The Reading Cultures core sequence offers an introduction to critical reading and cultural analysis. This Humanities Course approaches cultures not simply as groups of people but as sets of shared ideas and assumptions that take shape in specific forms of representation. Our goal will be to examine how cultural knowledge is formed and transmitted across space and time via three interconnected processes: collecting, travel and exchange. Focusing on these processes and their representation in art, literature and film, we will consider how cultures are created through the stories they tell and the stories that are told about them.

The Spring quarter works toward understanding the relation, in the modern and post-modern periods, between economic development and processes of cultural transformation. We examine literary and visual texts that celebrate and criticize modernization and urbanization. Beginning with Balzac’s novel Old Man Goriot and Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto, we then concentrate on works that address economic, social, and cultural change in the twentieth century, including Melville’s “Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” Richard Wright’s Native Son, as well as screen films.

Reading Cultures is a yearlong humanities core sequence. It is devoted to the cultivation of interpretation through the close reading of objects across a broad range of times and places, from ancient texts to contemporary film, folk tale to museum. In each case the goal is to work outward from the textual details and explore questions about cultural production, the challenges of translation, responsible interpretation, texts as formative sources of human community, hybridity and the legacy of colonialism, and the role of humanistic inquiry in addressing such questions.

The final quarter of Reading Cultures examines the relationship between artistic expression and exchange. Our objects of inquiry include philosophical and artistic works that celebrate and criticize modernization, urbanization, and commodification, as well as the ways in which modes of artistic and intellectual expression have been shaped by the systems of exchange that govern everyday life. We will begin the quarter by reading nineteenth-century meditations on the development of capitalism, and we will then turn to novels and films that sought to elucidate the social inequalities, exploitation, and uprootedness of the twentieth century instantiations of this system. We will study representations of exchanges and tensions between upper and lower classes, rural and urban, modern and antique, and current experience and nostalgia for pasts and futures that may or may not have existed or come to be.
COURSE DESCRIPTION (sample3):

The spring quarter course concludes the Reading Cultures course sequence with its theme focused on the notion of a cultural, social, and economic (ex)change. We will consider various types and meanings of exchange, ranging from altruistic gift to commercial circulation of goods. Focusing on the structure of this process will ask: what is exchanged, on what conditions, who is involved in the action, and what is its goal? Our discussion, based on the study of modern literary and visual texts, will work towards a deeper understanding of the relationship between economic development and processes of cultural transformation. We will examine philosophical and artistic works that celebrate and criticize such processes as modernization, urbanization, and commodification. Beginning with Balzac’s representation of nineteenth-century Paris, we will analyze how the new social attitudes and modes of spectatorship have developed, and how they relate to our own twenty-first-century lifestyles and experiences. Following Marx’s famous critique of the capitalist economy, we will concentrate on classical twentieth-century novels and films which portray social inequalities, modern exploitation and uprootedness both in rural and highly developed urban environments. In our discussions we will also raise questions about the importance of representation itself, in literature and the arts, and the modes of artistic exchange in the capitalist system based on the circulation of money and of commodities.

BOOKS (AVAILABLE AT SEMINARY CO-OP):

ADDITIONAL SHORT READINGS (AVAILABLE ON CANVAS)
James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone” and “Everybody’s Protest Novel”
Walter Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”
Herman Melville, “Paradise of Bachelors”
Ai Wu, “Rumbling in Xu Family Village”

FILMS SCREENINGS (ARE ARRANGED BY INSTRUCTOR)
Modern Times (1936, Dir. Charlie Chaplin) Week 4
The Lunchbox (2013, Dir. Ritesh Batra) Week 8

FIELD TRIP ON MAY 11TH (TO BE CONFIRMED)
Saturday Richard Wright trip to the Art Center.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION
Paper 1: 3-5pp (15%); 4-6pp (20%); 5-7pp (30%); participation 15, discussion 10, blogging (20%)
Week 1
1: Introduction
2: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* Chapters I, II, and IV (available on Canvas)

Week 2
1: Balzac, *Old Goriot*, chapters 1-2
2: Balzac, *Old Goriot*, chapters 3-4

Week 3
1: Balzac, *Old Goriot*, chapters 5-6
2: Marx, from *Capital*, pp. 302-336 (in *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Week 4
**Paper 1 due on Balzac/Mauss**
1: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
2: Melville, *Paradise of Bachelors* (available on Canvas)
(TBA) Screening I: *Modern Times*

Week 5
1: discussion of *Modern Times*; Walter Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (available on Canvas)
2: Xiao Hong, *Field of Life and Death*, chapters 1-4 and Preface to *The Field of Life and Death*

Week 6
1: Xiao Hong, *Field of Life and Death*, chapters 5-13
2: Xiao Hong, *Field of Life and Death*, chapters 14-17

Week 7
**Paper 2 due on Marx, film, Xiao**
1: Ai Wu, *Rumbling from Xi Family Village*
2: Richard Wright, *Native Son* Section 1; Wright’s Introduction to *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945)
**Saturday Richard Wright Tour**

Week 8
1: Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Section 2)
2: Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Section 3)
(TBA) Screening II: *The Lunchbox*

Week 9 – Memorial Day week
1: *Native Son* supplemental meeting; Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone” and “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (TuTh)
2: Discussion of *The Lunchbox* (TuTh); *Native Son* supplemental meeting; Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone” and “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (MW)

Week 10
1: Discussion of *The Lunchbox* (MW); Conclusion/Wrap up (TuTh)
2: Conclusion/Wrap up (MW)

May 31st-June 1st: College Reading Period. **Monday-Friday of finals week: Paper 3**