

## Art, Aesthetics and Modern Technology

HSS 404, Spring 2025

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Hours: By appointment

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to lay bare the interrelationships among technology and other human enterprises that shape a society, paying special attention to the arts, and thereby to understand society in terms of its various dynamics. A central activity in the course is the pursuit of certain definitions; these definitions—of art, beauty, culture, aesthetics, sublimity, and technology—shade one into the other, as each helps to comprehend the others. This course will be conducted in hybrid format, with one face-to-face class meeting per week, and mandatory online discussions throughout the week in Canvas.

Prerequisites: HUM 102, with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher. \*Weekly Schedule is below.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course it is expected that you will have had the experience of thinking deeply into a narrowly focused subject area, in a nuanced way, and that you will have been able to communicate effectively about it both orally and in writing; furthermore you will have written an in-depth, narrowly focused, polemical, researched essay that will be fully documented, an essay of substantial length. As well, you will have been able, successfully, to write argumentative, substantive and informed essays in response to thematic questions posed to you in the form of a take-home examination. These abilities and generally the skills you will develop in this course are necessary for success in the present world, for any professional, and indeed they are salutary for any citizen. In this regard, this course comports with NJIT's mission as set out in its most recent mission statement. Scroll further down to see the course schedule.

### COURSE TEXTS

(All assigned texts are available gratis inside our Canvas homepage in respective weekly details to be found in the homepage section titled "ASSIGNMENTS [Resources, Due Dates.]")

#### Books, Articles, Films etc.:

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Tr. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. (This essay must be downloaded at: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.)

Bullock, Alan. "The Double Image." *Modernism 1890-1930*. Eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane. New York: Penguin Books, 1991. 58-70.

Chaplin, Charlie. Dir. *Modern Times*. [United Artists, 1936.] Warner Home Video, 2003.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Off the Beaten Track*. Ed. and Tr. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002.

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/burt/filmphilology/Heideggerworkofart.pdf>

Eisenstein, Sergei M. Dir. *Battleship Potemkin*. 1925.

[http://www.openculture.com/2012/02/begin\\_your\\_cinematic\\_self-education\\_with\\_free\\_sergei\\_eisenstein\\_films.html](http://www.openculture.com/2012/02/begin_your_cinematic_self-education_with_free_sergei_eisenstein_films.html)

Faber, Monica. "Artistic Vision? Photographic Vision!" Brigitte Franzen, and Susanne Neuburger. *Hyper Real*. Köln : Buchhandlung Walther König ; New York, N.Y. : D.A.P. / Distributed Art Publishers, 2010. 374-81

Holmberg, Jan. "Ideals of Immersion in Early Cinema." *Cinémas : revue d'études cinématographiques / Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies* 14.1 (Autumn 2003): 129-47.

<http://www.erudit.org/revue/cine/2003/v14/n1/008961ar.html>

Lang, Fritz. Dir. *Metropolis*. [Universum Film, A.G., 1927.] Restored Authorized Version. Kino Video, 2002, 2003. (Available from NetFlix.)

Neuburger, Susanne. "Parallel Actions with Camera and Easel: Photorealism and Its Allies."

Brigitte Franzen, and Susanne Neuburger. *Hyper Real*. Köln : Buchhandlung Walther König ; New York, N.Y. : D.A.P. / Distributed Art Publishers, 2010. 323-31.

Rutsky, R. L. *High Techne: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman*.

Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

[http://monoskop.org/images/c/c4/Rutsky\\_RL\\_High\\_Techne\\_Art\\_and\\_Technology\\_from\\_the\\_Machine\\_Aesthetic\\_to\\_the\\_Posthuman.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/c/c4/Rutsky_RL_High_Techne_Art_and_Technology_from_the_Machine_Aesthetic_to_the_Posthuman.pdf)

von Munsterberg, Hugo. *The Photoplay*. New York / London: D. Appleton, 1916.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15383/15383-h/15383-h.htm>

Wittingslow, Ryan Mitchell, *What Art Does: Using Philosophy of Technology to Talk about Art*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023.

Various other readings are available via this homepage.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Oral/Visual Group Reports.
- Weekly Canvas postings (one original of 100 to 150 words, another 50 to 100-word response to someone else's post).
- Final and Midterm examinations, comprehensive, essay in format, open-book.

N.B.: Failure to participate in class discussions (especially online) at a minimally acceptable level will result in disqualification of end-of-term assignments such as the term paper and final exam; such

disqualification must inevitably spell course failure. In order to pass this course a student must be consistently active in weekly class work starting from the beginning of the course term. Furthermore, only three unexcused absences will be allowed; more than these will mean automatic course failure.

N.B.: Failure to submit the final exam will result in the papers that are part of the term paper project being disqualified.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

(Full descriptions of readings mentioned below can be found in the list of course texts above, and elsewhere at this course homepage in Canvas)\*

WEEK 1: Class does not meet in person this week. Take the online tour of the course homepage in Canvas. Prior to first in-person class meeting: Post comments (in discussion forum for Week 1) on "The Double Image" by Alan Bullock as well as on a classmate's initial comments in regard to the Bullock essay. Also post your group report preferences in the Week 1 discussion forum designated for this purpose; indicate your first, second and third preferences as to when you'd like to participate in a group report. (Each member of the class must participate in two group reports.)

WEEK 2: Class meets in person, and will start with an overview of the course. Then the group report schedule will be created. Finally there will be some discussion of artistic Modernism, its emergence in early modern painting and sculpture, photography and film (with particular reference to *The Photoplay* by von Munsterberg, and "Ideals of Immersion in Early Cinema" by Holmberg).

WEEK 3: Discussion of the assigned films by Eisenstein, Lang, and Chaplin.

WEEK 4: Discussion of Benjamin essay.

WEEK 5: Discussion of Heidegger essay.

WEEK 6: Midterm Exam (in-person, open-book; you may bring to the exam, and may use, anything you like in hard copy, but you may not use any electronic device during the exam—if you need to use the restroom then you'll have to leave your devices with the proctor until you return). Post discussion forum comments on assigned Abstract Expressionist and/or Pop Art works.

WEEK 7: Discussion of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

WEEK 8: Discussion of Hyperrealism, and Conceptual Art.

WEEK 9: Discussion of *What Art Does* (up through p. 35).

WEEK 10: Discussion of *What Art Does* (up through p. 64).

WEEK 11: Discussion of *What Art Does* (complement of Chapter Four and then Chapter Five, up to p. 95).

WEEK 12: Discussion of *High Techne* (Introduction and Chapter 1).

WEEK 13: Discussion of *High Techne* (Chapter 2).

WEEK 14: Discussion of *High Techne* (Chapter 3).

WEEK 15: Discussion of *High Techne* (Chapters 4 & 5).

\* All work must be prepared prior to class meeting. For specific due dates etc. see details of assignments at the course Canvas homepage.

#### COURSE GRADE

Final Examination: 35%

Class Participation online (initial, originating posts - graded weekly): 20% (10% if late)

Class Participation online (responses to a classmate's post): 15% (5% if late)

Follow-Up Questions and Comments: 5%

Portfolio of Eight Best Posts online: 5%

Group Reports: 20% (higher grade of the two counts for both)

Extra Credit: Essay on Visit to Art Show (appropriate shows to be listed in Canvas): extra 10%