

Detailed description

Disruptive Narratives: Re-Constructing the Truth in the Age of Multimodal Propaganda

Course Overview

The goals of the team behind the proposed OSUN Summer Course 2021 “Disruptive Narratives” are ambitious, but not unattainable. We want to investigate, both historically and synchronically

- **how fact-based narratives are formed,**
- **what impact they can and do have, and**
- **what role they can play, specifically, in countering multimodal propaganda and misinformation, issuing from state, para-state, and private sources, and driving resurgent authoritarianism.**

Participants in the course will be introduced to i) the history, ii) the characteristics, iii) the major topics of the genre by surveying some of its groundbreaking representatives and achievements. What the faculty want to explore with the course participants is **how an accurate representation of urgent aspects of contemporary reality is achieved by these fact-based narratives**. A further step will be to investigate their impact, their **reality-transforming potential**. **To do this we will engage with** historical and contemporary examples of the genre itself, but also with theoretical and philosophical texts that explore the relationship between (accurate) representation and/of (empirical) reality. The research and the curriculum are **interdisciplinary**, involving literary studies, political science, journalism and media studies, international relations, as well as history, philosophy and psychology.

Throughout the course a variety of engaging and effective teaching and learning methods will be employed; lectures will be used judiciously while active learning strategies will be distributed across all class sessions. Apart from classroom teaching and learning, several extracurricular activities will be organized that are seen to be integral elements of the whole course (see schedule).

Topic 1: Introduction

Given that the course is devoted to the importance and study of fact-based narratives, this module introduces participants to the issues that lie at the heart of our research on the genre, which have to do with representation but also and necessarily meaning, truth and belief. Meaning encompasses truth and belief and indeed, meaning moves people. This module initiates a discussion among participants on what makes sentences and discourse meaningful, which will evolve into a discussion on authorship, authorization and authority. This discussion is predicated on familiarity with a reading list that draws on philosophy and its appropriations by theorists working across numerous disciplines.

Topic 2: East and Central Europe, pre-1989

Here we will discuss political repression in the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, and the former Yugoslavia (esp. Slovenia). We will look at fact-based narratives that, despite the overall presence of censorship, managed to faithfully represent reality, opening the eyes of a growing number of people in those countries. The discovery and the narrative presentation of the facts (reality) will be shown to have meaningfully contributed to resisting the oppressive system of communism, leading up to the *annus mirabilis* of 1989 and, more broadly, the so-called transition years.

Topic 3: Practice in Focus: Disruptive Narratives Around the Globe I.

In this class, one of the living leading practitioners of the genre, Ian Buruma, and our guest speakers (including women and authors from the Global South) will talk about their initiation into the genre of

fact-based narratives, the major influences on them and the first phases of their careers. Participants will learn more about the global historical and political contexts in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in which some of them found their own inimitable voices. They will also talk about the publishing industry of fact-based narratives, this time, once again, concentrating on the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (the pre-Internet age).

Topic 4: East and Central Europe, post-1989

In English language scholarship the post-1989 era is an undiscovered gold mine in terms of East- and Central-European fact-based narratives. We will look at ways in which the post-communist experience was reflected, once again concentrating on the (dissolving) Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia. We will explore how the current pandemic is likely to change the all-encompassing national, regional and global narratives that will shape our lives in the years to come, especially in the East- and Central-European region. We might envision unprecedented scenarios emerging in the post-pandemic times that are related to "big data authoritarianism," "health terror," and new forms of "bio-power."

Topic 5: Disruptive Narratives in Latin America I

This module focuses on the *crónicas* of Latin America born in the tensions of the Cold War, inspired by a social and political commitment, in the context of dictatorships during the 1950 decade. We will examine the use of narrative techniques as including but also transcending aesthetics, as a way to evade censure and so denounce the horrors perpetrated in defense of the nation by military governments. *Operación masacre*, by Argentinian author Rodolfo Walsh, is known as a pioneer of this form and content. Along with Poniatowski's *Massacre in México* and Verdugo's *Chile, Pinochet and the Caravan of Death*, this work constitutes essential reading for a course such as this, focused on how to combat propaganda and misinformation with fact-based narratives. These works help us to understand the regional transformations during the second half of the 20th century; and we will explore their possible impact in the current moment.

Topic 6: Practice in Focus: Disruptive Narratives Around the Globe II.

In the second class with Buruma and our guest speakers, participants will be introduced to their work following the global changes in the 1990s. On the one hand, these global changes were political in nature (democratic transitions in many countries around the globe) and, on the other, technological (satellite TV, Internet, social media, etc.). We will pay special attention to the phenomenon of the global rise of political populism.

Topic 7: Disruptive Narratives in Latin America II

Urban gangs, extreme poverty, migrations, drug trafficking and corruption are part of the quotidian landscape in countries as México, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In showing it, contemporary journalism there produces a vibrant, high impact *crónica*, which combines the ferocity of storytelling and the crudeness of narratives. In this module we'll read and analyze the work of El Faro (El Salvador), Periodistas de a pie (México) and other individual initiatives which re-energizes literary journalism, while highlighting this region within the globe.

Topic 8: Conclusion