

**FACS 2900.06**  
**Arts, Societies, Histories**  
**F/W 2000**

**[www.yorku.ca/academics/cfisher/2900](http://www.yorku.ca/academics/cfisher/2900)**

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Office Hours: Thursday 3-5 (F), Friday 3-5 (W) and by appointment

Course meets: Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 a.m. 170 South Ross

*Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that reason historical. It became historically posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.*

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history, XVII A," in  
*Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 263.

Calendar Description:

Focusing on the European tradition, this course looks at the arts within the context of the societies and cultures which produced them. It begins by examining various definitions proposed by cultural studies of 'history', 'culture', and 'society'. While introductory surveys are often taught with the assumption that the history of art is the history of art is one story, and the narrative of its development has something to do with progress and the achievement of 'naturalism', this course will challenge this assumption by arguing that there is no one history of art, that histories of art need not follow an evolutionary model, that art is a form of cultural communication rather than perceptual imitation -- one that involves a broad spectrum of cultural values. We will consider such issues as the use of artworks as historical documents; connections between "high art" and popular culture; and the relationship between artist, viewer, artistic tradition, and society.

GOALS. This course will:

- encourage understanding of a cultural studies approach to the study of Western art, histories and societies - promote critical reading skills and skills in analysis, synthesis, and the construction of an argument
- foster increased computer literacy, cultural knowledge, and self- reflection
- emphasize written and oral presentation of ideas and arguments;
- promote self-reflection and group-work.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Ioan Davies, *Comparative Aesthetics* (website). Available online through main class website.
2. Additional online readings available on our class website.
3. Art Spiegelman *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
4. Course packet of print materials -- required in October.
5. Text for Group Studies Project (see below)

**Suggested, but not required:**

- 6. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin, 1972.
- 7. *Thinking it Through: A Practical Guide to Academic Essay Writing*. Academic Skills Centre, Trent University, 1989.
- 8. Library research roadmap. A self-guided tutorial to doing bibliographic research, for undergraduate students in the social sciences and humanities. <<http://info.library.yorku.ca/guides/roadmap/>>

**As noted above, many compulsory readings for this course are available only through the website.** In addition to readings, copies of all assignment handouts, review sheets and some lecture notes will be made available to you on-line. The website will also connect you to style guides, tips on essay writing, administrative and academic resources and community events.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Group Studies project	15%	see lecture schedule
Reading strategies sheet	10%	oct 18
In-class First term test	15%	Nov 29
Major project:	20%	March 7
Exam preparation (work with Partner)	5%	March 28
In-class Final exam:	20%	April 4
Tutorial/webct participation	15%	ongoing

GROUND RULES

This syllabus lays out deadlines for assignments clearly, and the group presentation allows you to choose your deadline. If any of these dates pose a problem for you, please consult me well in advance to negotiate a different due date. Exceptions can be made for reasons of domestic affliction or illness, with proper documentation; otherwise, work must be turned in on time.

A note on participation: being part of an intellectual community means attending class regularly and punctually, reading thoughtfully in advance and involving yourself in class discussions in a way that enables you and other students to learn.

Lastly, I encourage you to contact me whenever you are having trouble with your work for this course or would like to bounce your ideas off me. I am in my office regularly on Thursday afternoons in the Fall term and on Friday afternoon in the Winter term, but I realize that since you all lead busy lives, these times may not work for you. I am available at other times, too. The best way to ensure that I'll be around is to set up an appointment in advance. I teach immediately following this class so it is best to telephone or email me to work out something that suits both our schedules.

**Computer Assisted Writing Centre** <<http://www.yorku.ca/cawc/>>

Our class has been registered with the Computer Assisted Writing Centre, located in the Scott Library, rm 530. Because so much of our class material is online, it is important that everyone have access to basic instruction. Being a part of the centre means that you will be able to get hands on computing instruction, from basics to critical skills to web page design (see schedule) -- you will also be able to drop in during library hours to work on the computers, or sign up for additional workshops, if you like. Students must have an account for the CAWC's "Laurence" Netware server. This account is activated through MAYA,

York's central computer account management system. Please do this as soon as possible! If you enrolled late and LAURENCE does not appear as an available account in MAYA, you must obtain a signed letter of permission from me and take it along with student identification to the advisor on duty at 530 Scott Library or 109 Vanier. No accounts will be activated without the signed permission form and I.D. (YorkCard, or sessional card plus photo I.D.). **Tutorial sessions at the centre are mandatory. If you feel you already have the computing skills necessary, or if you otherwise feel the scheduled workshop sessions do not meet your needs, you must come to see me to be formally excused from the session.**

***webct*** (part of your 15% participation grade)

All students must register with webct. You will have an opportunity to do this during our first session at the Centre for Computer Assisted Writing (or on your own with MAYA). You can access webct for this class via the main course webpage. Essentially, webct operates like a security-protected webspace, just for our class. In addition to finding readings available only to the York community, webct will be used to circulate announcements, house discussion boards and host an informal chat space. The main reason I've signed up our class for webct is to foster a sense of the intellectual community we are building here. I expect you to use webct as a space to ask questions about the lecture or assigned reading, cite a passage you found particularly challenging/intriguing (and state why you found it so); identify a larger topic or question that you think connects different texts; offer a critique of one or more of the pieces, give assistance and share information, advice and resources. Responses can be as long or as short as you think appropriate, but everyone must contribute at least once every second week. You will be shown how to use webct during a mandatory session at the Computer Assisted Writing Centre September 27th.

### **Group Studies Project 15%**

You will be part of a discussion group that will be responsible for a group presentation. The group will prepare and present a 30-minute in-class presentation/performance based on your group's interpretation of one of a number of texts chosen for this purpose. Your 30-minute time limit must include any discussion you hope to generate - practice your presentation before you give it.

The presentation may be dramatic, artistic, conventional ... whatever the group chooses, but you'll need to situate your reading of the text within the concerns of this course -- what can your text urge us to think about arts? histories? societies? Your presentation should aim to be both descriptive and analytical, and you are encouraged to be creative. Each member of the group must participate in both the preparation and the presentation. Your goal is not only to prepare your presentation/performance but to create a cooperative group process. (You will have some time in class for preparation but you will need to arrange to meet outside of class with your group. Do take advantage of email, or webct.)

You will be required to supply a written evaluation of your group project - one or two pages - due one week after your presentation. This is an opportunity for you to comment on the assignment and the distribution of labour in your group.

### **Texts and due dates:**

Corigliano, *The Ghosts of Versailles: A Grand Opera Buffa in two Acts* (October 18)

Guerrilla Girls. *The Guerrilla Girls' Companion to the History of Western Art* (Nov 15)

Andre Breton , *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Jan 17)

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (Jan 31)

Samuel Delany *Dahlgren* (Feb 21)

Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (March 14)

**First term reading strategies assignment 15%:** a short assignment designed to promote critical reading skills. Full details provided in class and on the website.

### **Major project 20%**

This will be either a formal essay or an equally rigorous project with a strong written component (for example, a website) chosen in consultation with the instructor. Due March 2. Further details will be provided in class.

### **Exam preparation 5%**

Before the final exam, you will be required to work with a partner to design two possible exam questions and to supply answers to your questions. Both partners will receive the same grade, so care should be taken to divide the work evenly. Questions will be circulated on the listserv during the final week.

### **Academic Honesty:**

York Students are subject to policies regarding academic honesty as set out by the Senate of York University and by the Faculty of Fine Arts. Please read the *Senate Policy on Academic Honesty* in the 'University Policies and Regulations' section of the Undergraduate Programmes Calendar.

### **LECTURE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)**

#### **Sept 13 Introductions**

Course outline and design: What is a cultural studies approach to Western Arts, Histories and Societies?  
Assignments and expectations

***Academies, Museums and Canons of Art -- "who decides which artists and works of art will be more highly valued than others?"***

#### **Sept 20: Western Aesthetics as Narrative**

required reading: Davies, Comparative aesthetics - Read sections 1 "The Problem" , 2 "Western Aesthetics as Narrative". Feel free to explore this site. (Online, link from our course webpage)  
film excerpts: *Art of the Western World Series: the Classical Ideal* ('Traces the origins of humanism and much of Western art to ancient Greece') and *Art in an Age of Mass Culture* ('Themes of the exhibition "High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture" at the Museum of Modern Art New York.')

Web resource: high/low: PopCultures

#### **Sept 27 -- Believing is Seeing**

required reading: Davies, section 3 "Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Aesthetics"

Mieke Bal “Seeing Signs: The Use of Semiotics for the Understanding of Visual Art” (kit)

Film: Ways of Seeing

Supplemental: John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC/Penguin Books, 1972.

**Tutorials: Introduction to webct (and to the Centre) -- Computer Assisted Writing Centre, 531 Scott Library. You will be assigned one of 2 sessions 9:30-10:30 or 10:30-11:30**

### **October 4 Orders and Institutions**

required reading: Elgin Marbles [Art and Its Histories: 17-34 (kit)]

web resource: BRITISH MUSEUM homepage

supplemental : Mieke Bal-- Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis. New York: Routledge, 1996.

## **Cultures of Display**

### **October 11**

required reading: Davies, section 4 “The Architectonics of Art”

Andre Malraux (1947) “Museum Without Walls” [Art and Its Histories 302-313]

Emma Barker “Introduction: The Changing Museum” (kit)

collecting: s m i t h s o n i a n w i t h o u t w a l l s

film: **Cannibal Tours** ‘Dennis O'Rourke Depicts the interaction between tourists on a luxury cruise in the South Pacific and the aboriginal people of Papua New Guinea. Examines western culture's fascination with the exotic.’

supplemental: Deborah Root *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996.

### **October 18 high/low**

required reading: Emma Barker Exhibiting the Canon: The Blockbuster show (kit)

Hunters and Gatherers ‘Collectors talk about their obsessions, ranging from wind-up toys, through Donald Duck items, Titanic memorabilia, Betty Boop items, to barbed wire and bread tags.’

Web resource: Collectibles and Nostalgia Search Engine

**Group Presentation:** Corigliano and Hoffman, *The Ghosts of Versailles: A Grand Opera Buffa in two Acts*

**reading strategies sheet due** (the group presenting this week may hand in their papers October 25th.)

**Tutorials: Critical Skills for Internet Research -- Computer Assisted Writing Centre, 531 Scott Library. You will be assigned one of 2 sessions 9:30-10:30 or 10:30-11:30**

### **October 25**

required reading: Davies section 5: Art's Body

Fionna Barber “Caillebot, Masculinity and the Bourgeois Gaze” (kit)

film: Folk Art Found Me. ‘Folk artists from Nova Scotia describe their work’

### **November 1**

required reading: Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker ‘Am I Authentic? Excerpt from *Dreamings. Tjurrpa:*

*Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert* (kit)

Rasheed Araeen "The Artist as Postcolonial Subject and this Individual's Journey Towards 'The Centre'" (kit)

Film: Australian Art fest

Suggested: Clifford, James, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1997

***Changing Status of the Artist*** the construction and deconstruction of social, sexual and national identities

### **November 8**

required reading: My Body a Wunderkammer (web)

film: **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SARA BAARTMAN: THE HOTTENTOT VENUS**

'A Khoi Khoi woman was taken from South Africa in 1810 and exhibited across Britain. A court battle waged by abolitionists to free her from her exhibitors failed. In 1814, a year before her death, she was taken to France and became the object of scientific research that formed the bedrock of European ideas about black female sexuality.'

### **November 15 Genius**

Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" (kit), Catherine King "Portrait of the Artist as a Woman" (kit)

film: RECLAIMING THE BODY: FEMINIST ART IN AMERICA 'Taking as starting point the exhibition "Bad Girls" at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, critics and artists discuss the differences between woman artists of the 1990's and their immediate predecessors.'

web resource: Through Women's Eyes -- New York Times

**Group presentation:** Guerrilla Girls. *The Guerrilla Girls Companion to the History of Western Art*

### **November 22 Class**

required reading: Horsfall "Art in Large Towns: In What Ways can the Influence of Art be Brought to Bear on the masses of the Population in Large Towns (1882) [Art and its Histories, 69-72]

Lynda Nead "Class and Sexuality in Victorian Art" (kit)

Dorothy Allison "A question of Class" (kit)

**Tutorials: Basic Dreamweaver -- Computer Assisted Writing Centre, 531 Scott Library. You will be assigned one of 2 sessions 9:30-10:30 or 10:30-11:30**

**November 29** In-class test.

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**Last day of classes for the fall term is December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Happy Holidays!**

December exam period for undergraduates Dec 6-21st. There will be no formal exam held in this period for this course.

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### **January 3 Sexualities**

Whitney Davis "Homosexuality," gay and Lesbian Studies, and Queer Theory in Art History" (kit)

website: Kiss and Tell - Lesbian photography on the west coast 1972-1997

Lizard Jones

Supplemental: Emmanuel Cooper *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the last 100 years in the West* New York: Routledge, 1986. Kiss and Tell *Her Tongue on My Theory*, Vancouver: Press Gang, 1993.

**Tutorials: Intermediate Dreamweaver -- Computer Assisted Writing Centre, 531 Scott Library. You will be assigned one of 2 sessions 9:30-10:30 or 10:30-11:30**

## Challenge of the Avant Garde

### January 10

Art and its Histories Greenberg "Avant Garde and Kitch (1939) [art and its histories 211-221]

Required Reading: Paul Wood "Introduction: The Avant Garde and Modernism" (kit)

"The Point is to Change it: The Avant Garde in the early Twentieth Century" (kit)

reading: Gill Perry The Parisian avant-garde and 'feminine' art in the early twentieth century (kit)

required web resource: Carole Maso 'Rupture, verge, and precipice: precipice, verge, and hurt not' (poem)

### January 17

Paul Wood "The Revolutionary Avant Gardes: Dada, Constructivism and Surrealism" (kit)

**Group Presentation:** Andre Breton , *Manifestoes of Surrealism*

**Tutorials: Writing Strategies with Microsoft Word -- Computer Assisted Writing Centre, 531 Scott Library. You will be assigned one of 2 sessions 9:30-10:30 or 10:30-11:30**

### January 24

Jean-Louis Comoli "Machines of the Visible" (kit)

Barber: "Art History's Significant Other ... Film Studies" (kit)

Teshome H. Gabriel "Thoughts on Nomadic Aesthetics and the Black Independent Cinema: traces of a Journey" (kit)

web resources: Complete History of The Discovery of Cinematography

Muybridge Chronophotographical Projections

## S p a c e s

### January 31 architecture

Vidler "Interpreting the Void: Architecture and Spatial Anxiety"

Christy Anderson "Masculinity and English Architectural Classicism" (kit)

**Group presentation:** Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

### February 7

Space and the City

Required reading:

Harvey "The Urban Experience" [kit]

Tim Benton "Exhibiting Modernity: the 1889 Universal Exhibition and the Eiffel Tower" (kit): web

resource: Great Buildings Online

suggested reading: Rochelle Ziskin, *The Place Vendôme: Architecture and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Paris* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

**Tutorials: In-class lab time to work on final projects -- Computer Assisted Writing Centre, 531 Scott Library. You will be assigned one of 2 sessions 9:30-10:30 or 10:30-11:30**

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**\*N.B. Last day to drop full year courses is February 9th.**

**February 14 -- READING WEEK. No classes.**

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### **February 21**

*“Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one”*

required reading: Walter Benjamin “These from the Philosophy” (on the Angel of History -- short! kit)

film: *Last Angel on History*. ‘Explores the relationships between Pan-African culture, science fiction, intergalactic travel, and computer technology, in black music, in the writings of black science fiction writers, and in the works of black cultural critics.’

Web resource: Archives of African American Music and Culture Mission

**Group presentation:** Samuel Delany *Dahlgren*

### **February 28 Revisiting High/Low: Graphic novels**

required reading: MAUS

film: **Architecture of Doom** ‘Rise of the Nazi party in Germany from the perspective of Hitler's use of arts in Nazi policy and propaganda’.

Supplemental: Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics*

### **March 7:**

Peter Wollen “Modern Times: Cinema/Americanism/The Robot” (kit)

film: *Metropolis*

**Major Project Due.**

March 14 1950 and 60s

Wollen “Notes From the Underground: Andy Warhol” (kit)

film: **The Age of Anxiety** ‘American art reflects the upheavals of the last 25 years’

web resource: nostalgia: Welcome to RETRO

**Group presentation:** Toni Morrison, *Jazz*

March 21

Nichols “The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems” (kit)

Benjamin: The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (kit)

March 28

Collecting the Present: From Dematerialized Art Objects to Digital Culture - Brian Goldfarb

Wollen “Into the Future: Tourism, Language and Art” (kit)

**Exam Preparation assignment due.**

April 4 In-class final test.

end of classes.

Undergraduate exam period April 11-30.

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