

# HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES THE COOPER UNION

## COURSE DESCRIPTION FALL 2024

### CORE CURRICULUM

#### ***HSS 1 – 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. Instructor varies by section.*

#### ***HSS 3 – THE MAKING OF MODERN SOCIETY***

A study of the key political, social and intellectual developments of modern Europe in a global context. This course is organized chronologically, beginning with the Industrial and French Revolutions. Students develop an understanding of the political grammar and material bases of the present day by exploring the social origins of conservatism, liberalism, feminism, imperialism and totalitarianism. In discussions and in lectures students learn to study and to respond critically in written and spoken form to a variety of historical documents and secondary texts.

***Students must register for HSS3 L1 as well as one HSS3 section. HSS3 L1 will take place in the Rose Auditorium.***

*3 credits. Instructor varies by section.*

## HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

#### ***HUM 381 – POST-COLONIAL STUDIES***

TBD.

*3 credits. Victor Peterson II.*

#### ***HUM 387 – THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SOCRATES***

Socrates, the son of a humble stonemason, Sophroniskos, was one of the most remarkable, controversial and influential human beings who ever lived. Though he left behind no written testimonial of his peculiar, singular genius, we know quite a bit about him through the accounts and recollections of his contemporaries, critics and followers, primary among them, Plato, Xenophon and Aristophanes. Based almost exclusively on readings of the major ancient texts, the course focuses less on the philosophy of Socrates, as filtered through the great and not unbiased lens of his most famous student, Plato, than on the man, his physical demeanor, his way of life, his loves, his friendships and especially his trial and death in 399 B.C.E.

*3 credits. Mary Stieber.*

### ***HUM 304 – DANCE AND SOCIETY***

This course will reflect on how a variety of dance practices of the 20th century related to the world they were in. Broadly speaking, the course will revolve around moments of significant social change in American culture in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s, examining how dance and related performance forms embody and engage with these shifts. Students will gain familiarity with how to read dance and performance in relation to the surrounding culture, and will research artists and artistic movements of their choosing for their final projects. This course will take these questions and modes of engaging with dance to reflect on our current world, considering how we might better understand the social dynamics of the present day in light of our understanding and construction of the past.

*3 credits. Buck Wanner.*

### ***HUM 352 – THE PERSONAL ESSAY***

In this course we will study and discuss essays in Philip Lopate, ed., *The Art of the Personal Essay*, and we will also write our own, on any topics we choose, on all manner of subjects--the daily round, pleasures and pains, taking a walk, solitude, friendship, social issues--in short, our personal responses to any number of topics and situations, enlarging ourselves in the process.

*3 credits. Theresa Lin.*

### ***SS 340 – CAUSE AND EFFECT***

Does providing social welfare benefits spoil the poor? Do Nike ads increase their shoe sales? Does having an Amazon Prime membership lead you to buy more from Amazon? Does health insurance improve people's health? Does hiring a new professor improve the academic performance of Cooper students? Does giving aid to poor countries improve their economic performance? We can get data on all these variables and run regressions and come up with answers, but are they the right answers? Probably not. In all these questions, the direction of the causation can go both ways (for instance, with a Prime membership, you are more likely to order from Amazon because it is easier, but also you probably got the Prime membership because you shop online a lot). Also in all these questions, there is a potential that other factors can affect the relationship and in most cases we cannot control for all these factors. Therefore, simply running regressions does not necessarily give us the right answer. This course will help you think about how to answer these cause-and-effect questions. After taking this course, your attitude towards the world will change. You will doubt many claims that are being thrown at you by news reporters and even your professors. The course will teach you to think systematically about various types of cause-effect questions and use various types of datasets to try to answer them. You can apply the skills you learn in this course to questions in economics, psychology, business, politics, and even the sciences.

*3 credits. Loujaina Abdelwahed.*

### ***SS 347 – MACROECONOMICS***

The development of modern macroeconomic theory as it evolves in response to a succession of economic problems and crises. Emphasis on the recent Keynesian/monetarist debates and the role of the Federal Reserve Bank.

*3 credits. Loujaina Abdelwahed.*

### ***SS 384 – ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE OTHER***

This course provides an introduction to concepts in social-cultural anthropology. Students will rethink such concepts as culture, race, ethnicity, nationalism, transnationalism, gentrification, power and memory. We will use these concepts to address the questions of human universals and the origins of cultural differences. At the bases of these inquiries will be the question of the "Other." Who are the "Others" in culture or society?

*3 credits. Joey Russo.*

***SS 345 – UNDERSTANDING CAPITALISM: COMPETITION, CONFLICT, CRISES, AND CHANGE  
(THE RAYMOND G. BROWN MEMORIAL SEMINAR)***

In this course we will explore what capitalism is, how (and in what sense) capitalism works, why (and in what sense) it doesn't work, where and when it works, how it changes over time and how our social/policy actions influence and condition its trajectory and very existence. A key point of contention among students of economic history is the tension between: (1) the changing and varied institutions of the capitalist mode of production over time and across geographic space and; (2) the apparent repetitive patterns identified by economic historians, which suggests that there exist 'economic laws of motion' that are, in some sense, independent of particular policy and specific historical-institutional structures. The long-term repetitive patterns we will study include: unemployment; persistent poverty and inequality both within and across nations; significant wage differentials by race and gender; cyclical patterns of booms and busts (of varying periodicities) as well as severe economic crises affecting the global capitalist world every 40-60 years; degradation of the natural environment. To frame the questions, we are compelled to use a multidisciplinary approach, making extensive use of case studies and examples from history, anthropology, and the other behavioral sciences as well as recent developments in economic theory such as "complexity theory" and nonlinear processes. Students will design research projects based on their areas of interest. The general arc of the course will confront the relationship between social/state policies and successful national development policies—which also includes the profound question of the meaning of 'development'. One fundamental research question might be: if the institutions that comprise the 'Developmental State' have been instrumental in framing, shaping (and sometimes taming) capitalist development – can social/political forces push the system toward economic transformation and technological change that is more tailored to environmental and social justice?

*3 credits. John Sarich.*

***SS 351 – 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY HISTORY:***

***“WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FACISM?”***

This is a transnational history course that seeks to sharpen our thinking about definitions and resonances of fascism; it examines the past and asks how such investigation might help us to act in the present when we confront situations that seem to be, or are quickly termed, “fascist.” Using theoretical and historical sources, we will study the European origins of fascism beginning with the dramatic upheavals of World War I and the interwar years through World War II, the Holocaust, and its aftermath, and then turn our attention to the development of a new global authoritarian populism and right-wing nationalist xenophobic leaders and regimes in the 21st century. We will examine historical roots and current appeal as well as efforts at resistance, in a variety of contexts from Britain, Western and Eastern Europe to Russia, India, the Middle East, and East Asia. All of our work will require close analysis of entangled categories and experiences of race, class, nation, and gender and reference to “current events” in the United States as well as globally.

*3 credits. Atina Grossmann.*

***SS 369 – COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: CONVERSATIONS ON CONSCIOUSNESS AND  
ATTENTION***

What is consciousness? How do we learn? How do we build memories, and recall them when needed? Questions around consciousness and cognition are as old as human language itself, and recent breakthroughs in psychological and neurological methodology and research have given insight into the world of human cognition. This course explores the history of these areas of inquiry and applies critical assessment of current understandings and research around cognition, consciousness, and the human mind.

*3 credits. Andreas Miles-Novelo.*

### ***SS 318 – RETHINKING THE COLD WAR***

Was the Cold War phenomenon the same in Cuba as it was in Korea? Was it the same in Algeria as it was in Vietnam? This seminar goes beyond the narrative of the Cold War as a superpower struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States to explore multiple iterations of the conflict. By approaching key geopolitical developments alongside cultural artifacts of the era (including films, political posters, photography, and poetry), we will interrogate whether it is possible to conceive of just one “Cold War”. We will also examine Cold War legacies by tracing varied invocations of the era since 1989. In addition to a research-based writing assignment, we will develop creative projects that respond to our historical inquiry in real time.

*3 credits. Eilin Pérez.*

## **HISTORY AND THEORY OF ART CORE**

### ***HTA 101 – ART HISTORY: MODERN TO CONTEMPORARY***

This two-semester art history core course, developed as part of the Foundation year for students in the School of Art but open to all students, is organized around a set of themes running through the history of modernity from the 18th century to the present. Within specific themes, significant works, figures and movements in art/design will be presented chronologically. Students will be able to identify and critically evaluate significant works, figures and movements in art/design in the modern period; be able to describe the main social and political contexts for the changes in art/design over the last two hundred years; and engage, in writing and class discussion, with theoretical perspectives on art/design production. The course will involve museum visits. Grading will be based on class participation, papers, and exams.

*3 credits. Lex Lancaster, Stephanie Jeanjean.*

## **HISTORY AND THEORY OF ART ELECTIVES**

### ***HTA 324 – MUSEUM AS FRAME: ART IN NEW YORK***

Through class meetings and museum visits we will investigate the idea of the museum, its history, cultural significance, meaning and societal influence. In particular, we will consider how the museum experience affects the attitudes and assumptions of museum visitors. We will explore the intellectual underpinnings of the modern museum since the Enlightenment, with special attention to issues of nationalism and eurocentrism; the complexities of museum sponsorship (public, private, and corporate), and how they shape cultural presentation; and the emergence, since the 1960s, of community-oriented museums alongside the growing importance in society of multiculturalism and ethnic identity. We will also consider standard art-historical issues of style and society as they relate to the various artworks we see.

*2 credits. Andrew Weinstein.*

### ***HTA 300 – SINGLE ARTIST SEMINAR: LOUISE BOURGEOIS***

This course will examine the life and work of Louise Bourgeois. From the 1930s through 2010, Bourgeois moved between abstraction and figuration across the mediums of painting, drawing, prints, and most prominently, sculpture. Iconic today, the artist was overlooked for most of her career when she worked prodigiously alongside canonical male artists of late modernism to explore themes of identity, trauma, gender, and motherhood. In this class, we will develop skills of visual analysis, attending closely to the artist's form and iconography (famously, the spider and the cell) as well as her process and materials (including bronze, marble, latex, plaster, fabric, and clothing). We will build a historical and methodological toolkit to engage critically with different aspects of her oeuvre, probing the uses of autobiography and psychoanalysis; the architecture of memory; and the poetics of inside and outside. Finally, we will pose the question of legacy and look at the ways her work has been metabolized in contemporary art by artists like Robert Gober and Kiki Smith or Tracey Emin, Leiko Ikemura, Sarah Lucas, Senga Nengudi, and Rachel Whiteread.

*2 credits. Melanie Marino.*

### ***HTA 278 – MODERNISM IN LATIN AMERICA: ABSTRACTION IN MEXICO CITY***

This course traces the development of modern art in Mexico City during the first half of the twentieth century, addressing art produced by both Mexican and foreign artists. Existing literature places an emphasis on muralism and, with it, figuration. Demonstrating that abstraction and alternative modes of visual expression thrived in Mexico City during these decades foregrounds the individual and group endeavors that challenged artistic convention. In this process, we will reassess the expectations of orthodox abstraction, identifying how Mexico City-based artists productively translated and displaced these tenets. Throughout the course, we will deconstruct foundational scholarship that frames discussions of Mexican art and identity, considering disciplinary dynamics that have separated "Mexican art" and "modernism." After mapping the coordinates of major movements and trends in Mexican figuration, we will assess responses to Cubism, Concretism, and Surrealism and examine categorically "Mexican abstraction": the group of ex-Surrealists affiliated with the magazine DYN, independent practitioners, Abstract Expressionists from New York temporarily living in Mexico, and Generación de La Ruptura. Interrelated themes including the citation of pre-Columbian art and cosmologies, the relationship between representation and the indigenous identity, and the polarities of nationalism and modernist universalism will structure our inquiry.

*2 credits. Megan Kincaid.*

### ***HTA 313 – DIGITAL ART HISTORY***

This course analyzes Digital Art History with origins in multiple art fields such as Conceptual art and Fluxus, as well as the fields of cybernetics, computation, and engineering. From conceptual art to artificial intelligence, the course surveys numerous aspects of Digital Art such as innovation in technology throughout the 1950s-present and artists' responses and negotiations to these new technologies. Many exhibitions throughout the 1960s-today reflect this ongoing conversation between art and technology. We will look at not just the theoretical and historical texts, but also a survey of artworks, artists, and exhibitions to better understand how both inform each other. Some fields include net.art, surveillance, bioart, video games, and tactical media. Topics will include feminism, race, and sexuality and we will keep in mind also the male and Western-focused digital art history but also how recent artists challenge these histories. The course asks the following questions: Who gets to participate in these technological innovations? How does technology spark innovation and progress? How is technology fraught with bias that can lead to the oppression of some individuals over others? What is the future of digital technologies and art?

*2 credits. Constanza Salazar.*