



CITY COLLEGE of NEW YORK
City University of New York

Semester: Fall 2014

Course: Honors College Seminar 1 The Arts In New York City

Room and time: Monday 9:30 am-10:45 am in NAC 6/304

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Seminar description and general policy:

It is quite clear to most of us that we need good architects and engineers to live in habitable cities. Well-trained and responsible educators to teach our young, doctors and nurses to care for our old and sick. We'd probably largely agree on aspirations, duties and rewards of scientists, research assistants, and policemen, of plumbers, bankers, aerospace engineers, restaurant managers and merchants. But what about artists? What is their role and place in our society? What do they offer us and what are our expectations, if any, regarding their work? What is your understanding of the arts and of individuals who devote a large part of their life to making art?

The city in which we live is an amazingly vast conglomerate of things that are grand and small, cosmopolitan and provincial, commercial and idealistic, selfish and communitarian. If you are a New Yorker: How well do you know this city, beyond the paths of your "village" and the main iconic sites? If you are a recent arrival to New York: Which aspects of the urban life are especially appealing and which seem to be intimidating? To "old" and "new" New Yorkers: What things would you like to discover in and about the city? How could you make meaningful to yourself its vast reservoirs of well-known and not so known cultural riches? What is your place in New York?

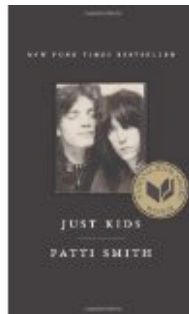
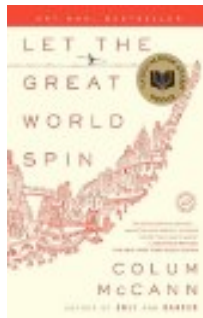
I hope our readings and class discussions, together with the ventures into the city – as a class, in small groups and individually, will help you to explore such questions and find at least partial answers.

We'll be covering a lot of ground exploring the resources of New York City and talking about what we read, see, hear, feel, and think. Our discussion will address some basics: different kinds of the arts; their specific qualities and histories; their special appeal and limitations; standards by which artworks and forms of artistic activities are judged. We will also aim to address some broader issues and points of controversy in on-going debates about the arts and their role in society.

Required readings:

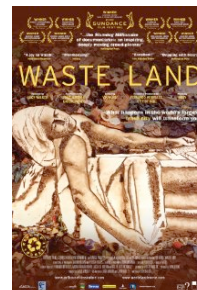
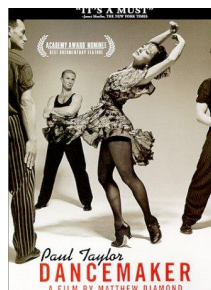
Elizabeth Schmidt, ed. *Poems of New York* (Everyman's Pocket Classics).
Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin* (Random House).
Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (Ecco Press).

Recommended: John Berger, *The Ways of Seeing*.



Required films:

Man on the Wire (2008), doc. dir. by James Marsh
Dancemaker (1998), doc. dir. by Matthew Diamond
The Waste Land (2010), doc. by Lucy Walker with Vik Muniz and *catadores*



Learning Goals:

In this seminar, students will:

1. Discuss the role of artists and cultural institutions of New York.
2. Identify the key features and formal qualities of the different artistic genres.
3. Construct clearly written and well-reasoned analyses of various art forms.
4. Prepare and make effective presentation of reports on various cultural events.
5. Articulate questions about a wide range of artistic expressions.
6. Explore the issues of social responsibility and different visions of public space.
7. Demonstrate that they got to know better New York and its diverse cultural institutions.

Requirements:

The pace of the course is intense: a new book/ performance/ doc. film/ site visit almost every week. The key factor to the good use of opportunities this course presents and satisfactory completion of all the required work: wise planning and open-minded exploration. Ask questions. Search for answers. Talk - in class, on the blog, with yourself.

• **Regular attendance.** Any absence from class or any event scheduled outside class has to be explained in writing and made-up on your own.

• **Participation** in class activities: discussion about the readings, artworks and events; blog posts; “field trips.”
Note: We use poems as a "kick-off" to class sessions; the chosen poems are sometimes more directly related to the topic, sometimes they just provide a different take on the city or a counterpoint to the main topic. Poems require close reading, and often a repeated close reading. They are a bit like exercises in focused attention, free-wheeling imagination, and risk-taking.

• Two individual papers:

The first – on the novel *Let the Great World Spin* (Standard format, 2 ps., ca. 600 words, titled) – is due Monday, Sept. 28.

The second – on one dance and one musical performance, chosen from the list “Current Events” (21/2 ps., ca. 800 – 900 words, titled) – is due Monday, Nov. 2.

• One group project that involves:

- a) making informed choice of a site from the list “On the Edges and in the Heart of the City”;
- b) visit(s) to the chosen site with your colleagues;
- c) preparation of a written report (ca. 6 ps.), with visual appendix; and with additional individual comments by each member of the group, 11/2 p.); due Wed., Nov. 25;
- d) brilliant presentation in the class (20 min.); and
- e) imaginative and effective presentation on the class web-site.

• Grading policy: the final grade is cumulative, weighted as follows:

attendance & participation in class discussions 20%;
blog posts 10%;
first paper 10%;
second paper 20%;
group project 40%.

General Education Information:

Students successfully completing this course will develop the following proficiencies:

Oral and written communication skills - Students will produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.

Critical thinking skills - Students will evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.

Information literacy skills - Students will gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.

Academic honesty:

Rely on your own judgment and use your own words in preparing writing assignments. Any research sources and quotes must be acknowledged and properly documented. Plagiarism is a serious offense; it is a form of theft. For full description of CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity (definitions and examples of cheating and plagiarism as well as presentation of procedures for imposition of academic and disciplinary sanctions see <http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>