bric-a-brac of culture and society, from individual identity formation to consumer practice. In short, this course offers a survey of formative work theorizing nostalgia, recent discussions of the contemporary state of retro, and theories of desire and authenticity, which students will use to examine where and how nostalgia manifests in art and culture.

Assignments and Grading

Graded coursework comprises four writing assignments, an annotated bibliography, and participation and attendance. Your papers will be due at 11:59PM on the date listed.

- Paper 1 (2 pages, close reading for argument) - 10%
- Paper 2 (4-5 pages, controlled research argument) - 20%
- Paper 3 annotated bibliography - 5%
- Paper 3 (8-10 pages, research-based argument) - 30%
- Paper 4 (exploratory essay and reflection) - 20%
- Participation and attendance - 15%

Deadlines

Friday, 7/4 at 11:59 pm EDT - First Essay Due

Tuesday, 7/8 at 11:59 pm EDT - First Draft of Second Essay Due

Sunday, 7/13 at 11:59 pm EDT - Final Draft of Second Essay Due

Friday, 7/18 at 11:59 pm EDT - Partial First Draft of Third Essay Due

Friday, 7/25 at 11:59 pm EDT - Complete First Draft of Third Essay Due

Thursday, 7/31 at 11:59 pm EDT - Complete Final Draft of Third Essay Due

Friday, 8/1 in-class P4/P3 presentations (any additional materials due at 11:59 pm)



Slater Bradley, still from "Intermission" (2003)

Unit 1: What's Past? Nostalgia and How to Use it

- Mark Fisher, "The Slow Cancellation of the Future," *Ghosts of My Life*
- Simon Reynolds, "Introduction" and "Prologue," *Retromania*
- Tobias Becker, "The Meanings of Nostalgia: Genealogy and Critique"
- *Pleasantville*

Unit 2: Looking Back, Then Forward

- Fredric Jameson, "Nostalgia for the Present"
- Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*
- Gary Cross, "Where We've Been, Where We Might Go"

Unit 3: Identity and Storytelling

- Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*
- Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora"
- *The Grand Budapest Hotel*

Week 1 (6/30 - 7/4)

Monday

In-class reading (Kate Wagner, "404 Page Not Found")

Introduce P1 + Writing for 114 overview

For Wednesday: Mark Fisher, "The Slow Cancellation of the Future," *Ghosts of My Life*

Wednesday

Screening: Pleasantville (tentative)

Essay topic brainstorming – P1 – P3

Close Reading tutorial

Discussion: Fisher, reading theory

Friday

In-class writing workshop – peer review

For Monday: Tobias Becker, "The Meanings of Nostalgia: Genealogy and Critique"

Submit P1V1 at 11:59 pm

Week 2 (7/7- 7/11)

Monday

P2 topic and argument lesson, drafting workshop

Discussion: Becker

For Wednesday: Simon Reynolds, "Introduction," from *Retromania*

Tuesday - submit P2V1 at 11:59 pm revise via office hours

Wednesday

Intro + conclusion lesson, revision workshop

Discussion: Reynolds, reading academic books

For Friday: Simon Reynolds, "Prologue," from *Retromania*

Friday

Body paragraphs lesson, editing workshop

For Monday: Fredric Jameson, "Nostalgia for the Present"

Sunday – submit P2V2 at 11:59 pm

Week 3 (7/14 - 7/18)

Monday

P3 topic brainstorm + workshop

Discussion: Jameson, reading theory redux

For Wednesday: Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (excerpts)

Tuesday – submit P3 Proposal at 11:59 pm

Wednesday

P3 Proposal workshop session

Research tutorial

Discussion: Boym

Friday – submit partial P3V1 at 11:59 pm

Research tutorial II – source evaluation

Discussion: applying theory

For Monday: Gary Cross, "Where We've Been, Where We Might Go"

Week 4 (7/21 - 7/25)

Monday

P3V1 workshop

Discussion: Cross

In-class reading: from Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*

For Wednesday: Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (excerpts)

Wednesday

P3V1 revision session

Implementing feedback tutorial

Discussion: Boym

For Friday: Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (excerpts)

Friday

Discussion: Boym

Citation Workshop

*For Monday: Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora"
submit complete P3V1 at 11:59 pm*

Week 5 (7/28-8/1)

Monday

P3 Revision workshop

Discussion: Hall

Wednesday

Screening: The Grand Budapest Hotel

Presentation prep

Thursday – submit complete P3V2 at 11:59 pm

Friday – last 1014 class meeting (P3 Presentation Day)

Course Objectives

This course is, first and foremost, an academic writing course. This course will, in addition to its exploration of recent theories and manifestations of nostalgia, aid you in your growth as a writer and thinker. We will be focusing on five key elements of critical thought and argumentation: identifying *problems*, making *claims*, supporting these claims with *evidence*, establishing *motive*, and providing sufficient *warrants*. In addition to these foundations, we will be focusing on the process of drafting and revising, critical steps in editing any kind of work. This class will help prepare you to engage critically with ideas and writing in any form or field, and to undertake complex, original, and interesting (both to you and others!) writing and research projects.

Course Materials

- All materials will be posted to Canvas in PDF form. I do not require you to purchase any of the texts assigned. You may bring readings to class in electronic (i.e. on laptop, tablet, e-reader) form or in printed form; if you would prefer a printed form but do not want to pay the library fees, please let me know, and I will get you a printed copy.
- All TV and movie assignments will likewise be made available to you: I will hold screenings for all of them at times that work for all of us, and if a time cannot be found, we will watch part of the assigned material in class.

Course Requirements

- Attendance and participation
- Preparation for class
- Four scholarly essays and drafts

Course Policies

- **Attendance:** It is, as you may imagine, extremely important that you attend this class; the accelerated summer schedule means that multiple absences will result in you falling extremely behind. As such, there are no guaranteed excused absences for this course, and multiple absences will affect your participation grade. In the event of an unforeseen absence, I expect you to contact me in order to catch up and make up for classwork ASAP; doing so will result in an excused absence.
- **Participation:** The same is true for participation. Your success in this course depends on your active presence: I aim for each student to meaningfully contribute at least once per class. This may take any form from contributing in discussion to small group work; if you will have difficulty participating in class, please let me know, and we can work out accommodations.

- Laptop and tablet use is permitted in class, though I require that you do not distract others or yourself with your use. I ask that you do not use your phone in class.
- Any lateness of more than 20 minutes will count as an absence, unless you contact me about it before or after the fact. Frequent lateness will be an issue for your participation- - please notify me if you will have trouble getting to class on time.
- Please let me know if you require any sort of accommodation in or out of the classroom. Yale's Student Accessibility Services (<https://sas.yale.edu>) may provide additional guidance and support. I strive to have an accessible, equitable, and accommodating classroom; if you are for any reason having trouble participating in class, completing work, or getting to grips with the material, please do not hesitate to contact me or come to my office hours.
- I expect the work you turn into me to be your own, and for you to cite scholars whose work you use properly. Plagiarism is unacceptable and subject to disciplinary action under Yale College's Undergraduate Regulations. See Yale College's statement on academic integrity [here](#), and the Poorvu Center's information page on plagiarism [here](#) if you find yourself unsure what plagiarism entails.