

Cultural Studies Program *Spring 2026*

Category A: Text and Theory

COMMRC 3326 - Contested Realities: Disinformation, Democracy, and Digital Platforms

Olga Kuchinskaya | Thursdays, 6:00 - 9:00 pm Contemporary digital media has become a battleground for attention, influence, and political legitimacy. This seminar explores how digital platforms are reshaping political communication, enabling new forms of activism and authoritarian control, and fueling information wars that challenge democratic institutions and public trust. We begin by grounding our analysis in foundational debates within media and cultural studies about approaches to media effects. From there, the seminar unfolds as a collaborative intellectual space. Students will help shape the syllabus by curating the reading list, conducting research, and selecting case studies. Topics may include: networked activism, dis/information campaigns, AI in political communication, media control in democratic and nondemocratic contexts, platform governance, surveillance capitalism, journalism and the fragmentation of truth, and the role of digital media infrastructures in shaping political conflict and public discourse. The seminar's participatory model invites students to bring their own interests and expertise into the conversation as we collectively map out the challenges and possibilities for democratic communication in the 21st century.

ENGLIT 2270 - AI Cultures

Zachary Horton | Tuesdays, 6:00 - 8:50 pm This interdisciplinary seminar will grapple with the cultural histories and futures of Artificial Intelligence as it has been represented in fiction, influential texts by the pioneers of AI, media corporations, and popular culture. We'll study the history of AI as a cultural imaginary, as a research program, and as a corporate paradigm. We'll examine the relationship (historically and in the current moment) between labor and AI. How does AI function simultaneously as a tool for humanity, a replacement of humanity (as affect, as creativity, as labor), and as a speculative end of humanity? Can AI be truly creative? In an AI saturated media ecology, what will be the role of human-created art, literature, and thinking? Does AI challenge what it means (philosophically or pragmatically) to be human? The meaning or status of knowledge? The nature of agency? How will AI reconfigure identity categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality? How does the loss of media dynamics such as verifiability, authenticity, and provenance effected by AI challenge the role of authorship, citizenship,

the ethics of media production, and the future of democracy? We will also discuss professional concerns, such as how AI will transform the humanities and social sciences, universities in general, and students' commitments to values such as originality, critical thinking, and long-form information processing (reading). We'll consider the relationships between AI and misinformation, neofascism, and political futures. An overarching question will be how AI challenges or even forces the humanities to function at different scales in order to retain a place for its core values. How might the human (and the humanities) need to evolve and adapt as AI colonizes more and more functions of the human? Beyond corporate techno-optimism, is there a version of AI that could enhance human agency and experience in a meaningful way?

For primary sources, we'll draw upon my extensive research in the history of AI, as well as published texts from AI practitioners, as well as critics of AI. We'll read short stories and novels that have given voice to humanistic concerns about AI, as well as watch a number of films that have prominently and influentially featured AI characters, shaping our collective narrative of what AI is or can be. My goal is to mount a multi-disciplinary study of AI as a cultural paradigm that has already radically transformed our cultures over the past 75 years, to help us understand the past and chart our way through its radical futures. I welcome students from all disciplines who wish to incorporate an understanding of or a response to AI in their academic and creative work.

FR 2105 - Bodies in Trouble: Outlining the Human in Medieval France

Anthony Revelle | Thursdays, 2:30 - 5:00 pm This seminar will explore the production of the categories of the human and the nonhuman in Medieval France, with a focus on embodiment. How did medieval people understand their relationship to their environment and their physical place in a changing world? Where are the limits of the human body and of the individual subject, and what happens when those limits are blurred, for example in acts of eating, sexual intercourse, or in assemblages with the animal and the inanimate? We will discuss gender, social privilege, subjectification-objectification, and premodern notions regarding human exceptionalism and the nature-culture debate. Course taught in French.

Category B: Disciplines and Intellectual Movements

COMMRC 3306 - Seminar in rhetoric and culture: Affect and Rhetoric

Caitlin Bruce | 2:00 - 5:00 pm This course explores the role that affect and/or emotion plays in politics and culture, and what the prominence or invisibility of emotion reveals

about the possibility for collective political involvement. We will trace disciplinary ambivalence surrounding affect and emotion in communication studies as a way to also investigate ways in which affect studies may forward or threaten critical cultural inquiry, in particular as it relates to social difference. Beginning with Plato's Gorgias and feminist critiques disciplinary norms around logos, and concluding with case studies about contemporary spectacular capitalism and feminist social movements, we will analyze the critiques of pathos as a political strategy. Focusing on different kinds of emotion: compassion, anger, anxiety, happiness, and so forth, and their different uses, we will contextualize these strategies by looking at contemporary political and cultural debates, using both texts and films. The way emotions work as cultural resources reveals how they also function as rhetorical tools of persuasion, for better or worse.

EFOP 3003 - Theories of Educational Inequality

Sean Kelly | Wednesdays, 6:00 - 8:40 pm In order to understand educational systems, it is crucial to understand the plurality of forces acting to create (or ameliorate) social stratification. Despite some discussion of the level of educational productivity in the U.S. compared to other nations, the main educational problem in the U.S. is the high level of educational inequality, not average productivity. Educational inequality stems in large part from the stratified nature of our society, and is in turn generative of future inequality in the labor market and other aspects of society. We begin this class with a summary examination of educational inequality, just to get the basic findings on the table and an initial set of resources for recent estimates of educational inequality. We then turn to a brief survey of major theories of social stratification, and major empirical findings on status attainment and inequality at the macro level. Schools do generate inequality, but also opportunity; it is a glass half-full (or empty) situation. We then move to a series of topics at the micro-level, that is, social forces acting on schooling that can be readily measured at the level of individuals and families. The term paper is a structured paper in which you will use the social theories from this course to analyze Hollywood narratives of schooling and youth development.

EFOP 3089: Special Topics: Contemporary Issues in Racialization, Culture, and Identity in U.S. Higher Education

Sergio Gonzalez | Wednesdays, 3:00 - 5:40 pm This course looks closely at the history of categories, assumptions, and ideas used to analyze (sometimes to guide and sometimes to resist) educational inequality in US Higher Education. Our goal is to think carefully about 1) the historical, political, and educational consequences of the labeling and emergence of racialized or "othered" groups in the context of higher education, and 2) critical, intellectual, and pragmatic interventions that have emerged from a range of disciplines and

thinkers for imagining and building equitable higher education spaces beyond the constraints of hegemonic structures. This course draws from multiple disciplines to consider how identities are constructed in discourse and policy in order to differentially deliver benefits and burdens over time. The instructor and students will work together to identify focal groups or communities through which we will explore these broad themes more deeply--e.g., the emergence of Latinx people as a highly consequential, racialized minority in the US context and the rise of Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

EFOP 3151 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Heather McCambly | Thursdays, 3:00 - 5:40 pm This course provides doctoral and advanced master's students with a general understanding of theory and its application to the study of higher education. This includes an overview of major paradigms, schools of thought, and theoretical frameworks commonly used in the study of higher education. Through an examination of both conceptual and empirical work, students gain an understanding of important theoretical bodies of knowledge and how to apply them to their scholarship and practice. The course has an interdisciplinary orientation, drawing on sociology, psychology, anthropology, gender studies, cultural studies, and race studies.

ENGFLM 2454 - The Marxist Legacies of Film History and Theory

Mark Lynn Anderson | Mondays, 6:00 - 9:50 pm The international cinema emerged during a moment when the political-economic analyses of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were already dramatically shaping world events. Not only would cinema document these transformations, but it would quickly be enlisted in various projects shaped by modern materialist understandings of social class, historical consciousness, imperialism, class struggle, revolution, and ideology. Moreover, Marxism provided the earliest theorists of moving images a productive means of describing and instantiating modernity itself as more or less commensurate with cinematic forms and practice. While it is now a commonplace to be amused by Eisenstein's desire to make Marx's *Das Capital* into a motion picture, such an ambition was in no way whimsical in the early to mid-twentieth century, when the cinema became one of the most contested sites of cultural politics across ideological and disciplinary spectrums. This seminar considers the indebtedness of film and media studies today to a long history of marxist thought and practice that remains inextricable from our histories of film and filmmaking. Readings and screenings will include key works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Eisenstein, Vertov, Luxemburg, Lukacs, Brecht, Kracauer, Benjamin, Cai, Ivens, Ferguson, Adorno, Arendt, Mao, Gramsci, Fanon, Solanas, Rocha, Marker, Godard, Sembene, Maldoror, Althusser, Ranciere, Negri, and Hardt.

ENGFLM 2464 - LOW LIGHT: NARRATIVE AESTHETICS OF FILMING DARKNESS

Triton Mobley | Wednesdays, 6:00 - 9:50 pm The creative practice of cinema has been described as "the art of light". So what value does extended sequences of filmed darkness have on cinema's visual storytelling? Within idealized conditions, cinema's luminous expressions of illusion can use color and volume of space to be transportive. From cinema's early experiments to construct storytelling, the filmic space brimmed with possibility to control the capture of light, either in abundance or to make it very small, enveloping audiences in a wash of light's absence and extending the film frame with variations of darkness. What French new wave reintroduced through developments in soft lighting, the dynamic range of industry tools today, have allowed for an expansion in practical lighting techniques that can bathe a scene and all of its relevant filmic architectural accouterments in projected blackness. How might the cinematics of filmed darkness create an alternative visual language(s) for constructing new narrative possibilities? What does the self-imposed restraint of an underexposed film frame do for matters of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and the subjective state of character development? Advancements in modern camera technologies have allowed for a new shift in cinema's experimentations with minimal light, implicating audiences submerged in a darkness that penetrates a new filmic architecture, obscuring image-depth-perception relationships disavowing the passive experience of film gazing. This extraction of light offers an expansion of the viewing experience through immersion and Brechtian disunity. This seminar works to negotiate new understandings and interpretations of this experimental period within 21st century cinema with a comprehensive catalogue of screenings from modern, contemporary, and art-based filmmakers. We will be guided by a collection of film scholarship across critical theory, media theory, film analysis, cultural studies, and selected excerpts from literary fiction. With a mixture of media scholarship and practical film experiments in production lighting and filming, the goal will be to draw new conclusions through critical analysis, producing informed challenges for the aesthetic evolutions in cinema today.

GSWS 2252 - Theories of Gender and Sexuality

David Tenorio | Tuesdays, 2:30 - 5:00 This course provides an overview of the formation, debates, and important trajectories of gender and sexuality studies, emphasizing foundational readings as well as emerging directions in scholarship. Gender and sexuality studies are interdisciplinary fields in conversation with not only feminist and queer theory but also across multiple forms of study and praxis. Engaging practices of knowledge production across a range of fields, students will work through some of the key moments, concepts, and frameworks shaping thinking/feeling about gender and sexuality even as they gain familiarity with the conversations, problems, and approaches reorienting gender

and sexuality studies now. The course also serves as a graduate level introduction to the skills and practices of reading, discussing, and writing in a variety of theoretical idioms.

HAA 2008 - CONSTELLATIONS OF ART HISTORY: Mediating Culture

This graduate seminar, offered within the Constellations of Art History structure in the Department of History of Art and Architecture, will consider the mass mediation of culture through the reproduction and circulation of its images. Readings will focus on the intersections between media studies and histories of art, architecture, design, film, television, and digital culture. Our consideration of the processes of mediation will encompass the systems of capitalist production and consumer culture by which works of art, broadly defined, reach their publics. As well as formative texts, such as the work of Walter Benjamin and Andre Malraux, we will read recent work by scholars including Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, Benoît Heilbrunn, Grant Farred, Diana Kamin, Janet Kraynak, and David Joselit. Student writing in the class will be directed towards considering how questions of mediation can extend the approaches in their own dissertation research.

HAA 2008 - CONSTELLATIONS OF ART HISTORY: Queer Art History Beyond European Hegemony

This graduate seminar addresses a latent dilemma in the discourse of LGBTQIA+ art produced outside the context of white Western hegemony: it is somehow both always present and ever emerging. We interrogate this dilemma by examining recent scholarship on nonwestern, nonwhite, and/or premodern gender and sexuality against seminal/seed texts in the Eurocentric tradition and beyond, with a particular focus on Eastern Eurasia. Themes and topics include text/image relations, gender and cosmology, trans and nonbinary histories, the history of medicine, and post- and de-colonial gender and sexuality studies. The reading list, a portion of which will be determined through participant input, is guided by the overarching question: what is global about queer art history? This seminar is open to graduate students working on any period or region. No prior knowledge of Eastern Eurasian art history is required or expected. Final projects may address any of HAA's Constellation themes, in addition to those primarily taken up here: Identity, Reparation, and Materiality.

HIST 2048 - Public History

Keila Grinberg | Wednesdays, 3:00 - 5:30 pm The course will introduce students to Public History's theory, methodology, and practice. Public History is the employment of professional historical methods by public and private agencies to engage communities in shaping the presentation of the past into usable histories. Through the course, students will be able to analyze how public historians and the Public collaborate to explain

individual and collective human behavior through various methods and mediums, such as digital projects and websites, historical scholarship, movies, TV series, games, memorials, monuments, museums, and tourism. Moreover, students will learn how Public Historians and the Public create and express historical meaning for their local, state, national, and global communities. This course will also take a “hands-on” and experiential approach to learning about Public History, in which students will be able to develop career development skills.

HPS 2117 - Women Philosophers

Paolo Palmieri | Tuesdays, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm This open-platform seminar questions the presence and absence of women philosophers in early modern Europe. The seminar is student-centered and promotes intellectual emancipation. Participants are welcome from all academic fields and perspectives. We will debate women philosophers and the role of visibility, oppression, seclusion, sexuality, violence, institutional racism, colonial prejudice, and gender in marking disciplinary boundaries within philosophy. Suggested examples of women in early modern philosophy and science include Virginia Galilei, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Margaret Cavendish, Emilie du Châtelet. Laura Bassi. Readings, writing and creative projects, punctuated silence, and colorful patterns of resistance are encouraged. There are no prerequisites.

MUS 2611 - The Politics and Aesthetics of Time

This seminar begins from the premise that one cannot engage a musical work, or form a thought, or even get through the day, without relying on some model or theory of time—of the temporal effects of agency, of the durations of moods, of speed, causality, intensity, boredom. We will explore how modern systems structure the apprehension of time: work, school, medicine and psychiatry (and experiences of illness, diagnosis, disability), nationality, coloniality, racialization, sexuality and gender, and more. Our aim will be to generate a sufficiently capacious picture of the temporal conditions underpinning modern life to be able to see how aesthetic experiences fit into and (perhaps) modify that picture. We will engage in close description and analysis of the unfolding experience of—among other forms—songs, albums, films, video-scrolling, sitcoms, musicals, operas, and novels, and ask how these interact with personal, political, and historical experiences of time. This seminar is open to those interested in thinking about how to incorporate analysis of time as a modality in their research projects; it is equally open to composers/artists who want a deeper theoretical grounding in time and wish to use the seminar as a way of experimenting with their engagement with time in their work.

THEA 2202: Immersive and Participatory Performances

Elizabeth Kurtzman | Mondays, 3:00 - 5:30 pm Using the concept of ‘immersion’ as a methodological lens, we will engage with theories of presence, participation, and space to consider how immersive sites serve as experience machines, producing not only entertainment, but also changing the way that audience members interact with performances and with creators. Over the course of the semester, we will discuss tourist sites, participatory performances, escape rooms, digital games and more to consider how the expectations of audiences change as attractions and even educational programs take on the label of immersive experience. How has the global tourism industry changed to meet the expectations of new generations? And how have these expectations shaped—and been shaped by—advancements in technology? We will delve into audience studies, as well as theories of affect and sensory alignment, to examine the ways in which participatory entertainment presents new—and very old—ways of engaging audiences mentally, physically, and emotionally. We will also delve into the ethics of these sites and the ways in which they exploit tragic histories, minoritarian communities, and vulnerable populations. Along the way, we will consider how audience interactions with media and entertainment sites are changing, and how our engagements with each other are shifting as a result.

Category C: Cultural Antagonisms and Cultural Crises

ITAL 2701 - SPECIAL TOPICS: The Media of Italian Colonialisms

Rachel Love | Wednesdays, 3:30 - 6:00 pm This course examines the texts, sights, and sounds of colonial conquest, anti-colonial activism, and postcolonial hybridities in Italy. In histories of European imperialism, the Italian occupations of Libya and East Africa draw little attention. Outside scholars and Italians themselves have described Italy's belatedness (to unification, to industrialization, to the colonial contest) relative to northern European nations. These very anxieties drove the violence of Italy's eventual colonial conquest, as well as the subsequent amnesia surrounding it. We will explore how Italian media produce imperial ideologies, as well as possibilities of transnational solidarities, resistance, and belonging by examining the cinema of empire under the Italian Republic and Fascism, the midcentury activist media surrounding the Algerian struggle for independence, and the twenty-first century literature, documentaries, and music of contemporary postcolonial Italy. Throughout the course, we will ask: What are the fantasies and anxieties engendered by the media of Italian colonialisms? How can we make transhistorical connections between Italy's imperial past, leftist desire for solidarity with decolonizing countries, and twenty-first century reckonings with mobility, and race, and identity? How can the Italian case aid and complicate our understanding of imperialism

and postcoloniality more broadly? Primary sources include films by Pastrone, Pontecorvo, Pasolini, and Garrone; novels by Flaiano, Farah, and Scego; alongside newsreels, works of testimony, and contemporary popular music. This course will be taught in English with supplementary materials available in Italian.

HIST 2515 - Democracy, Authoritarianism, and Human Rights in Modern Latin America

Laura Gotkowitz | Tuesdays, 3:00 - 5:30 This graduate seminar will explore the politics and culture of democracy, authoritarianism, human rights, and memory in modern Latin America. Focusing on a variety of countries, it will consider such topics as the experience of diverse sectors of society under democratic and authoritarian rule; movements for human rights; efforts to forge truth, justice, and reparations in the aftermath of authoritarianism; and struggles over competing ideals of democracy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

PHIL 2305 - Topics in Ethics

This course explores moments when ethical life is shaken by demands or social conditions that feel incomprehensible, alien, or even hostile. What do such experiences reveal about freedom and responsibility? How should we respond when we lose our moral bearings? In answering these questions, we will pay special attention to how disorientation, despair, and hope shape what it means to live and act well. Readings will be drawn from Sørensen, Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jonathan Lear, among others.

MUS 2280 - Music in Atlantic Revolutions (a section of Music, Art, and Conflict)

2026 is the 250th anniversary year of the American Revolution, and this course marks the occasion by exploring music's role in the multiple uprisings and revolutions that transformed the Atlantic world, from the 1760s through the 1820s. Whether by communicating news, mobilizing fighters, or shaping new publics, music and musicians were often directly involved in revolts (including captive peoples' revolts against enslavers) and revolutionary events. Music, sound, and sound materials also offer historical perspectives on revolutionary conflicts, and they held memory of these conflicts for later generations. Finally, music conveyed ideals of liberty, self-determination, and human dignity that were fundamental to this era's uprisings and continue to resonate today.

RUSS 2655 - Radical Bodies in Soviet and post-Soviet culture

Daniil Leiderman | Thursdays, 2:30 - 4:50 pm The class examines how the arts of the Soviet world tested the limits of the bodily. The Soviet world inherited the West's neoclassical fixation on idealized, ruined bodies as symbols of nostalgic longing for a lost

utopia. Through disembodiment and transhumanism, the Soviet avant-garde turned this legacy towards reckless utopianism, entangling the body with technology, challenging gender identity and the limits of sensory expansion, all for the radical prospect of new and better selves. A parallel and dominant Soviet legacy embraced bodily nostalgia, re-assembling the neoclassical ideal in the figure of the “Great Leader”. Both legacies remain alive in the culture of the Post-Soviet world, in regime propaganda and protest art alike. This course will explore the legacy of these experiments with the bodily in the Soviet and Post-Soviet world through a wide variety of artistic, literary, cinematic, and philosophical sources.

RUSS 2645 / FMST 2327 - New East Symposium

Nancy Condee | Day/time TBA Participants collaborate over four months to stage a post-semester, multi-day media event with two simultaneous components. First, the Cinema component trains participants in film rights acquisition, event introductions, screenings, and discussions; film writing (program notes, press releases, poster design); social-media dissemination; and logistics. Second, the Academic component, focusing on the REEES region (Russia, East Europe, and Eurasia), combines relevant theory assignments with a CFP (selection, shaping, implementation) to design the event’s two research panels, comprising national and international presenters, supported in part by major partner universities. By the semester’s end, participants are trained to organize an intellectual multi-day event in potential collaboration with Pittsburgh’s annual cycle of three local festivals.

THEA 2216 - Race as/and/is Theatre

Qianru Li | Wednesdays, 3:00 - 5:30 This doctoral seminar interrogates the complex intersections of race and theatre, asking how race is represented on stage, performed in everyday life, and enacted as theatre. Drawing on theatre studies, performance studies, and critical race theory, we will examine how theatrical forms have historically produced, contested, and reimagined racial identities. The course considers theatre not only as a space where racialized bodies are staged, but also as a set of practices through which race itself is theorized, rehearsed, and embodied. Readings will include theoretical texts, historical case studies, and contemporary performances that grapple with race as ideology, structure, and lived experience. Topics include minstrelsy and its legacies; Orientalism and yellowface; Indigenous performance and survivance; intersections of Black, Asian, Latinx, and Pacific Islander theatre; and theorizations of whiteness. Students will participate in seminar discussions, lead critical presentations, and develop original research projects that advance scholarly inquiries on race as/and/is theatre.

Category D: Designated Courses

PIA 2210 - Race, Gender, Law

Lisa Nelson | Tuesdays, 12:00 - 2:50 pm A legal and policy analysis of the treatment of gender and race in a historical context. Students will engage heavily with legal briefs, opinions and arguments.

PIA 2502 - Environmental Policy: Local & Global

Shanti Gamper-Rabindran | Tuesdays, 12:00 - 2:30

PIA 2552 - Global Health Policy

Shanti Gamper-Rabindran | Tuesdays, 9:00 - 11:50 am The Sustainable Development Goals prioritize investments in human health. We study policy instruments to support the innovation, access, and affordability of medicines and vaccines in developed and developing countries. These include pull mechanisms (e.g., advanced purchase commitments), push mechanisms (government funding for R&D), and public-private partnerships. We explore the national and international responses to COVID-19 to understand the need for and barriers to global pandemic preparedness. We explore how World Trade Organization provisions and bilateral agreements between US/EU and developing countries balance (or fail to) medical innovation with access and affordability to these innovations. We delve into policies to address the public health impacts of industrial agriculture that accelerates antibiotic resistance. We examine how international cooperation has assisted or hindered responses to existing challenges (e.g., addressing maternal/child mortality, AIDs, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, diarrheal diseases). Finally, we consider the global health challenges resulting from the climate emergency.

SOC 2341 - Social Movements

Suzanne Staggenborg | Mondays, 2:30 - 5:00 pm SOC 2341 course on Social Movements is organized by theoretical topics, such as recruitment to social movements or decline of activism, but some articles relevant to the women's movement and LGBTQ movement will be assigned and students can write papers dealing with these movements.