

TEXTS & IDEAS – TOPICS: ARTS AND PUBLICS

CORE-UA 400-010, Fall 2015
Lectures TR, 3:30-4:45, 5WP 101

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Civic values and public purpose are intricately bound up with the arts. Whenever a case needs to be made that the arts matter, we tend to speak (albeit, often in very general terms) about how the arts contribute to education, or self-expression, or community life, or public deliberation, or the moral and social reform of individuals and institutions. On the other side, those who question the public value of the arts tend to complain about the arts as insular, or out of touch, or baffling, or too political, or not political enough. How did we come to think about the arts in such terms? What is our conception of public life such that it makes sense for us to promote the arts as having an important public role, or alternatively to distrust or dismiss the arts for not properly or effectively living up to that role? And, ultimately, what's at stake: Why should it matter if the arts matter?

This course takes a broad view of the changing attitudes and values that have shaped public arts culture in the West from the Classical period through to the present day, with a specific focus on drama and theatre. As the chronology of the readings suggest, there is a historical story behind how some of these ideas emerge, recur, and reconstitute. Our main goal, however, is to explore not so much the past itself but to reflect on the nature and significance of those ideas as they continue to influence our present. To that end, the selection and arrangement of the readings are intended to raise implications and prompt thinking. Indeed, much of the story is in the gaps of what is missing, and in the pathways we might draw back to our own understandings. Like other Texts & Ideas courses, the purpose of this course is for us to think critically and engage in meaningful debate on these issues ourselves. That means close and careful reading, open-ended inquiry and discovery, and an ongoing negotiation and further expression of these ideas in your own writing and discussion with others.

Some of the key topics we will be discussing include: cultural participation and public controversy; artistic integrity and personal truth; censorship and free expression; public funding and government support for the arts; community development, quality of life, and results-driven arts; the relationship between the individual, the artist, and public interest; and the importance of cultural heritage to local, national, and global life.

Texts to purchase at NYU Bookstore

Barry Unsworth, *Morality Play* – ISBN 0393315606

Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* – ISBN 019922997X

George Bernard Shaw, *Plays Unpleasant* – ISBN 0140437932

V. S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* – ISBN 037570714X

Moises Kaufman, *The Laramie Project* – ISBN 0375737191

Andreas Eschbach, *The Carpet Makers* – ISBN 9780765314901

Arts & Publics: Course Anthology – Blake 978200008893B [only available at NYU Bookstore]

• All other readings and course materials available online through NYU Classes

Schedule of topics & readings (plays and novels are listed in CAPS)

Week 1: Course introduction

R 9.3 Introduction
F 9.4 Seminar #1

Week 2: Does it matter if the arts matter?

T 9.8 Lecture #1

- Leo Tolstoy, from *What is Art?* (1896) [in Course Reader]
- Maggie Nelson, from *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011) [in Course Reader]

R 9.10 Lecture #2

- Richard Sennett, from *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) [online]
- Melvin Rogers, “Revisiting John Dewey’s *The Public and its Problems*” (2010) [online]

 ☉ Position statement due
 F 9.11 Seminar #2

Week 3: Can art reason?

T 9.15 Lecture #3

- SOPHOCLES, *ANTIGONE* (441 B.C.E) [PLAY] [in Course Reader]

R 9.17 Lecture #4

- Martha Nussbaum, “Luck and the Tragic Emotions” (1986) [online]
- “The Fragility of Goodness” (1990) [Nussbaum interview with Bill Moyer, online video]

 ☉ Position statement due
 F 9.18 Seminar #3
 ☉ First writing exercise due

Week 3: Artfulness as a way of life

T 9.22 Lecture #5

- Tertullian, from *De Spectaculis* (“Of Public Shows”) (198) [in Course Reader]
- Plato, *Ion* (380 B.C.E) [in Course Reader]

R 9.24 Lecture #6

- PLAUTUS, *PSEUDOLUS* (191) [PLAY] [in Course Reader]

 ☉ Position statement due
 F 9.25 Seminar #4

Week 4: Do the arts progress?

T 9.29 Lecture #7

- BARRY UNSWORTH, *MORALITY PLAY* (1995) [NOVEL]

R 10.1 Lecture #8

- ROSWITHA OF GANDERSHEIM, *DULCITIUS* [PLAYLET] & “To Learned Patrons” (950) [in Course Reader]

 ☉ Position statement due
 F 10.2 Seminar #5

Week 5: What do the arts allow?

T 10.6 Lecture #9

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *AS YOU LIKE IT* (1603) [PLAY] [in Course Reader]

R 10.8 Lecture #10

- Charles I/James I, *Book of Sports* (1633) [in Course Reader]

- Aphra Behn, “Good, Sweet, Honey, Sugar-Candied Reader,” Epistle to the Reader from *The Dutch Lover* (1673) [online]
 - ☉ Position statement due
- F 10.9 Seminar #6

Week 6: Will we ever learn (from the arts)?

- T 10.13 No class – Legislative Day (classes meet according to a Monday schedule)
- R 10.15 Lecture #11
- David Hume, “Of Refinement in the Arts” (1742) [in Course Reader]
 - “Rousseau’s Indictment of the City as Theatre” from *Fall of Public Man* (1977) [in Course Reader]
- F 10.16 Seminar #7

Week 7: Happiness and the pursuit of the arts

- T 10.20 Lecture #12
- SAMUEL JOHNSON, *THE HISTORY OF RASSELAS* (1759) [NOVELLA]
- R 10.22 Lecture #13
- “The Pursuit of Happiness” from *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1996) [online]
- F 10.23 Seminar #8

Week 8: Playgoing habits

- M 10.26 ☉ Midterm exam due (take-home, online submission)
- T 10.27 Lecture #14
- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, *MRS. WARREN’S PROFESSION* (1893) [PLAY] & “Apology” (1902)
- R 10.29 Lecture #15
- Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” (1891) [in Course Reader]
 - Walt Whitman, “The Old Bowery” (1892) [in Course Reader]
- F 10.30 Seminar #9
- ☉ Second writing exercise due

Week 9: With or against us; or, What is an audience for?

- T 11.3 Lecture #16
- OSCAR SAUL & LOUIS LANTZ, *REVOLT OF THE BEAVERS* (1937) [PLAY] [online]
 - John Cech, “A ‘People’s Theatre’ for Youth” (1987) [in Course Reader]
- R 11.5 Lecture #17
- “Manual for Federal Theatre Projects of the Works Progress Administration” (1933) [online]
 - Hallie Flanagan’s brief to the House of Representatives, “Federal Theatre Project” (1938) [online]
- F 11.6 Seminar #10

Week 10: The Federal Theatre Project – Putting the arts back to work

- T 11.10 Lecture #18
- *How Art Works: The National Endowment for the Arts’ Five-Year Research Agenda* (2012) [online]
- R 11.12 Lecture #19
- Overview of grant programs [group project assigned]
- F 11.13 Seminar #11

Week 11: Being read

- T 11.17 Lecture #20
- V. S. NAIPAUL, *THE MYSTIC MASSEUR* (1957) [NOVEL]
- R 11.19 Lecture #21

- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility” (1936) [in Course Reader]
 - NEA reports, *Reading at Risk* (2004), *To Read or Not to Read* (2007), and *Reading on the Rise* (2008) [online]
- F 11.20 Seminar #12 - Group presentations
☉ Group grant proposal due

Week 12: Group projects / Thanksgiving

- T 11.24 Grant awards
R 11.26 No class – Thanksgiving break
F 11.27 No class – Thanksgiving break

Week 13: Social works

- T 12.1 Lecture #22
• MOISES KAUFMAN, *LARAMIE PROJECT* (2001) [PLAY]
- R 12.3 Lecture #23
• Shannon Jackson, from *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (2011) [online]
- F 12.4 Seminar #13

Week 14: Craft, economy, and the ends of art

- T 12.8 Lecture #24
• ANDREAS ESCHBACH, *THE CARPET MAKERS* (1995) [NOVEL]
- R 12.10 Lecture #25
• Shelly Errington, from *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art* (1998) [online]
- F 12.11 Seminar #14

Week 15: Exam week

- M 12.14 ☉ Final exam due (take-home, online submission)
T 12.15 Overview & conclusions
R 12.17 No class – Exam week
F 12.18 No class – Exam week
☉ Interpretive-Analysis Essay due

Writing assignments & exams

More detailed descriptions of each assignment will be handed out in your seminar meeting as they are assigned.

Short writing exercises (5% x 2, 10% of total grade; no more than 1 page each)

These short papers will allow for more freely developed, ponderous reflections on certain topics, following from a specific writing prompt. Your writing should fit on one page, typed (single or double spaced, front and back). You may write in whatever style, format, voice, perspective you want, so long as you fully address the questions posed by each prompt.

Position Statements (5 x 2%; 10% of total grade)

Over the course of the semester, you will post 5 concise position statements to an online forum debating a range of arts and cultural policy issues. Each of your postings will discuss a core issue (you will decide on these core issues as a group in your seminar meetings). You are to take a *for* or *against* position on each issue. For instance, on the question of whether the government should fund public theatre, you *must* decide whether you support or do not support government funding as a policy. The case you make should incorporate certain qualified considerations and conditions, but your statement must arrive at a decisive position. Also important: by the end of the semester, each of your 5

posting should relate to a consistent overall viewpoint, involving a deep commitment to an evolved set of principles and values about cultural life, civic purpose, and the idea of the public arts more broadly. For instance, if you argue a certain position on the grounds of government non-intervention, you should not have a posting arguing some other case based on the need for active government regulation and oversight. Your viewpoint and underlying values can (almost certainly will) change over the course of the semester. When that happens, you will need to reconsider previous postings, and edit or amend them accordingly. Being able to trace those changing viewpoints and prioritized perspectives will be one of the most valuable aspects of this assignment sequence, both for yourself and for others, so feel free to push your ideas and outlooks in radical different directions, especially through the first half of the course. The more unique and distinct your own position, the more it will challenge others to respond and relate in turn as they write and revise their own position statements.

Group Grant Proposal (20% of total grade; about 6-8 pages)

As your overall viewpoint on the public arts agenda questions begins to stabilize, you will be asked to build on that viewpoint in drafting an artistic, organizational, or scholarly project/mission statement for (hypothetical) submission to a public arts grant program. The challenge of this assignment will be to balance your own strong vision and agenda with the specific mission and application criteria of a particular grant funding organization. Another challenge is that you will be working in groups of 3-4. That means you will need to negotiate your own viewpoint in the process of coming up with a shared vision and a coherent, convincing articulation of your group's project.

Interpretive-Analysis Essay (20% of total grade; 6-8 pages)

You will write an interpretive-analysis essay for your final paper. Although there is a compare and contrast element to these papers, the main goal of doing interpretive-analysis work is to arrive at new insights into a complex concept, idea, or issue that you could not have grasped without trying to make sense of the subject from multiple perspectives. By looking to identify the particular assumptions behind varying viewpoints and modes of representation, you should become more aware of your own assumptions and outlook on the world—one of the big payoffs of the critical style of reading that you will be learning in this course. In writing an interpretive-analysis paper, you will be exercising skills of close reading, analytical reasoning, and critical perspective. A more detailed outline of the assignment will be handed out and discussed in class later in the semester.

Midterm & Final Exam (15% x 2 of total grade)

Both the midterm and final are take-home exams, completed and submitted online. The exams will test your understanding of the assigned texts (key arguments, plot points, etc.), course knowledge (core issues, lecture discussions, etc.), and reflective/critical engagement (ability to identify issues across texts, ability to relate specific concepts to broader ideas, etc.).

Completed exams are due before 5pm on the assigned days: Monday, October 26 for the midterm and Monday, December 14 for the final. *You will not be able to access the exam after that time. Untaken quizzes will result in a 0 grade.*

Grading Summary

Short Writing Exercises	2 x 5%	10%
Position Statements	5 x 2%	10%
Group Grant Proposal		20%
Interpretive-Analysis Essay		20%
Midterm Exam		15%
Final Exam		15%
Seminar Work & Participation		10%
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		100%

Attendance

You are expected to attend every lecture and seminar meeting. If you cannot make a meeting, please let us know as soon as possible in advance. Attendance will be taken and participation noted. If you miss two meetings, you will need to meet to discuss where you stand in the course. If you miss three or more meetings, your final standing in the course will automatically drop one letter grade, and continue to drop per additional class missed.

Academic Integrity

Policies regarding plagiarism/academic integrity can be reviewed online at cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity. These policies are strictly enforced.