

HNRS 125

Seminar 1: The Arts in New York City

PLAS Category: Appreciating and Participating in the Arts (AP)

The Arts in New York City acquaints students with specific modes of creative expression in the performing and the fine arts through reading, discussion and the opportunity afforded by the Arts Pass for students to attend theatrical, operatic, and musical performances, exhibitions of visual art, and other highlights of the current cultural season. Students will write frequently about these and other examples of the visual, performing, and dramatic arts, thus developing their analytic and communication skills, their understanding of the social, historical, and aesthetic content of the cultural work being performed and exhibited, and an awareness of the relations among these art forms. The critical tools students develop through their course work will also enable them to evaluate their own experience of the arts and of artistic creation.

Seminar 1 Professor Feiner
2nd Part Syllabus Information

Office: Rathaus 212 Ext. 73091 Main Office: 73090 harry.feiner@qc.cuny.edu
Office hours: Wed. 11:30-12:45 or by appointment. (Please try to notify me if you intend to stop in.)
Tech Fellow: Lauren Klein lklein@gc.cuny.edu

Class Rules

1. Please be on time. Class will start at exactly 1:40.
2. Switch off cell phones or beepers before class. If you believe you have a valid reason for having them on during class, see me before class.
3. No eating or drinking during class.
4. It is rude to talk between one another in class. It is disruptive, distracting the attention of the teacher and your peers. Anything said in class should be said to everyone.
5. Attendance is crucial (which should be obvious). Preparedness and class participation will be factored into your grades. (Merely attending class is not adequate. It is very obvious when you are doing your email, or other things while in class. Being 'present' applies to both the physical and mental.)
6. It is inappropriate to miss an event, regardless of the fact that they are scheduled outside of class-time. Each event will have a written component.
7. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade. Any incidence of plagiarism will be referred to the V. Pres. of Student Affairs and subject to the general college regulations.

Assignments

The CHC Handbook states the learning objectives of this class as follows:

1. Demonstrate... understanding of the interrelation of the arts, and of the arts with culture, through research and writing ... and ... cultural/historical context.
2. Utilize appropriate evaluative/critical discourse to analyze ... experience of the arts, including of artistic creation.

Objective #1 will be addressed primarily through the essays written on events we attend and reading assignments through the semester.

Objective #2 will be addressed through the final project.

There will be required writing for each event or piece studied. These will take two forms, mini-essays, (of approximately 1/2-3/4 of a page on a specific topic), term or concept, and 2-3 page essays exploring a theme. Unless otherwise specified the essays should follow the general guide-lines of double spacing, 12 point 'Times New Roman' font, margins of 1.5" and header and footer of 0.5". The length is a suggested parameter. You may be able to answer the question well with less or may feel you need or want to do more. The important thing is to answer satisfactorily, with enough information, but no extraneous 'talk'. (See "Some notes on your essays" below.)

The mini-essays will be graded primarily on how well you have understood the particular term or concept, and how well you have communicated its definition. On the longer essays you will be expected to demonstrate your understanding of what you have seen and how it relates to discussions from class. You will be expected to demonstrate both analytical and synthetic skill in expressing a theme and point-of-view, as guided by the formulation of the specific question. Your answer cannot be arbitrary, but must reasonably adhere to the gist of the question. Style and usage are considered in any written assignment. Examples will be cited, and there will be class-time spent on the expectations of the written assignments.

MID-TERM: Papers M-1, M-2 and P-4 are due 9 Nov.
Papers M-6, M-7 and P-9 are due 29 November.
Papers P-8 & M-10 are due 13 December.
All others are due on the exam day (15th week meeting).

Theatre

For theatre essays, we will write an essay for each topic below. ('M' denotes a Mini-essay; 'P' is a fuller exercise.) Papers will cover the following topics.

M-1. Analysis of a critical term in regards to the play's structure. Use terms discussed in class, on the list posted on Blackboard. [Use for *OEDIPUS*.]

M-2. How is *exposition*, or *back-story*, used in *ARMS and the MAN*.

P-3. Compare a play with another, noting its parallels and differences. [*WAITING for GODOT* and *MOTHER COURAGE*.]

P-4. Comparison of the plays characters and discussion of character. (Again, always make sure you use terms discussed in class to demonstrate your command of those terms.) [Use for Irwin and Hector in *The HISTORY BOYS*.]

M-5. Social and political analysis; the play as a microcosm of social history. Explain the importance of one cultural or social aspect of the conventions portrayed on stage. [Use for...]

M-6. Discuss one visual aspect (including costume, lighting, scenic design or staging). [Use for *AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'*.]

N.B. There are 5 'Theatre' essays in all. (3 'mini', 2 'full'.)

Dance

M-7. Using the readings on 'Dance', choose one term and discuss how it was exhibited (or not) at the performance of....

P-8. Describe the quality of the movement patterns, articulation of body shapes, and relation of the dancers to one another in regard to the 'idea' or conception of..... How do the visual aspects contribute to that idea?

Opera

P-9. Describe the differences and similarities between a piece of music-theatre and a straight play (a play without music).

Art

M-10. Choose a painting and discuss its composition in regard to one of the compositional terms we have discussed. Make your choice from a museum visit. This 1st visit (which should be between 17 Nov. and 29 Nov.) should be to the Met. Choose a traditional 'Illusionistic' work that can easily illustrate the ideas we discussed in class about traditional approaches to form and space. Make sure you acquire a good-quality color image to attach to your paper.

P-11. Choose a painting and discuss it from the point of view of visual imagery and in terms of its social, political and historical context. Visit the Modern for this project. Again, make sure you acquire a good-quality color image to attach to your paper. (2-3 pages)

There are a total of 6 'Mini' & 5 'full' essays.

The Creative Project

Choose one of the 'period' plays, dances or opera that we have seen or studied. [*WAITING for GODOT* does not qualify.]

Using research techniques, study how the piece was done in the past. Put most of your emphasis on the visual aspects of the production. How was *OEDIPUS* done in Hellenistic Greece, or 1900, or 1975?

From our discussion of visual art create a scheme, idea or concept for how you would approach the same piece. This needs to be based on an understanding of the play's action, 'time and place'. Would you do *OEDIPUS* in the style of Salvador Dali, an assemblage of junk, or Soho design style? Make sure you have cohesive reasons for your choice. (i.e. How will the particular visual style enhance the action, imagery and themes of the piece?)

This should be presented mostly with visual research in Power-point. At least one trip to The NY Public Library Picture Collection is required. DO NOT project a lot of text or written statements; use visuals. A short explanatory essay [about 3/4- 1 page] will also be required. Presentations will be given on our last meeting [exam day] and should last about 6 minutes maximum.

Note: A 'period piece' is a performing art piece that exists in a distinctly different historical period from our own. 'Time and place' refer to the historical time and geographical place the piece was originally set in, or if not specified by the author, originally created in.

Some pieces can have multiple possibilities of 'period'. *MACBETH* can be thought of as being pre-Norman, Celtic Britain, from the historical period the story comes from, or the Elizabethan-Jacobean period in which it was written. *OEDIPUS* can be thought of as mythic, pre-Homeric Iron Age Greek, or the classical Athenian time of Sophocles. A play like *ARMS and the MAN* however, is firmly set in a Victorian milieu, even though it is ostensibly located in 'Bulgaria'.. Please refer to the 'Blackboard' posting on 'Research'.

Some notes on your essays

1. Don't make conciliatory statements; stick to your thesis.
 - For example, try not to begin every essay with a pleasantry like saying such-and-such is a 'unique' work, or a 'great' play unless you really think so and feel you prove it in your essay, or there is some sort of historical-critical tradition you refer to. Such things appear as 'padding', rather than as an indication of a colloquial style (which is fine).
 - Don't say things to try to please the teacher. You don't have to think a piece is great or a performance worthwhile, but always supply supporting arguments and evidence. You also can't simply say 'I don't like it because it's not to my taste'. That may be so, but you then have to characterize and provide a rationale for your adopted aesthetic.
2. Try not to use a term in its own definition. (Don't say something like 'In realism objects seem more realistic' etc.)
3. When you make a statement of any sort, you have to provide explanation and illustrations.
4. When you use terms, you have to define them if their meaning is not clear from the way you have used them.
5. Always reread your essay (as many times as necessary) asking yourself if your meaning is as clear as possible. Make sure your train of thought has clarity so anyone who does not think like you will be able to follow it.
6. A good class essay will demonstrate your understanding of the material and your ability to analyze the subject, as well as your ability to synthesize ideas and present your own.
7. Affecting a personal writing style can be effective, but wit and warmth will not substitute for the basics of stating a thesis and then supporting it.
8. A lack of care, attention and energy are very easy to spot, as well as the use of clever devices to cover-up substandard work. Don't waste energy on such things; put it into properly fulfilling the assignment instead.
9. Though not research papers, if you do use references make sure you provide proper annotations.
 - A caution about research: be careful of the inherent superficiality of web-based sources. Many sources, like 'wikipedia', seem to be geared to quick answers that lack depth and nuance. Important terms and concepts are often complex. Make sure you understand their complexity. It is a good idea to get used to using multiple sources. It also broadens your perspective.
10. The same caution can be applied to concepts in general. Remember that many ideas in the arts reflect human and cultural complexity; they often are nuanced, ambiguous and contradictory. Resist the tendency to see things in over-simplified terms.
 - At the same time good writing and arguments benefit from the application of the principle of 'Ockham's razor'. (Look it up! And not only in 'wikipedia'.)

Grading

70% of the grade will be based on the essays.

20% will be based on the Creative Project.

10-15% will be based on class participation and discretionary aspects of your semester's performance, such as my general feelings of abilities, application or improvement over the semester, and 'presentation'. which includes how you carry yourself in class. Presentation includes your professional demeanor, as conferred by lateness, attendance, manners, attentiveness and expression.

Please remember that a 'C' is indicative of 'average' work. A 'B' is 'above average' or 'very good' work, and an 'A' is 'excellent' work. Do not assume that because you are Honors students and you have done well in the past, that you will necessarily get 'A's. Be prepared for the higher expectations and more competitive nature of college level work; don't assume you will glide through and be prepared to adjust your expectations and work habits. I will be happy to discuss anything with anyone, but if you are unhappy with a grade it is a waste of time to make comparisons to other classes or teachers, and claim that 'so-and-so let's you do this or that'. Please do not ask to be treated differently:

I cannot give 'extra credit' or any special type of treatment out of respect for the principle of fairness. Any opportunity given to one student must apply to all.

In other words, don't try to improve grades by manipulating the situation; put your energy into the work. Learning to make these kinds of adjustments is part of your educational experience.

What I do in lieu of such give-aways is to use discretionary consideration (which is where the 'extra' 5 % comes in). If someone performs poorly on only one or two of essays I have to give credence to the idea that it was an aberration, and weight those less. If someone shows a steady improvement over the semester, I also have to respect that effort and application.

HONORS 125 AT3RA

FALL 2008

The Arts in New York City: Form, Content, Context

Prof. J. Saslow

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Office hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:00 or by appt.

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718.997.4803 (Art Dept.) or 4820 (personal)

In this seminar, students will learn about the experience, purposes, and techniques of the visual and performing arts, through a mix of direct visits to cultural events, readings of primary and secondary texts, class demonstrations and discussion, writing assignments, and group research projects. We will also examine the interrelation of these art forms with each other, and with the wider culture. You will learn to analyze the arts and deepen your experience of artistic creativity, by studying the vocabulary and concepts of critical processes appropriate to the various art forms, and writing in a variety of formats about both your personal reactions and more objective investigation. The course will concentrate on the richness of art experiences available here in our own city, which has long been a preeminent cultural and creative center both nationally and internationally. Your understanding of how art is affected by, and contributes to, its broader social-economic context will be deepened through the case study of this familiar environment. Students will demonstrate their grasp of the course goals both in individual writing and through group projects, which will involve a presentation to the class as well as a web-based format.

Because this course will make use of various forms of educational media, we are assigned an Instructional Technology Fellow. Tsai-Shiou Hsieh will introduce the class to the use of these media, and will be available to advise you on specific projects. Contact: tsaishiou.hsieh@qc.cuny.edu, or visit during office hours in the HC building.

COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS

There may be changes/additions in the course of the term; they will be announced as soon as possible

DATE	TOPIC
8/21	FIELD TRIP: "South Pacific," Lincoln Center Theater
8/28	INTRODUCTION: NEW YORK AND THE ARTS
9/2	
9/4	IMAGE: VISUAL ARTS L. Fichner-Rathus, <i>Understanding Art</i> , chap. 1, "What is Art?" pp. 1-23. Charles Simpson, "The Structure of the SoHo Art Market," in Carole Calo, <i>Writings about Art</i> , pp. 104-115. First group presentation assigned.

- 9/9 J. Baughman, "Take Me Away from Manhattan: NYC and American Mass Culture, 1930-1990," in Martin Shefter, *Capital of the American Century: The National and International Influence of New York City*, chap. 6, pp. 117-143.
- 9/11
- 9/13 **SATURDAY AFTERNOON: CLASS FIELD TRIP** to Chelsea art galleries (date tentative)
- 9/16 L. Fichter-Rathus, *Understanding Art*, (8th edition -- on reserve), chap. 2, "Visual Elements of Art," pp. 25-69.
V. Zolberg, "New York Culture: Ascendant or Subsident?" in Shefter, *Capital of the American Century*, chap. 7, pp. 145-166.
- 9/18 **SOUND: MUSIC**
J. Machlis and K. Forney, *The Enjoyment of Music* (9th edn., 2003): unit 1, "The Elements of Music," pp. 1-40.
- 9/23
- 9/25 Machlis and Forney, chaps. 10 (pp. 65-75), 17 and 18 (pp. 140-153).
- 9/30 **NO CLASS**
- 10/2 **FIRST GROUP PRESENTATIONS -- VISUAL ARTS**
Presentations are to be posted on the class website by 10/15
- 10/7 Group presentations on visual arts, cont'd.
Response paper on music assigned.
- 10/7 -- **MACAULAY COMMON EVENT**: Conversation with film director David Holbrooke
6:00-8:00 pm @ Honors College (W. 67th St.)
- 10/9 **NO CLASS**
- 10/14 **NO CLASS (MONDAY SCHEDULE)**
- 10/15 -- **MACAULAY COMMON EVENT**: Conversation with artist Nina Jankowitz
6:00-8:00 pm @ Honors College
- 10/16 **SPOKEN WORD: THEATER**
D. Sporre, "What is Theatre?" in his *The Art of Theatre*, chap. 2, pp. 33-58.
- 10/16-19: **CLASS TRIP**: John Millington Synge, *Playboy of the Western World*, presented by QC Department of Drama/Theatre/Dance, @ Goldstein Theatre.
PLAY TEXT: Read Synge play (text available online)
- 10/21 Sporre, "Understanding and Evaluating Plays and Performances," chap. 3, pp. 59-92.
- 10/23 PLAY TEXT: Alexandre Dumas, *Camille* (The Lady of the Cammelias)
- 10/28

- 10/30 **MUSIC PLUS IMAGE/MOVEMENT: DANCE**
Sporre, "The Audience: Expectation, Perception, and Response," chap. 5, 119-48.
- 11/4 Class workshop by Kathryn Sullivan, Steps Dance Studio, producer of "Downtown Dance" video
- 11/6 **RESPONSE PAPER DUE** on music
Final group project assigned.
- 11/11 **MUSIC PLUS WORDS I: OPERA**
Class trip to *La Traviata*, Metropolitan Opera House (in November; exact date to be announced)
11/11 reading: Machlis and Forney, chapters on opera: chap. 39, pp. 313-325; chaps. 60-62, pp. 429-448; chap. 64, pp. 459-464.
- 11/13 opera, cont'd.
- 11/13 **MACAULAY COMMON EVENTS:**
Courting Risk: Afternoon Workshops. 4:30-6:30 pm @ Honors College
Courting Risk: Writers Reading. 6:00-8:00 pm
- 11/18
- 11/20 **Due date: Individual report** on an event from your Cultural Passport, posted to class website.
- 11/25 **MUSIC PLUS WORDS 2: BROADWAY MUSICAL**
S. Adler, *On Broadway: Art and Commerce on the Great White Way*, chap. 1, "The Terrain," pp. 1-29.
- 11/27 **NO CLASS**
- 12/2 **Due date: Response** to another student's Cultural Passport report, on website.
- 12/4 Adler, chap. 7, "The Nature of the Beast," pp. 201-227.
- 12/9 **FINAL PROJECTS:** in-class presentations
- 12/11 **Final projects, cont'd.**
- 12/16 " "
- 12/23 **FINAL PROJECTS DUE, submitted in Web form. There will be no formal examination.**

ASSIGNMENTS, EXPECTATIONS, GRADING

Learning objectives for this seminar: Students will:

1. Demonstrate their understanding of the interrelation of the arts, and the arts with culture in the broader sense, through research and writing involving two or more texts, or an artistic text and its cultural/historical context.

2. Utilize appropriate evaluative/critical discourse to analyze their own experience of the arts, including of artistic creation.

All readings and assignments are designed to promote your mastery of these goals, as well as to assess how well you are grasping them. If at any point you are unsure how the course material is related to the goals of the course, or what you should be getting out of a particular topic, please ask in class, or see the instructor during office hours.

Field trips and city-wide events

The class will make several trips outside of regularly scheduled class hours to attend cultural events, visit art galleries, and the like; in addition, we will attend a few events organized by the Honors College for students across the CUNY system. Additional dates will be announced as early as possible. You are required to attend the bulk of these events; in some cases there may be assignments related to the event, so if you don't go, you'll fail the assignment. If you absolutely cannot make a group event for urgent personal reasons, see the instructor about the possibility of an equivalent make-up project; these will be granted only in extreme circumstances. Medical or official absences require documentation.

Weekly reading and class discussion/writing

Most assigned readings will be available on reserve, at the main checkout desk of Rosenthal Library (lobby level), or where appropriate in the Music Library (Lefrak Hall, first floor). You should read all assignments for the class before the due date, and be prepared to discuss them in class. For textbooks or academic studies, you should look for the broad main ideas of the readings and their relevance to our larger topic, more than for small specific details. In the case of primary materials (play text, opera libretto, etc.), you should be prepared to discuss the content of the piece: plot, structure, themes, characterization, and other elements we will introduce in class.

The *New York Times* covers a great deal of local and broader news in the daily Arts section; other area papers also cover this topic, but in less depth. You should get into the habit of at least skimming the newspaper daily for possible items of interest; from time to time, we may discuss them in class.

NOTE: All students are expected to read and discuss all assignments, and to attend all class events. In a college-level class at a secular, public, and voluntary institution, whose purpose is to learn cultural history and critical skills, one's personal dislike or disapproval of the content of a particular work of art, or any other element in it, is not relevant to whether it can be examined and discussed in an objective academic manner. No one is being forced to accept the point of view of an artwork; in fact, a spirited (but reasoned) criticism of its subject or ideas would be highly welcome in class, provided all show respect for the contrary opinions of others.

Class participation is evaluated for content, not only for quantity. Everyone is expected, and encouraged, to answer questions and comment on remarks from the instructor and from classmates whenever you have a thought to share. However, hogging the limelight when you really haven't much to say is rude to fellow students, and boring for everyone. "Time is money": Try to express your ideas clearly and briefly. Don't be shy, but don't be greedy.

NOTE: Because this course is based heavily on discussion, group experience, and sharing of ideas, regular attendance is essential in class and at outside events. If you're not there, you can't get credit for any discussion, or for critical comments on the work of your fellow students, which will significantly affect your grade.

20% of grade (includes in-class writing, below).

In-class writing

During class lectures and discussions, you will periodically be asked to write short, impromptu pieces about your thoughts or experiences on a variety of arts-related issues. These will be used as aids to your own thinking and exploration, rather than as "quizzes" (though some will be collected by the instructor for purposes of assessing the success of the course). Some of these will be written only for yourself, while others may be shared with the group to provoke further discussion. In at least one case, your writing will be posted to the class website for commentaries from other students, and you will be expected to comment on someone else's posting.

This component is included in the 20% grade for class participation.

First group project: VISUAL ARTS -- CONTEXT

Working in small groups, students will choose a museum or similar cultural institution to visit, and will give a short report in class on the nature and purposes of the institution (further details of assignment will be distributed). Each group will present for approximately 10 minutes. Presentations should include a multi-media component. Written submission required after the presentation.

20% of grade (all members of a group receive the same grade for the total project)

Response paper: MUSIC -- FORM

A short paper (1000-1200 words = 3-4 double-spaced pages) describing your experience of, and reaction to, a musical performance of your choosing. Papers should provide a basic description of the event, using the vocabulary of formal analysis we learn in class, and then discuss your evaluation of the event (was it "good"?) as well as your personal reaction (How did you feel about it? Was it of interest? Why or why not? What did you learn from it about this art form, about the nature of artistic structures, or about artistic experience more generally?). Papers will be posted on the class website, and each student will be responsible for writing a brief response to someone else's essay.

20% of grade

Final group project: THEATER -- CONTENT

Students will again work in small groups on a project of research and presentation about a chosen work of dramatic performance (play, opera, musical). The project should focus on the content of the work, and involve a "close reading" of the text, though it may then branch out into other aspects of meaning. Groups will create both an oral presentation (approximately 15-20 minutes) and a web-based final version, each of which should include images, text, sound, film, or other elements as appropriate.

40% of grade

NOTES:

Grades will not be "curved." If everyone deserves an A, everyone gets an A. If everyone gets bored and stops showing up, everyone gets an F (and the instructor gets a vacation).

PLAGIARISM is a serious academic offense, because it is both theft and lying. If you pass off someone else's ideas or words as your own without proper acknowledgment, you are 1) robbing the original author of proper credit for his or her creative work (would you like someone doing that to you?) and 2) failing to do the minimum mental work necessary to learn something for yourself -- which means you are pretending to understand something that you don't (would you like to fly in an airplane piloted by someone whose only training in flight school was buying term papers on air safety off the Internet?). Incidents of plagiarism will receive an automatic F and may be reported to the College authorities, who have the authority to assess penalties.

Three books on the course reserve list are recommended for guidance in writing, particularly about the arts. Although the first two are focused on visual arts, many of their tips and guidelines are applicable to other writing about art forms as well; the third covers more art forms.

Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*

Amy Tucker, *Visual Literacy: Writing about Art* (written by a Queens College English professor)

Suzanne Hudson and Molly LeClair, *Thinking and Writing in the Humanities*
