

**Unsettling Things:  
Expanding Conversations in  
Studies of the Material World**

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Bard Graduate Center

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Academic thinking has always been in active dialogue with changing social, cultural, and political contexts. Many current modes of scholarly thought, which are employed broadly across disciplines, emerged during the civil rights, social justice, and decolonization movements of the past half century. This course mobilizes recent and current efforts to expand academic perspectives as relevant to studies in decorative arts, design history, and material culture--three interdisciplinary fields that have long aimed to make the canon of traditional art history more inclusive. We will examine three important, and often interrelated, modes of fostering diversity in our fields: expanding topical contents and subjects for research; foregrounding previously marginalized voices and scholars; and engaging with existing or developing new approaches, theories, and methods that are widely applicable in the humanities.

The first half of the course introduces students to broad foundational currents in social sciences and the humanities (such as post-Marxism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism) and critical fields that both contributed to and emerged from them (including critical race theory; African American studies; Indigenous and settler colonial studies; feminism, gender studies, and intersectionality; queer theory; and disability theory). The second half features topical and thematic units that bring these academic perspectives to bear on both past and current cultural and material productions (topics may include monuments and the politics of memory; race, cultural property, and appropriation; global and alternative modernities/futurities; efforts to decenter whiteness and to decolonize academia, archives, and museums; oral history and empowering diverse voices; political ecology and environmental justice).

Weekly seminars will feature BGC faculty and fellows as well as outside guests, and will be structured around short presentations, dialogues, and conversations rather than lectures. Students will bring topics to the table and contribute to conversations. Assignments will include in-class presentations, literature reviews, and a project that applies the critical tools and perspectives to students' own research interests.

*Final digital projects will satisfy the digital literacy requirement. 3 Credits.*

## **Assignments and Grading Percentages:**

- 1. Participation [10%]:** attendance, reading preparation, conversation, break-out groups.
  - As a seminar, it is vital that you attend all classes having read all required selections, and that you contribute to conversation.
  - If you know you cannot attend a certain week, please contact us in advance. Beyond one absence, you will be asked to do a small make-up assignment. [Please consult the BGC's attendance policy in the Student Handbook]
  
- 2. Questions for class [10%]:** Please prepare 1 or 2 general questions each week (starting in week 2) from/about the readings, based on your previous engagement with related issues, about related current events, and/or geared toward visiting speakers.
  - Post these questions to the course site on your individual student page *by noon on the [date] before that class.*
  - NOTE: Auditors are required to do this one assignment.
  
- 3. Lecture responses [20%]:** Attend at least *two lectures or presentations*, outside of class, that are related somehow to the general themes of the course.  
[A selection of possible BGC events are listed on the course site]. For each, write a *one-page summary and personal response*, and post these to your student page on the course site.
  - *Due [date]* [but we encourage you to turn them in shortly after the events you attend].
  
- 4. Presentation [20%]:** Prepare one 10-min presentation for one session *in unit 3* on a topic of your choice related somehow to the theme of that day's session. The presentation, and class feedback, should help you prepare for the final project (see below).
  - Please sign up for a presentation slot [there are 2 per day] by adding your name to the course syllabus page for that week.
  - Select the specific topic for your presentation in consultation with faculty before Spring Break (**[date]**).
  
- 5. Final Project: Digital Resource Module [40%]:** Building on your presentation, develop a digital resource module about the same topic that could be used by professors, students, and/or interested members of the public (including secondary school teachers) to begin a teaching or research project. *See the course website for details.*
  - Proposal (an explanatory paragraph and short website outline) due **[date]**; final project due at the end of the semester, **[date]**
  - *NOTE: This assignment fulfills the digital project distribution requirement.*

## **Course Readings:**

The assigned and most of the "additional" readings will be posted on the course website and/ or will be available electronically elsewhere (e.g. Bard's Stevenson Library: <https://www.bard.edu/library/>)

# Unit I. Foundational Perspectives

## Post-Marxism

“Post-Marxism: Culture as the Problem of History”

### GUEST SPEAKER:

#### Required reading:

1. **Labriola, Antonio.** *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*. Chicago, IL: Charles Kerr and Company, 1908. Read pp. 216-230.
2. **Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno.** "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, 94–136. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002 [orig. 1944].
3. **Lefebvre, Henri.** *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1*. Translated by John Moore. New York, NY: Verso, 1991 [Orig. French ed. 1947]. Read *part of* Ch. 4 "The Development of Marxist Thought" (pp. 194-200 only) and all of Ch. 5 "Notes Written One Sunday in the French Countryside" (pp. 201-227).
4. **Althusser, Louis.**
  - A. *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York, NY: Verso, 2006 [orig. ed. 1965]. Read Appendix to "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (pp. 117-28) and "Marxism and Humanism" (pp. 227-31).
  - B. *Philosophy of the Encounter*. Translated by G. M. Goshgarian. New York, NY: Verso, 2006 [orig. 1978-87]. Read pp. 167-71 and 196-203.
5. **Hall, Stuart.** "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems." In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, 2-35. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005 [orig. 1980].

## Post-Structuralism

“Post-Structuralism: Power, Performance, and Practice”

Aaron and Meredith

#### Required reading:

1. **Foucault, Michel:**
  - A. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 2002 [orig. 1966]. Read the “Preface” (pp. xvi-xxvi) and selections from “Chapter 10: The Human Sciences” (pp. 375-80; 400-422).

B. "6: On Power," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, 96-109. London: Routledge, 1988.

2. **Bourdieu, Pierre:**

A. Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*. Oxford: Berg, 2007. Read selection from "A Brief History of Theory" (pp. 23-32).

B. *Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984 [orig. 1979]: Read "Introduction" (pp. 1-7) and "4: The Dynamics of the Fields" (226-56).

3. **Latour, Bruno.** *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005: "Third Source of Uncertainty: Objects Too Have Agency" (pp. 63-86).

4. **Butler, Judith.** "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, Dec., 1988, Vol. 40, No. 4: 519-531.

## Postcolonialism

"Postcolonialism: Race, Representation, and Resistance"

Meredith and Aaron

### Required reading:

1. **Fanon, Frantz.** *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 2008 [First English translation 1967, First French edition 1952]. Read: Introduction, Chapter 5, and Conclusion.

2. **Deloria, Vine Jr.** "Anthropologists and Other Friends." In *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 78-100. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988 (originally published 1969).

- Optional related: Floyd Red Crow Westerman "[Here Come The Anthros](#)" (1969)

3. **Said, Edward.**

A. "Introduction." In *Orientalism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

B. "Edward Said On Orientalism" (Interview). Media Education Foundation. Directed by Sut Jhally, 1998. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MYDEj4fIU>

4. **Spivak, Gayatri Chakrobari.** "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 66-111. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

5. **Bhabha, Homi.** *The Location of Culture*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994. Read "[The Commitment to Theory](#)" (18-28) and "[Of Mimicry and Men](#): The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse"(85-92)

# Unit II. Critical Voices

## Indigenous Studies

“Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and ‘Decolonizing’ Museums/Methods”

### GUEST SPEAKERS:

#### Required reading:

1. **Smith, Linda Tuhiwai**, “Introduction” in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books, 2004 [orig. 1999], (pp. 1-18).
2. **Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang**, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol.1, No. 1, 2012: 1-40.
3. **Rose, Wendy**, “I Expected My Skin and My Blood to Ripen” and “Three Thousand Dollar Death Song.” In *Nothing but the Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literature*, John Purdy and James Ruppert, eds. London: Pearson, 2000.
4. **Bowechop, Janine and Patricia Pierce Erikson**, "Forging Indigenous Methodologies on Cape Flattery: The Makah Museum as a Center of Collaborative Research," *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 29 No. 1 & 2 (Winter and Spring 2005): 263-273.
5. **Norby, Patricia**, "Art and Environmental Conflicts of Northern New Mexico: Colonization Aestheticized." MS of a chapter from *Water, Bones, and Bombs: Twentieth-Century Art and Environmental Conflicts in Northern New Mexico*, University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming (pp. 1-21).

## February 17: African American Studies

“African American Studies and the Atlantic World: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Perspectives”

### GUEST SPEAKER:

#### Required reading:

1. “**When We Gather**” (A multifaceted art project celebrating the historic achievement of the US’s first female Vice President, the women who came before her, and those who will follow. Co-produced and hosted by Nikki Greene). \*\*\*Watch by Feb 15th\*\*\*
2. **Spillers, Hortense**. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2(1987):64-81;
3. **Hartman, Saidiya**. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006), Prologue.

4. **Sharpe, Christina.** *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Read Chapter 1.
5. Five-Part short essay by **Joshua Besseches**
  - Part One: "Transforming Pain into Beauty: The Alchemy of María Magdalena Campos-Pons
  - Part Two: Early Life and Artistic Practice in Cuba
  - Part Three: Leaving Cuba for the North
  - Part Four: Recent Work—A New Phase
  - Part Five: Alchemy of the Soul: Elixir of the Gods
6. Short essay by **Esther Allen**, "Constellations in Sugar: On Alchemy of the Soul: María Magdalena Campos-Pons"

## Intersectional Feminism

"Redress and Reform: Intersectional Feminism in Fashion and Design"

### GUEST SPEAKER:

### Required reading:

1. **Crenshaw, Kimberlé.** "The Urgency of Intersectionality" TEDWomen, TED Talk, 2016 [19 min]
2. **Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall.** "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs*. 38, no. 4 (2013): 785-810.
3. **Buckley, Cheryl.** "Made in Patriarchy II: Researching (or Re-Searching) Women and Design." *Design Issues* 36, no.1(2020):19-29.
4. **Otto, Elizabeth.** *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics.* London, England: Herbert Press, 2019. Introduction and Chapter 3.
5. **Reddy-Best, Kelly L., Carmen Keist, Tameka N. Ellington, Nancy Diehl, and Michael Mamp.** "Scholars' Roundtable Presentation: Do We Study Diversity in Dress." *Dress* 46, no. 2 (2020):141-57.

## Queer Theory/Disability Theory

"Decentering 'The Normal': Queer Theory and Disability Theory"

### GUEST SPEAKER:

## Required reading:

1. **Adams, Rachel, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin.** "Disability." In *Keywords for Disability Studies*. New York: NYU Press, 2015, pp. 5-11.
2. "Examined Life": **Judith Butler & Sunaura Taylor** (2008 film, 15min. clip) [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_N84BffPcM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_N84BffPcM)]
3. **Elizabeth Guffey.** "1. Origins of a Misfit Design: The Advent of the Modern Wheelchair (–1945)." In *Designing Disability: Symbols, Space, and Society*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 15-43.
4. **Muñoz, José Esteban.** "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 8:2 (1996): 5-16.
5. **McRuer, Robert.** "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence." In Lennard J. Davis, ed. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 88-99.

Spring Break]

## Unit III. Current Topics/Approaches

### Decentering Whiteness

"Decentering Whiteness in the Art History & Archaeology of Europe & the Mediterranean"

#### GUEST SPEAKER:

#### Required Reading:

1. **Tanner, Jeremy.** "Race and Representation in Ancient Art: Black Athena and after." In *The Image of the Black in Western Art, volume 1: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, edited by D. Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., 1-39. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
2. **Rose-Greenland, Fiona.** "Color Perception in Sociology: Materiality and Authenticity at the 'Gods in Color' Show." *Sociological Theory* 34, no. 2 (2016):81–105.
3. **"Gods in Color: Polychromy in Antiquity"** ("Digital for the Exhibition"). Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt, Germany. Accessed January 15, 2021. <https://buntegoetter.liebieghaus.de/en/>.
4. **Fostiridou, A., I. Karapanagiotis, S. Vivdenko, D. Lampakis, D. Mantzouris, L. Achilara, and P. Manoudis.** "Identification of Pigments in Hellenistic and Roman Funeral Figurines." *Archaeometry* 58, no. 3 (2016): 453–64.

5. **Simons, Patricia.** “Black Women in Italian Renaissance Art & in Modern Whitewashing.” The Josephine von Henneberg Lecture in Italian Art, Boston College, 15 October, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-T2HdUSyn4&t=3957s>.

## After “Orientalism”

“Post-Orientalism in Islamic and Chinese Art History”

### GUEST SPEAKER:

#### Required Reading:

1. **Clunas, Craig.** *Art in China*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997. *Read only 9-19*.
2. **Faure, Bernard.** “The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze,” in *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): 768-813, *read only 768-782*.
3. **Watenpaugh, Heghnar Z.** “Resonance and Circulation.” In *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, edited by Finbarr Barry Flood and Gulru Necipoğlu, 1223- 1224. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017.
4. **Liu, Yu-Jen.** “Stealing Words, Transplanting Images: Stephen Bushell and the Intercultural Articulation of “Chinese Art” in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Archives of Asian Art* 68, no. 2 (October 2018): 191-214.
5. **Shaw, Wendy K.** “From Islamic Art to Perceptual Culture.” In *What is 'Islamic' Art?: Between Religion and Perception*, 1-32. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

## Alternative Modernities: Oceania

“Oceania: Indigenous Voices”

### GUEST SPEAKER:

#### Required Reading:

1. **Hau‘ofa, Epeli.** “Our Sea of Islands.” In *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*, 27-40. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008.
2. **Kabutaulaka, Tarcisius.** “Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and Melanesian Alter-Natives.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 27, no. 1 (2015):110-145.
3. **Nuku, Maia.** *Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia*. *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (2019).
4. **Nuku, George and Rosanna Raymond** (Interview.) “Body Arts: Tatau and Ta Moko,” Pitt Rivers Museum, <https://vimeo.com/63826843>



5. **Dan Lin & Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner**, “Anointed” (6 min.) Acclaimed poet and activist, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, explores the nuclear testing legacy of the Marshall Islands through the legends and stories of Runit Island.

## On Monuments

[DUE: Final Project Proposal]

“On Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory”

**GUEST SPEAKER:**

**Required reading:**

1. **Robert Musil**, “Monuments,” from the section “Ill-Tempered Observations” in *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* [originally written 1927; first published in Zurich as *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten* in 1936; trans from the German by Peter Wortsman in an edition first published in Hygiene, Colorado, by Eridanos Press, 1987]
2. **Kirk Savage**, “The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 127-149.
3. **Jeffrey Collins**, “Non Tenuis Gloria: The Quirinal Obelisk from Theory to Practice,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 42 (1997), pp. 187-245.
4. **Lynne Hunt**, “Hercules and the Radical Image in the French Revolution,” *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983), pp. 95-117.

## Narrative, Storytelling, Oral History

“Collective Memory, Colonialism, and the Struggle to Know Who We Are”

**GUEST SPEAKER:**

**Required reading:**

1. **Portelli, Alessandro**. “What Makes Oral History Different.” In *The Oral History Reader*, Third Edition, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 48-58. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.
2. **Sinclair, Murray**. “Education: Cause & Solution.” *The Manitoba Teacher* 93, no. 3 (2014): 6–10.
3. **Sinclair, Sarah**. “Introduction.” In *How We Go Home: Voices from Indigenous North America*, edited by Sarah Sinclair, 1-10. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2020.

4. **Hemmers, Ashley.** “I didn’t work my ass off to get to Yale to be called a squaw.” In *How We Go Home: Voices from Indigenous North America*, edited by Sarah Sinclair, 113-134. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2020.
5. **Ali, Zaheer** (Interviewed by Julie Golia). “Muslims in Brooklyn.” In *Beyond Geographies: Contemporary Art and Muslim Experience* (Catalog), 14-17 ONLY. Brooklyn: BRIC, 2019.
6. An Opening: An Art and Sound Installation by **Kameelah Janan Rasheed** at Brooklyn Historical Society (Video Preview, 1 min 26 sec)

## [Make Up Week]: **Final Meeting**

Final Project Presentation, Course Reflections, student-suggested topics

## [Reading Week]:

## [Finals Week]:

Final Assignments Due