

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES THE COOPER UNION

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS SUMMER 2024

HSS 1 – THE FRESHMAN SEMINAR

A literature course concentrating on poetry and drama. Selected texts from antiquity and the Renaissance are common to all sections, with works from other genres, periods and cultures chosen by individual instructors. The course develops aesthetic appreciation of literary texts and encourages a range of critical responses. Through close reading, and extended discussion, students learn to articulate their responses in written and spoken form.

3 credits. Tara Menon.

HSS 4 – THE MODERN CONTEXT – QUEER THEORY AND POLITICS

In this course, we will examine the crucial role that gender and sexuality have played in producing something we call modernity. We will think about the role that identity and categorization have played in producing modern subjects who experience genders and sexualities as either “natural” or “deviant” and how sexuality and gender function to index race and class to biological determinants. But the question what is political about queerness? will ultimately lead us to questions about how the governance of desire and relationality has determined our orientations toward space, time, and embodiment in ways that use queer theory to dismantle not only naturalized conceptions of the body and how and who it desires, but also the supposed boundedness of that body by which race acquires its sensibility, its narration as an individual in the linear time of “development” and “progress,” and its orientation within a binary of private and public that determines imaginaries and uses of space.

3 credits. E Barnick.

HTA 261 – ART AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

This course focuses on socially-engaged and relational artworks and initiatives in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa from the 1960s to the present. By studying the development of participatory practices outside of the institutional networks and market structures of the Euro-Atlantic art world, we will examine the shifting boundaries between art and activism, investigate the politics of the art world, and address how activated spectators, collectives and collaborative projects shaped cultural production and social life locally and in a global context.

2 credits. Robin Simpson.

HTA 335 – ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The ‘ancient Near East’ is a term invented by western scholars to refer to a part of western Asia often called the Middle East in the time before the advent of Islam in the seventh century CE. It originates from the efforts of nineteenth century European scholars to discover the places mentioned in the Old Testament, such as the Tower of Babel or Ur of the Chaldees, and as a result it continues to possess a veneer of orientalist fantasy. Yet the ancient Near East some of the earliest evidence for many aspects of human society that we now consider fundamental, such as cities, towns, religion, writing, taxation and monumental architecture. In this course we will explore these aspects through the art, architecture and material culture left behind by the ancient inhabitants of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, from prehistory to the fall of the Sasanian Empire. In doing so we shall address such topics as identity, gender, religion and imperialism through the study of reliefs, seals, coins, architecture, pottery and statuary. In short, we will reconstruct the social history of the ancient Near East through art. This course is designed for students without prior experience in ancient art or archaeology.

2 credits. Henry Colburn.

HUM 358 – STUDIES IN CINEMA: THE COUPLE FORM

What does it mean to inhabit the world as two? The couple—as a form, aspiration, mandate, and obstacle—has occupied writers, artists, filmmakers, and social scientists for centuries. Shaping discursive and institutional frameworks at the level of the body, the household, and the state, the couple continues to be one of the most tenacious, if contested and ever-changing, forms of loving and living. In cinema, the couple has been a central figure for narrative experiments in companionship, complicity, and enmity: the forbidden love in Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (1955); the partners-in-crime in Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967); the neighbor-lovers of a waterlogged Taiwan in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole* (1998); the paranoid, self-isolating lovers in William Friedkin's *Bug* (2006) etc. The course combines weekly film screenings with readings in literature, gender studies, film theory, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. We will identify and analyze the potentialities and limits of the couple form, as well as develop analytical tools needed to understand and elucidate film form.

3 credits. Hicham Awad.

HUM 363 – CARIBBEAN LITERATURE AND SOCIETIES

The Caribbean region is known for lush landscapes, pristine beaches, and iconic bits of culture such as reggae, Rastafarianism, salsa, calypso, and carnival. The beauty of these islands belies serious political and social issues of which visitors are generally unaware. However, the history and cultural practices of the region paint a different picture. In this course, we will examine how the earliest institutionalized and intertwined forms of violence and economics—including genocide of the indigenous population, slavery, the rise of the plantocracy, and the impact of globalization on the economies of the region—and their attendant/resultant forms of cultural production continue to shape present Caribbean life. We will examine the various systems of colonial and imperial power, past and ongoing, and their lasting impact in various ways across the region. Finally, we will consider the idea of the Caribbean as a haven for tourists that depends upon a sanitized representation of the region's history of institutionalized violence and exploitation. We shall conduct our investigations through film, literature, history, sociology, and theory.

3 credits. Tara Menon.

SS 347 – MACROECONOMICS

Macroeconomics is the study of fluctuations in aggregate output, income, unemployment, and inflation. We begin by examining the nature and meaning of economic development, principles of national income accounting and measures of human development. We then proceed to study the history of U.S. macroeconomic performance, with emphasis on the current crisis and its international dimensions. We then turn to competing theories of what drives macroeconomic activity in a capitalist economy. Topics covered include theories of economic growth and income distribution, economic cycles, labor market dynamics, money and finance, foreign exchange rates and the impact of monetary and fiscal policy on the trajectory of the system.

3 credits. Edner Bataille.