

# HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES THE COOPER UNION

## COURSE DESCRIPTION FALL 2023

### 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and in lectures students learn to study and to respond critically in written and spoken form to a variety of historical documents and secondary texts.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. All students enrolled in HSS3 must view the asynchronous HSS3 lecture in advance of their section meeting.***

*3 credits. Instructor varies by section.*

## HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

#### ***HUM 231 – DANCE IN EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS***

The moving body is the fundamental material and main subject of dance; the body is also fundamentally at risk to and a vector of transmissible diseases. In very different eras, two major public health crises - the AIDS epidemic, and the COVID-19 pandemic - have challenged how we relate to our own bodies, and dance has been uniquely situated to address these challenges as it works to conceive and shape the body. Some themes the course will engage include: How did the AIDS crisis cause American society to confront its understanding of sexuality (among other things), and what role did dance play in this confrontation? How has COVID highlighted existing societal inequities along racial and class lines, and how has a cultural practice like dance - that often depends on many people gathering together, and requires many financial resources - both reflected these inequities, as well as offered possibilities for change? Finally, given the ongoing nature of COVID, what can our study of the AIDS crisis teach us about the current moment, in dance and in society? In examining the intersection of dance and these public health crises, this course will consider how sexuality, race, and class converge on the body, and use methods particularly developed by and through dance scholarship to analyze these essential issues with a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach. Finally, we will ask what dance can do as we navigate through the lasting effects of the current pandemic.

*3 credits. Buck Wanner.*

#### ***HUM 324 – THE POLAR IMAGINATION***

This course will explore our fascination with the ends of the earth: the Arctic and the Antarctic. What is the history of our engagement with these regions long thought to be uninhabitable? What's important about the search for the Northwest Passage and the landless "North Pole," first in the age of big ice and now in the era of polar melt? At the other end of the globe, what does the vast and forbidding Antarctic continent have to tell us? What are the polar regions to us now, in times of re-escalating political tensions and rising temperatures? To give shape to these

questions we will look at literary works inspired by the planet's extreme regions (for example, Mary Shelley, Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and other nineteenth-century authors as well as contemporary writers), histories of famous explorations (for example, Shackleton's voyage to Antarctica), and recent scholarship on climate change and polar history. Along the way we will look at questions of conflict between the technologies of developed nations and indigenous peoples' habits of sustainability; the geopolitics of research stations; art activism; documentary filmmaking; polar tourism; and the fate of polar species in an environment whose climate is rapidly shifting. In short, the course is an advanced introduction -- no prerequisites other than the HSS core sequence -- to an interdisciplinary subject that touches upon history, science, technology, politics, literature, and art.

*3 credits. William Germano.*

### ***HUM 327 – THE HISTORY OF THE CINEMA***

The course attends to what historian Antoine de Baecque calls “cinematographic forms of history”. From the 1890s until the present day, how has the moving image evolved as both the product and the author of technological inventions, historical events, national(ist) and international(ist) imaginaries, and aesthetic interventions? The course, structured around screenings and readings in historiography, philosophy, and film theory and criticism traces three main operations across a wide swath of experimental, narrative, and documentary filmmaking: periodization (instant, interval, decade, century); illumination (light and darkness, graphesis, markings); and inscription (word, voice).

*3 credits. Hicham Awad.*

### ***HUM 334 – PLATO’S REPUBLIC***

A seminar devoted entirely to a close reading and critical analysis of Plato’s greatest dialogue, the Republic, and its reverberations down through the ages as a model of political theorizing, if not a template for an ideal society. As we work through the text book by book, we will create our own "Socratic dialogue," that is, a series of problems, questions, deliberations, and considerations that would run parallel to the text, with the ultimate aim of assessing what Plato means, and intends, with this enigmatic work. Comparative material in the form of historical and contemporary (to Socrates and Plato) influences, precedents, and references will be introduced where appropriate. We will then venture briefly into the analogous genre of “utopian” literature which the Republic inadvertently engendered, finishing with the most influential modern critique, that of Popper.

*3 credits. Mary Stieber.*

### ***HUM 356 – ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE: WORLD LITERATURE***

Study of literary topics including particular genres, themes, sensibilities and critical approaches. The focus of this course will change in individual semesters.

*3 credits. Sohnya Sayres.*

### ***HUM 361 – MODERN PHILOSOPHY: KNOWLEDGE AND THE MIND***

The modern period of philosophy in the Anglo-European world, dating from the 17th through the early 20th century, begins with radical investigations into theories of knowledge and the human mind. Epistemological questions—including where ideas come from, how cognition relates to senses and to the body, the basis for truth and scientific understanding of nature, and how we gain self-knowledge and knowledge of others—are established as the foundation of what it means to be “modern” in a normative sense. Posing these foundational inquiries also begins to link social power to human knowledge as opposed to religious authority, and thus to the potential to apply knowledge in reshaping the earth, transforming society, and establishing forms of subjectivity rooted in the power of reason. This course will introduce major philosophical works in this Western philosophical tradition starting from the early modern period through various debates within and revolts against the European Enlightenment. We will focus on texts by philosophers such as René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. Particular focus will also be given to ways of historicizing and countering the dominance of modern epistemology and science in relation to critical, contemporary, and global perspectives.

*3 credits. Matthew Bower.*

### ***HUM 373-L – TRANS AND QUEER IMAGE ETHICS OF THE NEAR PAST***

The photographic image has been a tool for self-determination within interconnected trans / queer grassroots organizing in the so-called United States. This seminar will move beyond the surface of images made since the late 1960s to study strategies that affirm, protect, educate, and build space for one’s imaginations to grow. What do previous models of analog image production and circulation offer our contemporary tools of digitization and social networking? In this seminar course, students will develop a critical analysis of the stakes and responsibilities in trans

and queer image cultures of the near past. To do so, we will engage current dialogues about critical fabulation, limits of representation, and liberationist vs. rights-based movements in the U.S. We will study a set of influential images that are neither comprehensive nor chronological that include protest documentation of prominent leaders like Sylvia Rivera, to headshots of performer Stormé DeLarverie, news clippings, and snapshots. Together we will write descriptions of images. Coursework will also include engaging with and discussing oral histories, literature, non-fiction, music, films, and podcasts to learn about the cultural, social, and political contexts images emerge from.

*3 credits. Ariel Goldberg.*

### ***SS 323 – POLITICS AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY***

The political uses of collective memory can range from defining national and social identities to shaping public opinion. In exploring the interactions between memory and politics, this course will focus on the nature and forms of collective memory, its development and reconstruction and its relationship to structures of authority. Emphasis will be placed on examples from recent political history.

*3 credits. E Barnick.*

### ***SS 334 - MICROECONOMICS***

Microeconomics is primarily the study of the determinants of prices and the distribution of income. The focus is on studying the strategic behavior of individual business firms, workers and consumers in dynamic interaction with the institutions that shape and constrain this behavior, while also being subject to change themselves through legal and political action. We will look at how certain aggregate patterns 'emerge' from the complicated interaction of interests while studying how societies can structure production and distribution systems toward specific goals.

*3 credits. John Sarich.*

### ***SS 340 – CAUSE AND EFFECT***

Every day, we hear news reporters, podcast hosts, TV show hosts, and even professors talking about various issues, and along the way, they make causal claims that do not necessarily make sense. They are simply confusing correlation with causation, a common logical fallacy. Think about the following question: Does getting your master's degree cause you to earn higher income? By how much would those two additional years in school increase your earnings? Most people would say, "Yes, of course." Having a master's degree leads to a higher paying job. You can get data on various individuals, their educational attainments, and their earnings. You can examine the relationship between these two variables. But are you actually measuring the impact of having a master's degree on earnings? There are many other questions that you can try to think about in the same manner – questions related to individual decisions, business decisions, and government policies. In this course, we will learn how to think about these questions in a systematic way. The course will make you think critically about many claims that are being thrown at you by news reporters and even your professors. The course will also teach you how to work with various types of datasets to answer various questions in economics, psychology, business, politics, and sciences. You will learn common ways to summarize and present data and find relationships between different variables.

*3 credits. Loujaina Abdelwahed.*

### ***SS 342 – ANTHROPOLOGY OF RITUAL***

The study of ritual takes us to the heart of anthropological approaches to experience, performance, symbolism and association. Once thought to be "vestigial" organs of archaic societies, rituals are now seen as arenas through which social change may emerge and are recognized to be present in all societies. Throughout the course we will explore varying definitions of ritual and its universal and particular aspects, while surveying ethnographic case studies from around the world.

*3 credits. Caroline Merrifield.*

### ***SS 347 - MACROECONOMICS***

In Macroeconomics, we explore answers to questions related to the performance of the US economy. What is unemployment? How is it related to the living standard? Why is there very high inflation? We examine why the economy experiences good days and bad days and what the government can do to minimize the negative effects of the bad days. We also address other interesting questions like why we have inflation and unemployment, and whether they are actually "bad" things.

*3 credits. Loujaina Abdelwahed.*

### ***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 372 – GLOBAL ISSUES***

This course will examine current issues of global significance and their implications for policy and decision-making. Among the trends we will consider are the tensions between resource competition and authority; the emergence of a global economy; the environment and sustainable development; demographic change; and the emergence of new security issues, including societal and environmental stress.

*3 credits. Edner “Billy” Bataille.*

## **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. Raffaele Bedarida, Lex Lancaster.*

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

### ***HTA 265 – MONEY IN ANTIQUITY***

In this course we shall investigate the ancient world through one of its most fundamental institutions: money. We will learn about different types of ancient money, including coinage, bullion, grain and credit, the various coins used by the Greeks and Romans (as well as other groups, such as ancient Mesopotamians, Persians, Indians and Jews), and about the different methods used to study them. The seminar takes an interdisciplinary approach to major topics in the history of money, including the origins of coinage, monetization, imitations and forgeries, debasement, trade, and the politics of issuing coins. We shall think about economics and social history, as well as the role played by coins in archaeology, and the complex ethical (and legal) issues surrounding the modern practice of coin collecting.

*2 credits. Henry Colburn.*

### ***HTA 270 – THE ART OF GREECE AND ROME***

This course is an introduction to the ancient Greeks and Romans by way of their art. In the ancient world, art (and architecture) always served a purpose. Although we cannot always divine that purpose, its mere existence permits us to use ancient art as a means of exploring the lives, experiences and ideas of the Greeks and Romans. In this course we shall examine the purposes of Greek and Roman art, starting with the Bronze Age and continuing until the reign of Constantine. We will focus on the interplay between purpose and form, and on how we can use objects to ask questions about the past.

*2 credits. Henry Colburn.*

### ***HTA 273 – HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY***

Our study of the history of photography will reckon with technological innovations embedded in the medium. The always changing materiality of image cultures shape our experiences and understanding of photography. We will study photography from the mid-19th century to the present through the social and economic conditions that define the processes of making images with such devices as the camera obscura, to Kodak's Brownie; analogue large format to Polaroid land cameras; 35mm point and shoots to camera phones; body cameras on police to the servers that store their data. Together we will investigate how photography, through these shifting modes of recording and distributing images, collaborates with other mediums and practices such as performance art, political organizing, and poetry.

*2 credits. Ariel Goldberg.*

### ***HTA 278 – MODERNISM IN LATIN AMERICA***

This course examines the emergence and development of Latin American modernisms in their so-called first and second waves. The first one, which unfolded from the 1920s to the 1940s in Brazil, Mexico and Cuba, witnessed the artists' combination of imported European avant-garde tendencies—such as post-impressionism and Cubism—with local motifs to produce an art that could reflect a national identity. The second wave pertains to the post World War II rise of abstract tendencies in South America, specifically, concrete abstraction in Argentina and Brazil, and op and kinetic art in Venezuela. Artistic modernisms in the region will be studied in connection with the political and cultural context in Latin American countries, specifically, the process of nation-state building, the rise of populist ideologies, and the incidence of developmentalism in the Southern Cone during the 1950s and 1960s. We will analyze a range of artists, such as Tarsila do Amaral, Candido Portinari, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Frida Kahlo, Wifredo Lam, Mario Carreño, Pedro Figari, group MADÍ, Lygia Clark, Helio Oiticica, Carlos Cruz-Diez and Jesús Rafael Soto. Topics might include: the strategies of modernity in Latin America, the new concept of “inverted utopia,” the role of the avant-garde group manifestos, the post-colonial, and the meaning of abstraction within a turbulent political milieu. We discuss crucial concepts that define cultural modernism in Latin America – among them, identity, indigenismo, costumbrismo, transculturation, syncretism, hybridization, and race politics.

*2 credits. Melanie Marino.*

### ***HTA 280 – INTERNATIONAL FUTURISM***

Futurism (1909-1944) was the first avant-garde movement to emerge from the peripheries of modernity. Founded by Italian and Egyptian artists, Futurism embraced a problematic ideology. Yet the movement has functioned ever since as a strategic model for several groups of artists fighting against dynamics of exclusion. The first part of the course focuses on Futurism and its international network. The second part discusses more recent artistic movements from Russia, Argentina, Japan, Italy, and the US, which have adopted Futurism's guerrilla-like methods to strike an attack on the hegemonic center.

*2 credits. Raffaele Bedarida.*

### ***HTA 313-I – HISTORY OF VIDEO***

This course is organized chronologically and thematically and intends to define major moments, preoccupations, and opportunities offered by video, as a new medium for visual artists. We will examine the beginning of video art, in the 1960s and early 1970s, with video sculptures and installations, militant and sociological video, as well as within Fluxus and Body Art. In this context we will discuss the use of video in relationship with other media such as painting, performance, television, and cinema. Considering the evolution of video art in contemporary works and artists' films, we will reflect on themes such as self-representation, narration & fiction, immersion and viewer's relationship with the screen. The course will also approach questions relative to the formats and temporalities specific to video, its terminology, its access and institutionalization learning from exhibition and collection histories.

Examples discussed in the course will be found principally in the United States, UK, and France and present a significant number of works by women, as a result of them being pioneers and major contributors to the history of video.

*2 credits. Stephanie Jeanjean.*

### **HTA 313-C1 – HOLOCAUST REPRESENTATION IN ART**

In surveying art about the Holocaust, this course explores the ethical limits of representation in an interdisciplinary framework of history, politics, art history, media studies, psychoanalysis, and Marxist and literary theory. What will emerge is the way that many concerns of Holocaust-related artists have likewise driven so-called mainstream artists since World War II.

*2 credits. Andrew Weinstein.*

### **HTA 313-H1 – THE POLITICS OF CONTEMPORARY ART: 1989-PRESENT**

This course centers on the politics of Contemporary Art from 1989 to the present. With world events including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the revolutions of 1989, the massacre at Tiananmen Square, The Zapatista Rebellion, the end of Apartheid in South Africa, Occupy Movement, post-911, and more recently the #MeToo movement and BLM, artists from around the world have always been at the forefront of leading activist movements. Scientific and technological innovations and climate awareness have led artists to also adopt new techniques of artmaking to engage in the ethical implications of technoscience and our ecological impact in the world. We will analyze artistic strategies including public art, relational aesthetics, activist interventions, tactical media, and new modes of artmaking. We will also ask the following questions: What is the relationship between aesthetics and politics? What are the practical aims and goals of artists? How do local activist interventions impact and spur similar movements across the world?

*2 credits. Constanza Salazar.*

### **HTA 313-J1 – PERFORMANCE ART HISTORY**

This course surveys histories of performance, action, and body art from 1950s to the contemporary moment. We will begin by asking questions of definition and origin: What is “performance art”, when did it first emerge, and what were its artistic precursors? We will consider its relationship to other visual art genres, such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, and photography, as well as to broader categories of performativity. Studying selected artworks from the United States, Europe, Latin America, and East Asia, this class will consider whether a singular history of performance art is possible, or even desirable. The course is divided into multiple thematic sections, moving from questions of ephemerality and documentation to different concepts of the performing body (meat/flesh/object), to various temporalities of performance (fast interventions versus slow durational works), and to ethical questions of exploitation, care, and healing. In class, we will place our emphasis on close-looking, visual analysis, and transcultural comparison. Where possible, the course will involve attending performances in New York City. Grading will be based on class participation, a short analysis paper, and a final research paper. Additionally, students will have the option to engage with the material through their own performance practice.

*2 credits. Flora Brandl.*

### **HTA 313-K1 – INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ART**

This course aims to teach students how to look at, think about, and engage critically with the visual culture of South Asia. Commencing with the Indus Valley Civilization in the 3rd millennium BCE and moving chronologically into the present day, it delves into the aesthetic, historical, religious, and socio-cultural dimensions of the region’s art. Together, we will explore a constellation of interconnected themes, including, but not limited to, representing the body, kingship and courtly culture, the afterlives of objects, the arts of the book, and imperial encounters. The politics and practices of the museums that collect and display South Asian art will also be a point of critical interrogation. For the final project, students will conceptualize their own exhibitions, presenting eight artifacts that offer a broad view of the arts of India. No prior background in South Asian studies is required to enroll in this course.

*2 credits. Tara Kuruvilla.*

### **HTA 343 – EXPANDED CURATORIAL PRACTICE**

The recent “decolonial” and “global” turn in museums and curatorial practice often ignores the fact that art history provides the disciplinary foundation for the museum as a colonial institution. What would it mean to curate against Euro-American narratives of art history? How do you curate artists and exhibition histories that aren’t found in institutional archives? How does curatorial practice offer alternate art historical evidence? This course thinks

through such questions by engaging with theories and activist practices of decolonization, postcolonial theory, Black studies and Asian studies to move towards other epistemologies and methods of curatorial practice. It will foreground minoritized artists and transnational exhibition histories across Western Europe and North America, and the global South, while considering alternate epistemologies, aesthetics and collections beyond the hold of both art history and the museum. We will study texts, artists, artifacts, art objects, embodied practices, museum collections, exhibition histories, and modes of display and their relationship to questions of history, temporality, translation, untranslatability, spectatorship, provenance, stewardship and the life of objects.

*2 credits. Leila Anne Harris.*