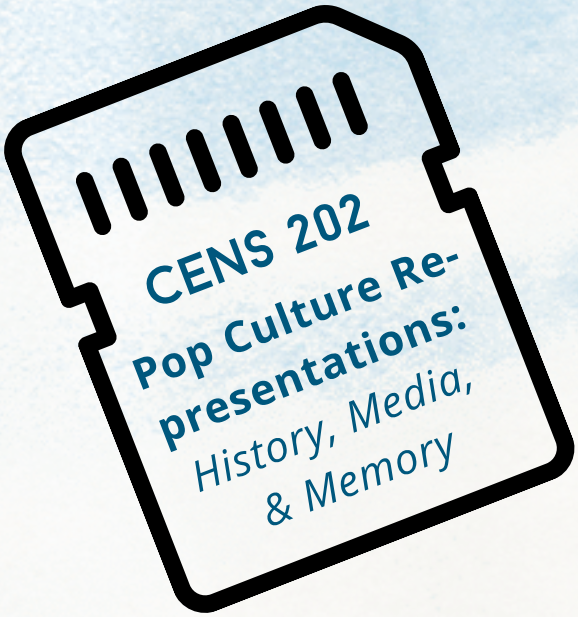
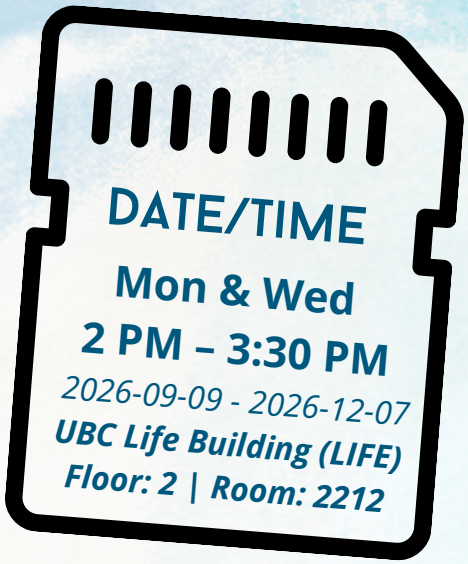
CENTRAL, EASTERN, & NORTHERN EUROPEAN STUDIES

POP CULTURE RE-PRESENTATIONS:
HISTORY, MEDIA, & MEMORY

CENS 202 – SECTION 102

MON/WED | 2:00 P.M. - 3:30 P.M.(2026-27 W1)





COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines how history and cultural memory have been constructed, contested, and mediated in Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe since 1945. Bringing media studies theory into conversation with foundational memory-studies scholarship, we explore how different media—material, visual, digital, and interactive—shape public understanding of the past and influence contemporary debates about identity, responsibility, and remembrance. Students analyze a wide range of popular cultural forms, including graffiti, monuments and counter-monuments, comics, board games, and video games, to understand how each medium negotiates narratives of war, trauma, division, and reunification. Through critical readings, hands-on analysis, and arts-based research, this course investigates how media both preserve and challenge collective memory, and how artists, designers, and communities continue to reimagine Germany's postwar history for new generations. **There are no prerequisites.**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Explain key concepts in media studies and describe how media shape cultural perception, communication, and collective meaning-making in Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe.
2. Interpret major theories in memory studies, including collective memory, cultural memory, trauma, and postmemory, and apply them to historical and contemporary German contexts.
3. Analyze how different media forms—such as graffiti, monuments, comics, board games, and video games—mediate narratives of German history, including WWII, the Holocaust, the Cold War, division and reunification, and contemporary debates on migration and multiculturalism.
4. Evaluate how artists, activists, and institutions use media to construct, challenge, or reframe cultural memory, particularly in relation to national identity, responsibility, and public remembrance.
5. Critically assess the political and ethical dimensions of representing traumatic or contested pasts across analog, visual, and digital media.
6. Compare how various media invite distinct modes of reception, participation, and interpretation, and explain how these differences influence public understandings of history.
7. Conduct close readings of visual, material, and interactive media using frameworks drawn from media theory and memory studies.
8. Develop original, research-informed interpretations of German postwar media artifacts, demonstrating the ability to synthesize theoretical, historical, and analytical insights.
9. Reflect on the role of popular culture in shaping contemporary memory cultures within Germany and transnationally.
10. Communicate arguments clearly and effectively, both in written analysis and through discussions grounded in theoretical and cultural evidence.

WHAT WE'LL NEED:

1) Canvas will be used for accessing course materials, completing assignments and coursework, and participating in class discussions. To log in to Canvas and learn more visit: https://students.canvas.ubc.ca. You can direct all technical questions to the Learning Technology Hub: lt.hub@ubc.ca. **All supplementary readings will be provided in PDF form on our Canvas site.**

2) Unless provided via Canvas in excerpt, all materials will be available for free online or for purchase via the **UBC Bookstore**.

3) Digital games will be available online for free or for purchase on various platforms, including laptop and desktop computers as well as Android and iOS devices.

Dr. Elizabeth "Biz" Nijdam (biz.nijdam@ubc.ca)
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Director, UBC Comics Studies & Pop Culture Clusters
Department of Central, Eastern, & Northern European Studies

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:30–1:30 PM, Buchanan Tower, Room 927

Hi! My name is Dr. Biz Nijdam. I've taught at UBC since 2019. I received my PhD from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2017, where I wrote my PhD on feminist comics and graphic narrative.

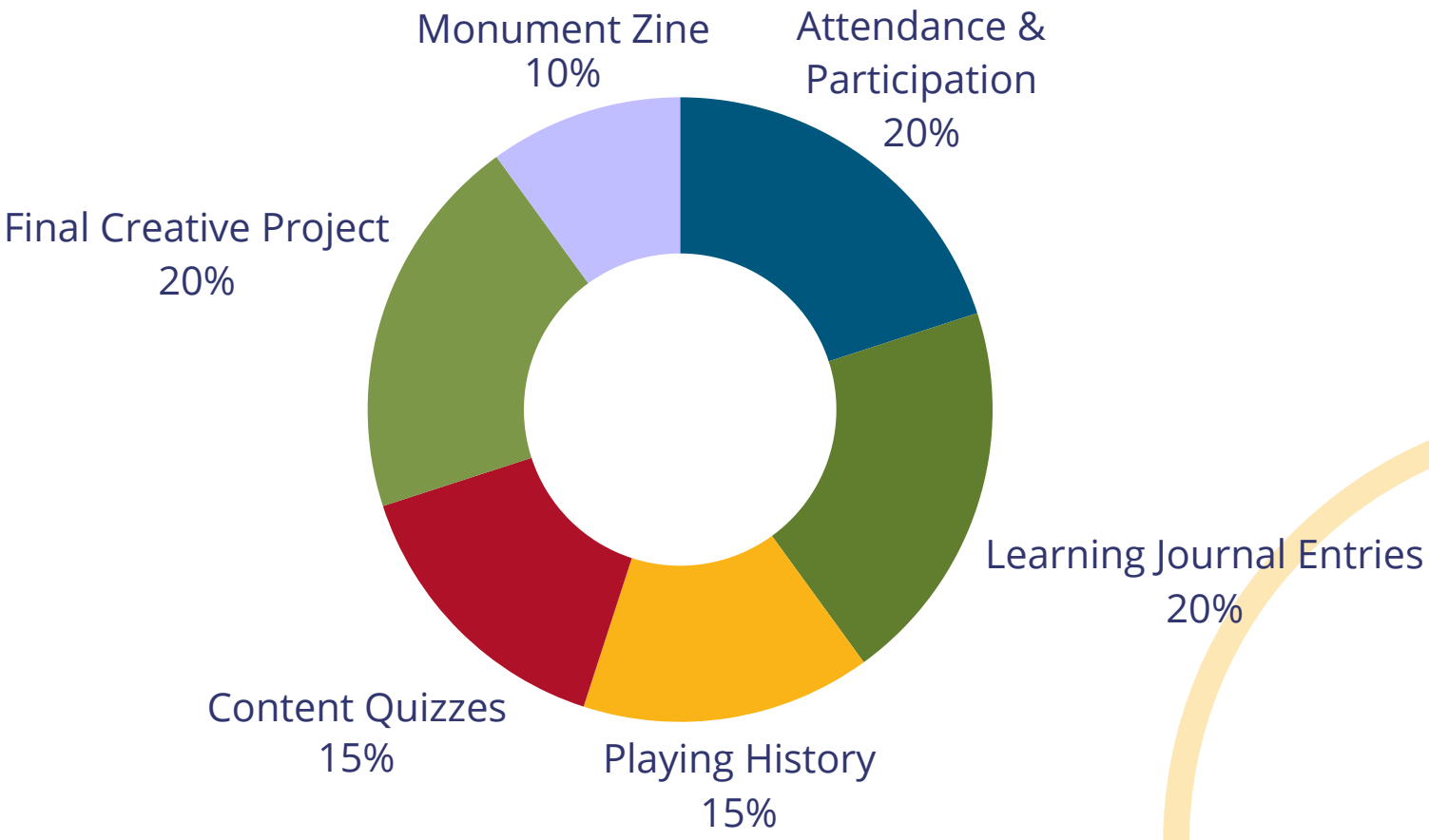
My teaching and research are grounded in the belief that popular culture not only reflects social and political discourse, but it also has the capacity to intervene in it. With popular culture increasingly serving as a site for political formation and shaping political ideas and practices, it's more important than ever to integrate popular culture into teaching and learning in higher education.

My scholarship examines the representation of complex histories in comics and digital and tabletop games, Tarot's capacity for innovating classroom teaching, and the role of comics and arts-based research in preserving Indigenous knowledges, sharing Indigenous storytelling traditions, and revitalizing Indigenous languages.

WHAT ABOUT GRADING?

This course will feature weekly course readings and lectures, 5-question multiple-choice content quizzes, class discussion, in-class writing, group work, short Learning Journal Entries (350 words), and projects that prompt students to synthesize learning through creative means.

Students will develop competencies in arts-based research methodologies by completing several creative projects, including a **Zine**, an **interactive narrative** based on archival research in UBC Special Collections or online, and a **final creative project** (TBD).



CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%)

To be successful in this course, you must be prepared for our class sessions and participate actively in all assigned course activities. Good participation will take the form of regular contributions to class discussion and the completion of "in-class" short essays assigned via Canvas as part of our weekly coursework. Creative assignments will include class time, but many assignments will be completed outside/independent of our in-person and/or asynchronous sessions.

Because this is a large-enrolment course, students will be divided into groups for some elements of their coursework and discussion activities. Students will be participating in online class discussion within these groups and share their Learning Journal assignments with each other via these groups. Restricting class discussion to groups will support students in community-building within this class, which is essential in cultivating the kind of trust and vulnerability needed for this kind of learning.

Students are expected to attend class regularly. Students may not miss more than 40% of the course's class sessions and assignments, regardless of whether their absences are avoidable or unavoidable. In the event that a student misses 12 or more hours of class time, they may be considered unable to meet the "learning outcomes" of the course and may therefore be excluded from the final assessment. Those students who are unavoidably absent from in-person and/or online class sessions or miss multiple class sessions and their associated "in-class" assignments must **report their absence to me immediately or upon their return to participating in class** in order to establish how they should proceed in catching up on missed material. Students may be granted a concession for their absence, in the case of an extended absence, by the Academic Advising Services of the Faculty of Arts.

IN-CLASS ESSAYS

Class participation will be graded through Canvas via short "in-class" writing assignments. These assignments will be completed during class time (whether in person or asynchronous) as part of the lecture's learni activities and will take the form of short essay questions (150–350 words) that will engage the course material, readings, and lectures of a given class session.

During our in-person and asynchronous sessions, students will take 5-7 minutes of "class time" to write 150–350 words in response to a prompt. These short essays offer students the opportunity to reflect on the course material before participating in other activities, such as discussion threads, and moving on to other course material.

These short "in-class" essays will not be graded for grammar, spelling, punctuation, or syntax; instead, they will be graded for completion. They thereby function as a testament to student engagement with the course material and proof of their participation in class as well as form the foundation of class discussion and project work. **The use of AI technologies for in-class essays is strictly forbidden.**

All in-class essay assignments should be completed in the order they are assigned. Making up in-class essays after the deadline will only be possible in extenuating circumstances, and extension requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis, so please email me if you become sick and require additional accommodation.

CONTENT QUIZZES (15%):

To ensure that students are keeping up with the assigned readings and to encourage close engagement with course materials, students will complete short content quizzes on each assigned reading. These quizzes will also function as a preview for the session's discussion of the material to help reinforce student understanding of key themes, characters, and plot points, ensuring that students are prepared for in-person and/or online class discussions and in-person and/or asynchronous activities.

Students must take the quiz **during class time** in the section's classroom. To ensure this, each quiz will begin with a **Code Word** provided by the instructor during class time. For students who would like to **make up a missed quiz**, they can do so in-person during office hours with Biz **within one week of the missed quiz.**

LEARNING JOURNAL ENTRIES + GROUP DISCUSSION (20%)

Over the course of the semester, students will engage in an activity and/or write one short (350 words) Learning Journal Entry per week in response to a prompt or activity that asks them to reflect further on our course texts, media, and themes. These assignments require students to demonstrate understanding and engagement with course material in greater depth than in-class discussion by responding to one particular prompt, idea, or question.

Some Learning Journal Entries will offer **TWO OPTIONS** for completion: **OPTION ONE** prompts students to pair AI-executed activities with critical thinking to develop a reflective practice that supports students in advancing AI competencies for personal, professional, and creative work, while fostering the AI literacy skills that will be essential in their futures. **OPTION TWO** prompts students to complete the same task without the use of AI technologies, embedding different but adjacent learning outcomes into the assignment design.

Strong Learning Journal Entries will consist of coherent and comprehensible short texts that engage with the topic at hand, incorporate references to readings when applicable, and synthesize class discussions with individual responses and interpretations.

Learning Journal Entries will be submitted via the assignment's Canvas Discussion Thread by Sunday at midnight (11:59 PM PT). After submitting their Learning Journal Entry, students will participate in **Small Group Discussion** (in groups of 6 students) over the course of the following week, **commenting on at least 2 of their peers' Learning Journal Entries before the following Sunday at midnight (11:59 pm PT)**. Each comment should consist of 150 words on their fellow student's Learning Journal Entry, while adding elements of their own observations.

Citations for referencing in-person or asynchronous lectures are not required. For in-text references to readings, films, or other media, please use MLA style. Bibliographies are not required.

OUR PLAN FOR THE TERM*

Week 1		WED., SEP. 9	**Course Introduction:** *How does media change our understanding of History?*
Week 2	MON., SEP. 14	WED., SEP. 16	**How does Europe remember?** *From Collective Memory to Archives* **Sept. 16: Experiencing Eastern & Central Europe**
Week 3	*asynchronous* MON., SEP. 21	WED., SEP. 23	**Monuments to Remembering & Forgetting** *Public Art in Postwar Germany*
Week 4	*asynchronous* MON., SEP. 28	*WED., SEP. 30*	**Postwar Photography & Painting** *The Politics of Abstract, Realism & Photorealism*
Week 5	MON., OCT. 5	WED., OCT. 7	**Postwar Photography & Painting** *Zine Workshop: Monuments of/to Memory Zine*
Week 6	*MON., OCT. 12*	*asynchronous* WED., OCT. 15	**Comics & Graphic Novels** *Comics & the Holocaust*
Week 7	MON., OCT. 19	WED., OCT. 21	**Comics & Graphic Novels** *Comics & the Holocaust*
Week 8	MON., OCT. 26	WED., OCT. 28	**Playing History: Digital Games** *Archival Research Session (Oct. 26)*
Week 9	*online* MON., NOV. 2	WED.,NOV. 4	**Decolonial Mapping & Group Work** *Virual Guest Speaker: Moses März (Nov. 2, Zoom)* *Playing History: Gamifying the Archive*
Week 10	*MON., NOV. 9*	*WED., NOV. 11*	*WINTER BREAK*
Week 11	MON., NOV. 16	WED., NOV. 18	**Playing History: Analog Games** *Catan Gameplay Session*
Week 12	*asynchronous or online (TBD)* MON., NOV. 23	WED., NOV. 26	**From the Past to the Present & Future** **Climate Literacy & Sustainable Futures** *Guest Speaker: Charlotte Taylor*
Week 13	MON., NOV. 30	WED., DEC. 2	**Game Modification Workshop**
Week 14	MON., DEC. 7		**Final Creative Projects Due!**

**this schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.*

MONUMENTS OF MEMORY ZINE (10%):

CENS 202's exploration of the intersection of popular culture and history is grounded in the role of media in discourses of postwar European history, cultural and collective memory, and identity. Students will therefore also be charged with reflecting on these tensions through creative processes. Early in the semester, students will participate in a Zine Workshop with a UBC Librarian to explore how arts-based research and creative practices can also engage in this critical and intellectual work.

After the workshop, students will be prompted to create their own zines (using digital and/or analog tools) by adopting some of the critical perspectives and approaches to history and memory examined in class.

PLAYING HISTORY PROJECT (15%):

Our course examines how history is curated, collected, and constructed to facilitate certain kinds of remembering and forgetting through various media. As part of our work to engage with these themes through creative methods, students will gamify history through archival research in either UBC's Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) or online via one or more digital archives, turning history into a playable object modelled after Luke Parnell's Game Modification Workshop or by turning it into an interactive narrative via Twine

For this group project, students will explore a selection of materials of historical import housed in a local archive or online to create a short Twine game (interactive narrative) based on/using these materials. Working in groups of 2-3, students will first be introduced to UBC's RBSC and archival research through a Canvas Course and a class visit by an RBSC archivist and/or UBC librarian. Then students will be invited to explore archival materials housed at UBC or found digitally in one or more internet archives, selecting some to integrate into their game, transforming these historical documents into a compelling interactive narrative.

FINAL CREATIVE PROJECT (20%):
REMEDIATED MEMORY – ONE STORY, THREE MEDIA

For their Final Creative Project, students will work in groups of 2-3 and select a single moment, object, or narrative from modern global history (1800s–2020) and re-tell it through three distinct media forms (e.g., image, text, interactive, spatial, or material). The project explores how different media shape meaning, memory, and responsibility, asking students to explore what is gained, lost, or transformed when history is remediated across formats.

Please see our Late Work Submission Policy, which is posted on our course's Canvas site, for more information on submission deadlines, our course's 24-hour Grading Grace Period, and late submission for partial marks.

There are no traditional final exams or midterms in this course.

COURSE POLICY ON GENERATIVE AI

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools is strictly prohibited in all course assignments unless explicitly stated otherwise. This includes ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools and programs.

Submitting work generated by AI tools is not only a form of academic misconduct. it also misrepresents your understanding and efforts within the context of our course, which is unfair to your peers.

It's easy to rely on AI tools when you're participating in a class that requires a lot of online work, but I hope you'll trust that you're capable of this work without the assistance of technology, especially since you're here to develop critical thinking skills, broaden your understanding of the role of popular media in our lives, and deepen your engagement with it, which AI can't do for you.

Moreover, many of these assignments are part of our grading contract, which was designed to afford students the opportunity to think and learn freely while taking chances in their interpretation of the texts and performance of literary, visual, and media studies analysis. This approach means that there are no "wrong" answers to these low-stakes assignments, so students should feel encouraged to engage thoughtfully and creatively without concern for the impact on their grades.

Finally, writing and critical thinking are essential skills that you will continue to use throughout your academic and professional careers. Practicing these skills now will benefit you in the long run.

UBC POLICIES AND HELPFUL RESOURCES:

The following policies and procedures are considered part of the class syllabus and policy. Feel free to talk them over with your instructor!

Applying for Academic Concession
UBC's Academic Honesty and Standards
UBC's UBC Respectful Environment Statement
UBC's Student Code of Conduct
UBC's Communicable Disease Prevention Framework
UBC's Policy and Resources to Support Student Success
Accommodations for Religious Holidays and Days of Significance
Use of Electronic Devices at UBC
Center for Accessibility: Support for Disabled Students