Introduction

This writing seminar will explore the implications of making the new from the ready-made, of constructing one’s own from what was—and remains—somebody else’s. Collage aims at reintegrating art and life, so we will examine collage works that comment on existing society, critique its values and forms of representation and demand their revision. By selecting heterogeneous elements from remote areas of culture, high and low, and juxtaposing them on a single plane, collage disrupts conventional associations and traditional narratives, collapses oppositions, scrambles classifications, and levels hierarchies. What new meanings do the fragments and quotations acquire from these radical juxtapositions, and how does their assemblage contest the mythologies of the culture from which they were taken? The class will consist of several case studies in visual and verbal collage placed in relation to a set of political and aesthetic ideas, which we will derive from a series of theoretical texts.

Course Objectives

- To construct original critical arguments, grounded in specific textual and visual evidence, and develop them through a series of questions
- To closely read (describe and interpret) artworks in multiple mediums: painting, photography, poetry, and prose
- To explore a central principle of modern aesthetics: the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials and elements extracted from prior wholes and reassembled into new discontinuous compositions
Writing

Over the course of the semester, you will write three essays.

1. *The art-critical essay* (4-5 pages) will be a detailed analysis of a collage work of your choice. Your tasks will be (1) to *present* the salient *components* of the work as well as the way in which they are *organized or arranged* and (2) to *make an argument* about the relationship(s) between the discrete elements and the work as a whole. To make this argument, you will need to discuss the nature of the individual pieces: their material properties (what they are made of), their origins (where they come from), their significance (what they mean). And you will need to explore the relations the work establishes between them: how they complement, repeat, parallel, or contradict each other.

2. *The point-of-view essay* (4-5 pages) will interpret a collage work from one (or more) of the perspectives presented in our critical texts. You will need to formulate an *interpretive question* that the work invites and then answer it from the point of view of one of our authors. As you present the question, you will need to explain both how the question is relevant to the object and why the question matters at all—its stakes.

3. *The literary-critical essay* (6-8 pages) will interpret a work of literature that makes use of collage techniques—a literary collage work. It will combine *close readings* of quotations with explanations of their role in the text as a whole. Here you will make use of all the techniques you worked on in the previous essays: identify significant details, pose interpretive questions, and use at least one of the ideas or theories of collage we’ve encountered to interpret the text.

You will be writing drafts for all three essays (at least one for each), drafts which I will read but not grade. I invite—and strongly encourage—you to make an appointment with me to discuss each of your drafts. We will also workshop them in class, when you will have a chance to get feedback from your classmates and to offer yours in return. These workshops will be a key part of the course, so plan on having drafts done on time and ready to be worked through. Please be ready to share your work on other occasions as well; throughout the semester, I will be asking you to read your writing aloud in class or circulate it in small, informal groups.

Additionally, I will assign several writing exercises, to be done at home, in preparation for class discussions, essay drafting, and workshops. I may not always collect them, but you will often be sharing them in class and sometimes posting them to NYU Classes. Your work on these exercises will figure into your participation grade.

Readings
Many of our texts will interpret collage works through their formal elements as well as through their art-historical, philosophical, and social contexts. In addition to analyzing specific works, they will also offer, either explicitly or implicitly, justification or explanation for the kinds of innovations in aesthetic form and content that collage represents — justifications aesthetic and political, formal and social. While most will address collage specifically, a few will not, but will provide you with the background and conceptual models crucial for making sense of modern “experimental” art and literature. These critical essays will be playing a dual role in the class: as well as sources of ideas and arguments, they will serve as possible models for your own writing. We will also read two literary collage-works.

In addition to the required readings, I encourage you to follow up whatever topics, authors, or texts particularly interest you. You could do this by looking up background information, searching for criticism, or getting further reading recommendations from me or your classmates.

This course is a seminar, so your regular, active participation in our discussions is crucial. I will expect you to come to class prepared with questions and comments on the day’s reading.

**Grading**

I will base your grade on your class participation, the quality of your essays, and your responses to the work of others, both written and oral. Each draft of your essay matters (though it will not get a separate grade). Presentation (i.e. grammar, proof-reading, MLA format) as well as style and substance counts.

Anticipated breakdown of graded assignments:

Art-critical essay: 25%
Point-of-view essay: 25%
Literary-critical essay: 25%
Participation: 25%

**Attendance**

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please be in touch with me directly as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for the next class. Please be aware that more than two unexcused absences will jeopardize your course grade.

**Academic Integrity**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists
and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Required Texts

You can buy our books at the NYU Bookstore. All other readings will be posted throughout the semester to the Resources folder of our NYU Classes site. Please print these out and bring hard copies to class.


Trips

If there is time, we may go on two field trips. If not, I will suggest that you take them yourselves, at your leisure. One may be to MoMA (the Museum of Modern Art), where you will have a chance to see firsthand a lot of the twentieth-century art relevant to our topic. The other would be to Anthology Film Archives, the cinema-museum that regularly screens classic and contemporary avant-garde films.

Schedule

1. **Texts and Textures**

Week 1

Wed, Sep 2
- Introduction
- In-class reading: Charles Bernstein and Susan B. Laufer, “Style” (1978)
- In-class writing: noticing
- Discussion: received ideas

Week 2

Mon, Sep 7: Labor Day
Wed, Sep 9
- Reading: Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (1968); Viktor Shklovsky, “Regarding Texture and Counter-Reliefs” (from Knight’s Move [1923], pp. 65-68)
- Writing exercise: argument distillation
- Discussion: the meaning of originality; perceivable form (texture)

II. Pasting Papers: Cubism

Week 3

Mon, Sep 14; Wed, Sep 16
- Reading: John Berger, “The Moment of Cubism” (1985); Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Texture: collage (paper-pasting)” (from Cubism and Abstract Art [1936], pp. 77-82)
- Discussion: the relation between art and society; art history as the history of “metaphorical models” for art; correspondence between a society’s metaphor for art and its worldview (i.e. its conception of the self’s relation to the world)

Week 4

Mon, Sep 21; Wed, Sep 23
- Reading: Rosalind Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso” (from The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths [1985], pp. 23-40): focus on close reading of Picasso’s Still Life with Violin and Fruit, pp. 35-38; Marjorie Perloff, “The Invention of Collage” (from The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture [1986], pp. 44-79): focus on close reading of Picasso’s Still Life with Violin and Fruit, pp. 48-51.
- Group work/presentations: case-study in art criticism: comparing Krauss’s and Perloff’s close readings of Picasso’s Still Life with Violin and Fruit (1912)

Week 5

Mon, Sep 28; Wed, Sep 30
- Group work/presentations: comparative close readings of Cubist works: comparing analytic cubism with papiers collés

Week 6

Mon, Oct 5; Wed, Oct 7
- Reading: Fernand Léger, “Ballet Mécanique” (1924)
- Ballet Mécanique (film; dir. Fernand Léger [1924])
- Discussion: the machine and the human; use and misuse
- Draft of art-critical essay due (Wed)
- Workshop

III. Cutting Pictures: Photomontage

Week 7

Mon, Oct 12: Fall Break

Tue, Oct 13 (Legislative Day: classes meet on a Monday schedule)
- Reading: Dawn Ades, Photomontage (1986): Introduction (pp 7-17);
Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde (1974): ch. 4 (pp. 55-82):
focus on “Montage,” pp. 73-82
- Discussion: the mass-produced image; defining the avant-garde
artwork: binary oppositions (in Ades and Bürger)

Wed, Oct 14
- Discussion: defining the avant-garde artwork: organic vs. inorganic
(Bürger)

Week 8

Mon, Oct 19; Wed, Oct 21
- Group work/presentations: photomontage then and now: comparing a
Dadaist work of photomontage with a contemporary one
- Discussion: the politics of fragmentation; seeing (and not seeing) the
seams
- Art-critical essay due (Wed)

Week 9

Mon, Oct 26; Wed, Oct 28
- Reading: Jorge Daniel Veneciano, “Louis Armstrong, Bricolage, and
the Aesthetics of Swing” (2004)
- Writing exercise: reverse outline: questions, points of view, answers
- Discussion: what is bricolage?; swing and the avant-garde

IV. Fragments, Ruins, Voices: Collage Poetry

Week 10

Mon, Nov 2; Wed, Nov 4
- Reading: T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land (1922)
Writing exercise: selecting and describing a passage (form, rhetoric, theme)
Group work/discussion: juxtapositions, junctures, cuts

Week 11

Mon, Nov 9; Wed, Nov 11
- Writing exercise/discussion: case study in literary criticism: comparing Brooks and Rainey on The Waste Land
- Draft of point-of-view essay due (Wed)
- Workshop

Week 12

Mon, Nov 16; Wed, Nov 18
- Reading: Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951)
- Group work/discussion: tracking a motif (theme)

Week 13

Mon, Nov 23
- Reading: Montage of a Dream Deferred (continued)
- Writing exercise: close reading: rhyme, rhythm
- Discussion: the relation between form (rhyme, rhythm) and theme; syncopation: reversal of expectation (going off-beat)
- Point-of-view essay due

Wed, Nov 25: Thanksgiving Recess

V. Reuse and Misuse: Punk

Week 14

Mon, Nov 30; Wed, Dec 2
- Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979): ch. 7 (pp. 100-112)
- Writing exercise/discussion: defining style: subculture vs. mainstream culture; what is punk style?

Week 15

Mon, Dec 7; Wed, Dec 9
- Group work/presentations: contemporary subcultures
- Discussion: subculture today
- **Draft of literary-critical essay due (Wed)**
  - Workshop

**Mon, Dec 14**
- Discussion: collage today

**Mon, Dec 21**
- **Literary-critical essay due** (by email as a Word document)