

<p>English 3381 Semiotics of Culture: Representing Diaspora</p> <p>Fall 2006 MWF 2:00 – 2:50 157 Dallas Hall</p>	<p>Professor Lisa Siraganian 15 Dallas Hall, (214) 768-2982 lsiragan@smu.edu Office Hours: Monday, 10-11:30 and by appointment</p>
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Course Description

Although the term “diaspora” was originally used to describe the biblical scattering of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile, “diaspora” is now used to label any “people settled far from their ancestral homelands” (*Webster’s*). The term, we might say, has entered the semiotics (that is, the language, conventions and modes of discourse) of our culture. Examples of diaspora have included African-Americans in California, Armenians in Canada, and Native Americans living off their reservations. Over the past 25 years, more and more people understand themselves as members of a diaspora.

This course seeks to reflect on this desire by addressing a set of related questions. What makes a people diasporic? In what sense is a people related to the place they are from? Is being a member of a diaspora an inheritable condition? We will explore how the notion of diaspora is one way of thinking about the relation between a thing and its context. This “thing” might be a person, a random object, or a piece of art. With an art object, the relation is between a work’s content and its context – a painting as distinct from its frame, a novel versus its reception in the real world.

For the first section of the course, we will consider some of the basic theoretical and literary descriptions of diaspora in order to derive a working model of diaspora from recent cultural examples. These include Steven Spielberg’s film about slavery, *Amistad*, in combination with less familiar work. The second section of the course takes a step back in time to examine the *literary* version of the question, how is a thing related to its context? In this section, novels, literary essays by poets, and poetry will be considered. The third section of the course introduces students to avant-garde movements in the visual arts from the 1960s to the present. Specifically, we will consider “earthworks” by artists such as Robert Smithson, David Nash, and Andy Goldsworthy. We will consider how the critical debate between minimalism and modernism in the 1960s art world is another version of the debate between anti-diaspora thinkers and pro-diaspora theorists. We will also think about how debates involving visual experiences might raise a different set of concerns and problems than do poetic, or political, debates. The last section of the course introduces several diasporic filmmakers who are searching for an alternative between anti-diaspora and pro-diaspora positions.

Class Schedule

<p>I. First Definitions of Diaspora</p>				
<p>Aug.</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>F</p>	<p>Introduction</p>	

	21	M	Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?"	
	23	W	Aimé Césaire, "Discourse on Colonialism"	
	25	F	Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture", from <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>	Quiz #1
	27	Su	5 pm: screening of <i>Amistad</i> at Fondren Library West 100D	
	28	M	<i>Amistad</i> , dir. Spielberg	
	30	W	<i>Amistad</i> , dir. Spielberg, continued	
Sept.	1	F	selections from Tom Feelings, <i>Middle Passage</i>	Paper #1 due (3-4 pages)
	4	M	<i>University Holiday – labor day, no class</i>	

II. Reading Literary Examples				
	6	W	Anzia Yeziarska, <i>Bread Givers</i> (pp.1-88), "Book 1: Hester Street", chapters 1-5 excerpt from Mathew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse"	
	8	F	Yeziarska, <i>Bread Givers</i> (pp. 89-201), "Book 1: Hester Street," cont., chapters 6-9, and "Book 2: Between Two Worlds," chapters 10-14	Quiz #2
	11	M	Yeziarska, <i>Bread Givers</i> (pp. 202-297), "Book 2: Between Two Worlds," cont., chapters 15-16, and "Book 3: The New World", to end.	
	13	W	Gertrude Stein, selection from <i>Geographical History of America</i>	
	15	F	Stein, selection from <i>Geographical History of America</i>	
	18	M	Stein, selection from <i>Geographical History of America</i> and William Carlos Williams, selections from <i>In the American Grain</i> : "Preface" and "Red Eric"	
	20	W	William Carlos Williams, selections from <i>In the American Grain</i> : "The Discovery of the Indies: Christopher Columbus"	
	22	F	Williams, selections from <i>In the American Grain</i> : "Voyage of the Mayflower" and "The Discovery of Kentucky: Daniel Boone"	Quiz #3
	25	M	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Yellow Woman and a Beauty of</i>	

			<i>the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today</i>	
	27	W	Silko, essays from <i>Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today</i>	
	29	F	Silko two short stories from <i>Storyteller</i>	Paper #2 due (4-5 pages)
Oct.	2	M	Victor Hernández Cruz, <i>Red Beans</i> , “Snaps of Immigration”, “Mountains in the North: Hispanic Writing in the USA”	
	4	W	Cruz, <i>Red Beans</i> , “Snaps of Immigration”, “Mountains in the North: Hispanic Writing in the USA”	
	6	F	MIDTERM	

III. Looking at Graphical and Artistic Representations

	9	M	<i>Fall Break, no class</i>	
	11	W	Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> 1	
	13	F	Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> 1 and 2	
	16	M	Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> 2	
	18	W	Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2”	
	20	F	Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2”, cont. in-class lecture and discussion of relevant contemporary sculpture	
	23	M	Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood”	Quiz #4
	25	W	Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood”	
	27	F	Robert Smithson, <i>Enantiomorphic Chambers</i> , “Pointless Vanishing Points”, <i>Non-Sites</i> , “A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites”, “Aerial Art”, “Earth”	
	30	M	Robert Smithson, <i>Enantiomorphic Chambers</i> , “Pointless Vanishing Points”, <i>Non-Sites</i> , “A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites”, “Aerial Art”, “Earth”	
Nov.	1	W	Robert and Shana ParkeHarison, selected images from <i>The Architect’s Brother</i> . Online exhibition of their work: http://www.geh.org/parkeharrison/index.htm	
	3	F	Andy Goldsworthy, film: <i>Rivers and Tides</i>	Paper #3 (4-5 pages)

IV. Watching Cinematic Representations				
	5	Su	6 pm: screening of <i>Earth</i> at Fondren Library West 100D	
	6	M	<i>Earth</i> , dir. Deepa Mehta	
	8	W	<i>Earth</i> , dir. Deepa Mehta	
	10	F	<i>Homecoming</i> , no class	
	13	M	Jawaharlal Nehru, selection from <i>The Discovery of India</i> , and Sati Al-Husri, selection from <i>Muslim Unity and Arab Unity</i>	
	14	Tu	7 pm: screening of <i>Calendar</i> at Fondren Library West 100D	
	15	W	<i>Calendar</i> , dir. Atom Egoyan.	
	17	F	<i>Calendar</i> , dir. Atom Egoyan Hamid Naficy, “The Accented Style of the Independent Transnational Cinema: conversation with Atom Egoyan”	Quiz #5
	19	Su	6 pm: screening of <i>Chan is Missing</i> at Fondren Library West 100D	
	20	M	<i>Chan is Missing</i>	
	22	W	<i>Chan is Missing</i>	
	24	F	<i>Thanksgiving break</i> , no class	
	26	Su	5:30 pm: screening of <i>War of the Worlds</i> at Fondren Library West 100D	
	27	M	<i>War of the Worlds</i> , dir. Steven Spielberg	
	29	W	<i>War of the Worlds</i> , dir. Steven Spielberg	
	30	Th	<i>Last day of class: Conclusions, exam review</i>	Paper #4 due (6-8 pages)

Final Exam has been scheduled by the Registrar’s Office for Wednesday, December 6th at 8:00-11:00 AM
to a tree branch.