

**HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
THE COOPER UNION**

**COURSE DESCRIPTIONS  
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and in lectures students learn to study and to respond critically in written and spoken form to a variety of historical documents and secondary texts.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 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***

We will examine a variety of contemporary personal essays as well as their stylistic antecedents in order to trace how the form has evolved depending on the needs of the writer and the times. Some of these writers include: Seneca, Kenko, Junichiro Tanizaki, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin, Joan Didion, Richard Rodriguez, and Annie Dillard. Students will receive weekly prompts influenced by these readings and be encouraged to experiment with elements of craft, voice, and structure in their own writing on whatever topics they choose.

*3 credits. Theresa Lin.*

### ***HUM 358 – STUDIES IN CINEMA: MONTAGE FORBIDDEN, MONTAGE OBLIGATORY***

How and to what ends do filmmakers sequence images and sounds? Creating associations, suggestions, clashes, and arguments, montage is a process of assembly that has animated the moving image since its inception. The course, which will examine theories and practices of montage in cinema, will also look to diverse literary and artistic forms of construction and deconstruction such as the cut-up method, exquisite corpse, sampling, and collage. Throughout the course, which combines readings, film screenings, and listening sessions, students will produce short writing assignments as well as a final project that consists of an audiovisual montage of their own creation.

*3 credits. Hicham Awad.*

### ***HUM 373-O – ABOLITIONIST FUTURES***

Colloquially, the word abolition is associated with destroying, dismantling, or putting an end to something—most notably the institutions of slavery and prison. However, contemporary prison abolitionists frequently underscore that their object is not to abolish prisons, but to abolish the conditions under which prisons became the solution to problems. What are these problems and how do we abolish the conditions under which they are generated and the conviction that punishment should serve as their solution? We can't answer this question simply by imagining an end to slavery, to prisons—we have to imagine what new worlds and new relations will need to be built in their place so that we can begin to understand the root of the problems they have been invented to solve. These new worlds are abolitionist futures. In this course we will examine abolitionist futurity as a collection of concrete experiments made to transform the conditions in which abolitionists live—experiments that destabilize social hierarchies, gender and sexual norms, reimagine work, communal life, scarcity and abundance, and creatively address the impact of trauma and harm on community and self. We will read works by and about maroon communities and 19th century abolitionists, and texts by contemporary scholars and practitioners working within transformative justice and prison abolition movements—our goal: to learn concrete skills from our peers and forebears that we can put to use inside and outside of the classroom in order to begin to live together differently. Some authors we will study with include Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cedric Robinson, Jayna Brown, Angela Y. Davis, Katherine McKittrick, Saidiya Hartman, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Dean Spade, M.E. O'Brien, Mariame Kaba, Adrienne Maree Brown, Robin Maynard, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.

*3 credits. E Barnick.*

### ***HUM 373-P – PHILOSOPHY OF RACE***

In this course we will explore, discuss and critique the explosive idea of “race,” especially dwelling on the philosophical question whether race is a reality.

Modern science teaches us that race is, in fact, unreal, in a very meaningful sense. Thanks to biology, anthropology, history, sociology, and today's common-sense observations, talk of natural racial or ethnic groupings is currently predominantly known to be a falsehood, the source of the continuation of regressive harmful stereotypes of peoples and a malignant misrepresentation of reality that has somehow survived the nineteenth century. Perhaps this zombie theory should be stamped out completely as soon as possible?

Or, on the contrary, does the very latest life-science research challenge common belief and tell us that different human races are in fact real? Is ‘political correctness’ the only thing keeping us from acknowledging real, natural

differences among ancestrally distinct groups, including even socially consequential psychological or behavioral differences?

Or, in a third scenario, is the idea of scientifically distinct natural races wrong, but are races nevertheless real in that they are political realities? Are races sociopolitical phenomena that are real enough to limit many human beings' life prospects, or even to get people killed, even though there is no such thing as biological race?

Or, finally, could all three of these alternatives be wrong? Maybe these are all bad answers to a bad question. Could it be a mistake at the start to worry about the reality of race and either to deny it or affirm it? Is there any useful way to think about "race," or anything else, without investigation of what is real and what is illusory?

We will approach these questions and topics from historical, phenomenological, pragmatic as well as logico-semantic frames of reference.

We will discuss historical and contemporary texts that carry on this debate.

*3 credits. Damion Kareem Scott.*

### ***HUM 374 – CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND CRITIQUE: BIG IDEAS OF THE LAST 20 YEARS***

The last twenty years, through the power of the net and big data, have provoked some truly strong, if not paradigm shifting, ways to think about human culture. "Humankind's" most ancient history is being radically rewritten; human welfare and happiness discourses are now being shaped by global voices; cellphones have changed literacy rates along with expanding human agency; theories about consciousness are being rapidly passed from experiment to economics. Critics are shrugging off the caution taught by deconstruction to write carefully circumspect books avoiding big thought to big books about it all. Our approach in this course will be humanistic, in that we will be reading from some of these new "big books" to learn about these new claims and to critically reflect on their authors' way of thinking.

*3 credits. Sohnya Sayres.*

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

This course engages with the legacy of colonialism in literature and theory. Topics include the relationship between colonizer and colonized, independence, apartheid, and socio-cultural movements from the contexts of South Asia, the Caribbean, the Americas, and Africa. We will explore the works of writers and theorists like Sylvia Wynter, Aimé Césaire, Silvia Cusicanqui, Walter Dignolo and Aníbal Quijano, Edward Said, Ella Shohat, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Gayatri Gopinath.

*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.*

### ***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.*

### ***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 Abdelvabed.*

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

#### **“WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FASCISM?”**

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 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.*

## **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 221 – THE BUDDHIST IDOL***

This course surveys the history of Buddhist art, from the earliest representations of the Buddha to the curatorial practices of modern museums. Ranging from the great stupa at Sanchi to the Eguchi Theme in Ukiyo-e prints, we will undertake an exploration of the intricate interplay between Buddhist theology, religious practices, and cultural, temporal, and geographical factors, discerning how these elements collectively engendered the extraordinary multifaceted artistic spectrum observed within the realm of Buddhist art. Throughout these inquiries, we will delve into diverse art forms, encompassing sculptures, paintings, architecture, textiles, and more, with a particular focus on the interplay between these mediums. By adopting this approach, we will gain insights into how different artistic media were interwoven in the creation and dissemination of Buddhist art. The course will prioritize the use of academic articles and chapters from a diverse range of sources over a traditional textbook in order to foster critical thinking and engage with up-to-date research. This approach is aimed at encouraging students to explore various, and at times conflicting, perspectives, enabling them to develop a more comprehensive understanding and empowering them to craft their own informed and original viewpoints.

*2 credits. Fosca Maddaloni.*

### ***HTA 240 – ASIAN AMERICAN ART***

Asian Americans come from vastly diverse paths of migration, socioeconomic conditions, political histories, and cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, the term “Asian American art” remains contested and open-ended. In this course, we will examine how artistic productions by Asian Americans during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have articulated varying ideas of identity, race, politics, community, and art, while continuing to question whether “Asian American art” can mean something more than art produced by bodies racialized as Asian. We will consider how various sociopolitical and discursive forces have historically shaped (and continue to shape) Asian Americans as a race, and carefully attend to the complexity of Asian American experiences and responses that have informed their artmaking. Beyond the focus on art and artists, we will also discuss how curating Asian American art has helped mold and animate the field. The course will address themes such as: Chinatown and the invention of place, immigration, citizenship, and identity, in/visibility and transparency/opacity, tradition and (self-)orientalism, art and activism from *Gidra*, *Godzilla* to *Stop AAPI Hate*, interraciality and globality, and theories of “yellow women” and “racist love” among others.

*2 credits. Chaeun Lee.*

### ***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 283 – THE GLOBAL BAROQUE***

While the study of Baroque art has traditionally been Eurocentric, scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of studying the movement within a global context. This course provides an introduction to Baroque art and architecture from ca. 1600 to 1750 in both Europe and across the world; emphasizing the movement of ideas, images, arts and goods, it underscores the international, dynamic, and hybrid nature of the movement.

Starting with an introduction to the key artists, imagery and styles in Europe, the course explores the diffusion and development of the Baroque in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. This course also examines the political, social, and economic ramifications of this exchange and how these Early Modern networks of trade formed the foundation of our current global economy. Featuring a wide range of media—including painting, architecture, print, sculpture, textile, and decorative arts—this course will highlight the diverse nature of the global Baroque, while focusing on the contributions of native artists and the incorporation of local cultures into regional Baroque styles.

*2 credits. Jamie Kwan.*

### ***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 305 – PERFORMATIVITY***

Performativity alludes to the mark and change that any utterance or act effects. In that sense, this course takes interest in questions of impact and imprint to address situated events, actions, items, or behaviors. We will build on linguistic theories of performativity that tell us that words do things in the world to discuss modes of performance art which do things in the world. Are there any limits to performativity? We will delve into the relation between performance and performativity distinguishing between "as" and "is." For that purpose, we will study key texts and

performances within the field of performance studies—from speech acts to accounts of gender, race, and sexuality—in an effort to emphasize the interplay between art and critical theory. Some of our topics will revolve around force and meaning; reiteration and citation; drama and picture; identification and counteridentification. Students will have the possibility of exploring their own performance practice in a final project.

*2 credits. Blanca Ulloa.*

### ***HTA 313-G1 – 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.*

### ***HTA 313-O1 – TOPICS IN AND AROUND COLOR AND THE VISUAL ARTS***

Color is both a material and a sensorial phenomenon; it is embedded in the scientific, philosophical, economic, and technological conditions of contemporary life. Rather than provide a comprehensive analysis of the history of color, this course approaches issues of color through a range of historical moments in fine art and visual culture from the long nineteenth century into the present. Each week the class will explore a particular issue or question related to color: from the ordering of color in color wheels and charts, to the production of colorants using extractive colonial labor, as well as the racial and gendered biases of color and its technological reproduction in contemporary photography, film and digital media. Through focused discussions in class and in-person visits to galleries and museums, the course will highlight limit conditions and provide openings to question our own conceptions of the stability of our material and perceptual world.

*2 credits. Rachel Hutcheson.*

### ***HTA 314 – EXCHANGE ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS***

The course focuses on the cultural and political geography of artistic production across national boundaries in art history from the mid-20th century to the age of globalization. We will engage with artworks and exhibitions as vehicles of cross-cultural exchange and transnational dialogue galvanized by immigrant artists who created strong shifts in modern artistic identities. The course focuses on the hybridity and mobility of art and explores why and how images and objects travel, raising questions about the transformative effect of these processes on both ends of the dialogue.

*2 credits. Eli S. Zadeh.*

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

Since the early 2000s, much critical attention and training has been granted to curation. In our course, we will focus on the public life of curatorial practices. We'll investigate the role of cultural workers responsible for working in the aftereffects of curatorial decisions by expanding their propositions, and anticipating and dialoguing with the public. Visiting exhibitions, and attending events, performances, screenings, etc., we will examine the different ways curatorial and artistic practices are opened up to the public. In our assignments and class activities, we will adopt the role of public programmers and educators by writing our own interpretive and pedagogical material; taking turns leading guided tours and commentary; and developing speculative programs. This work will be supported by readings on exhibition histories, artistic and cultural labour, address and hospitality, and art-informed pedagogy. Students will have an opportunity to help shape our itinerary and readings. Throughout we will reflect on the act of mediation—alternately defined as intervention, resolution, conveyance, or connection—as distinct from curation, and develop imaginative and inclusive strategies to engage and put curatorial practices to work.

*2 credits. Robin Simpson.*