

Honors 290 | The Art of Stealing
T/Th 10:00am-1:00pm
W-1-037

Instructors

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The Art of Stealing

About/Course Description & Goals

This course will examine the literary avant-garde, new media and digital cultures in order to frame discussions of (and our own experiments with) hacking, genre hybridity, community and identity formation, appropriation and authenticity, and participatory cultures. We'll explore how 20th century experimental movements like Dada, Surrealism and Oulipo inform the contemporary digital-cultural landscape in things like photoshopped collages, memes, and mashups. We'll look at 21st century literary arts movements like Flarf and Conceptual Writing to guide our own practices of appropriative creative production in our information-overload age. We'll explore plagiarism, intellectual property, and open-source information building and creation while thinking about collaborative artistic production and collective action (for example in social networks). This is a reading and production course, meaning that our discussions and readings will inform creative practices and experiments, leading up to a final creative project with a critical framework.

Course Requirements & Policies

Grading Structure

Attendance & Participation - 50%
Assignments - 50%

Attendance & Participation

No unexcused absences. Late more than 15 minutes will count as an absence. Since this is a condensed semester (each class is the equivalent of one week of a normal semester), missing more than one class will result in losing a full letter grade. I.e. if you miss two classes, the highest grade you can get is a B; if you miss three classes, the highest grade you can get is a C, and so on. You are responsible for contacting us or a class member if you miss a class, and you are expected to be fully prepared for the next class session.

Your participation grade will also reflect the quality and thoughtfulness of your contribution in class, respect shown to class members, your attitude and role in small group exercises, and evidence of completion of reading assignments. Please remember, then, that ALL in-class discussions and exercises

assume (and depend upon) you reading the assigned material. Review the online syllabus frequently, and plan your workload accordingly.

If you have a mobile computing device (laptop, tablet, smart phone) please bring it to class and be prepared to use it, appropriately.

Assignments

1. Reading Responses

Each week you will be expected to post to the blog one reading response and one substantive comment on one of your peers' posts. Reading response posts must be made for the week by Friday at 7PM. Comments on that week's reading response posts must be made by Monday at 7PM.

You have several options for constructing your responses.

- "Traditional" reading responses, like you might write for a standard literature course, directly engage with the reading, offering critical responses, inquiry, questions, and thoughts related to the reading. These are not research papers. They are generally 300-500 words, and can be longer (but not shorter). These follow "traditional" academic guidelines (i.e. citing sources according to MLA citation rules, indicating quotation using quotation marks, standardized academic grammar and spelling, etc.).
- Creative appropriative or generative responses. If you feel so inclined, you can use any of the tools or modes we cover, and probably a number of others that we don't, to create an appropriative creative response a text. You could, for example, create a mash-up of texts, write an erasure of a text, remix an album, sample a video, create a collage, make a parody, etc. You can also create an "original" creative response to a text. If you do either, you must also briefly write about your concept.
- New-media/syncretic reading response. You can, if you like, create a reading response that fully takes advantage of the blog medium, mixing critical response of a more traditional way, with embedded media as sources to build a constellation of critical thinking about a particular issue.

2. Creative Assignments

Each week we'll be experimenting with creative work in the mode we've discussed that week. These projects will all have specific guidelines posted about them on the blog.

3. Collage Journal

You will create over the course of a class your own *Arcades Project*-like journal. Start with a brand-new notebook, or a dedicated digital document (a Word document, for example, or your own dedicated website, or a file folder). Throughout our semester, collect any quotes, images, music, video, that you like. These do not have to be just from our class texts - pull from anything that crosses your mind during the course of our class. Make sure to record citations (including URLs for any web-based sources). Consider "tagging"

entries with keywords for cross-referencing. At the end of our semester, turn the journal in to us. It will be returned, of course.

Please note we will not accept late work, unless prior arrangement has been made. Late work will automatically receive a 0.

We are always delighted to meet with students. Please contact us (Erica prefers text messages, make sure to say your name in the message though! Matt prefers Twitter) to schedule an appointment.

Non-Discrimination

Our class will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, or political beliefs. Anyone who does engage in any of these forms of discrimination will be asked to leave the class.

Disability

If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center (Campus Center Upper Level Room 211) at 617.287.7430. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to us a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs be addressed.

Plagiarism

For the creative work, you're going to have to try very, very hard if you want to get in trouble for plagiarism. The whole point of this class is to steal, adapt, remix, and otherwise appropriate other people's stuff. That said, there is a line (it has to do with turning in something that involves almost no modification of source material on your part, or no conceptual framework), and you can cross it, and if you do, you fail the assignment, maybe the class, plus other bad stuff will happen to you. If you have an idea for a creative assignment, and you don't know if it crosses the line into plagiarism, talk to us about it. Ahead of time.

For the traditional responses, plagiarism is just like normal. You quote somebody without citing – plagiarism. You paste from Wikipedia or whatever – plagiarism. You already know this.

Daily Schedule

This is a tentative daily schedule, subject to updating and revision. For final assignments, readings, and schedule please check the course website www.artofstealing.wordpress.com

Week 1 | Early Avant-Gardes & Collage

Tu. 5/28

Assignments for Next Class

- [“The Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin](#)
- [“Collage: Diversions, Contradictions and Anomalies”](#) by Sally O'Reilly (*Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*)
- [“L – Collage”](#) from *Reality Hunger* by David Shields
- [“Why Appropriation”](#) from *Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith

Th. 5/30:

Assignments for Next Class

- “Convolutés” from [Arcades Project by Walter Benjamin](#) (glance through it, read a little, spend about 30 minutes)
- “[Introduction](#)” from *Unoriginal Genius* by Marjorie Perloff
- “[Dada Dialectics](#)” from *Collage: The Making of Modern Art*
- [Ways of Seeing by John Berger](#) (watch all four episodes)
- **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: MAKE A COLLAGE**
 - ...In whichever medium you prefer (still image, moving image, audio, text) or juxtaposing more than one medium. Write 300 (minimum) words on your concept, process, and whether or not you think you’ve created something “original.” (Feel free to argue about what original means – that’s what we’re here for!). Post these to the blog.

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Week 2 | Mid-Century & Erasure

Tu. 6/4

Assignments for Next Class

- “[A User’s Guide to Detournment](#)” & “[A Theory of Derive](#)” by Guy Debord (re: Situationist International)
- [Shorter American Memory](#) by Rosmarie Waldrop (re: Detournment; Oulipo)
- [A Humument](#) by Tom Phillips (on reserve at Honors) (version 1 on the web gallery)
- [Radi Os](#) by Ronald Johnson (excerpt) (optional)

Th. 6/6

Assignments for Next Class

- [A Humument](#) by Tom Phillips (on reserve at Honors)
- from [Voyager](#) by Srikanth Reddy (pages 1-59; pages 115-129) Look at tiny.cc/voyagermethod
- [A Little White Shadow](#) by Mary Ruffle
- from *Nets* by Jen Bervin (excerpt in [Against Expression](#), p. 110)
- from [The Memory Screen Notebooks](#) by Alan Halsey
- Listen: [Language Removal Services](#)
- “[Anticipating Instability](#)” & “[Revenge of the Text](#)” from *Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith
- **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: CREATE AN ERASURE**
 - You must use the text from [Pride and Prejudice](#) starting with chapter 47 and ending with the last word of chapter 49. The erasure should be at least 5 pages with the textual density of Ronald Johnson’s *Radi Os*. It can be longer and less dense, or shorter and denser, or both longer and denser, but not shorter and less dense. Unless you have a really good reason for it, in your artist’s statement.
 - You may do this digitally, or by printing it out, or acquiring a copy of the book which you manipulate. Please make sure you post your erasure as either text or an image to the blog before class Tuesday morning. If you make a physical erasure, please bring it to class to show us as well as posting it to the blog. If you are having trouble posting to the blog, text me for help before Tuesday morning. I won’t accept late assignments.

- You should accompany your erasure with a short (300 words or so) artist's statement discussing your process (what choices did you consider, and how did you make them), and your goals with the work.

Week Three | Conceptual Art

Tu. 6/11

Assignments for Next Class

- "[Introduction](#)" and "[Infallible Processes](#)" from *Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith
- "[Towards a Conceptual Lyric](#)" by Marjorie Perloff
- Watch: [Sucking on Words](#) (optional, but pretty fun)
- [Paragraphs on Conceptual Art by Sol LeWitt](#)
- On an index card, write a "recipe" for drawing a picture of your choice i.e. How to draw a house with wheels, or How to make a grid with 24 squares and 5 filled in red. The instructions should be step by step and detailed. Please make sure this is something at least plausible to do in-class on Thursday (i.e. on an index-card sized paper, with pen and/or pencil). If it requires special tools (i.e. a purple pen) you may bring those tools.

Th. 6/13

Assignments for Next Class

- "[Towards A Poetics of Hyperrealism](#)" from *Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith
- [Seven American Deaths and Disasters](#) by Kenneth Goldsmith (excerpt)
- "[Identity Theft](#)" by Robert Fitterman
- "[This Window Makes Me Feel](#)" by Robert Fitterman (excerpt – read from beginning through p. 25)
- from [Against Expression](#):
Your Country is Great by Ara Shirinyan
Day by Kenneth Goldsmith
- [Statement of Facts](#) by Vanessa Place (excerpt – read from beginning through p. 21)
- **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: CREATE A CONCEPTUAL WORK**
 - Remember: the idea is the work of art.
 - Your assignment is to come up with a work of conceptual art. This can be literary art (writing, like any of the readings for this weekend), visual art (like the Sol Lewitt, Yoko Ono, Andy Warhol etc. works we talked about: painting, photography, sculpture, film, etc.), music (like the John Cage work we talked about), or performance-based art (like the Ken Tanaka video we watched). You do not need to execute this concept. The concept does not necessarily need to be executable. You may execute the concept, or engage someone else to execute the concept and document their execution of the concept and turn that in as well as the concept, but focus on the concept.
 - The concept must be documented in writing. The documentation should be sufficient for anyone to reproduce (theoretically, if it is an impossible concept) the work.
 - For this project there are no minimum word-lengths for the documentation. You do not need to compose an additional artist statement as you have previously, though you can if you think it is necessary or helpful for understanding the project or discussing it in class on Tuesday.

- Please feel free to text me with any questions. And remember, the idea is the work of art. Most of this project happens in your mind.

Week Four | Audio: Remix and Mashup

Tu. 6/18

Assignments for Next Class

- Ch. 4 from [Remix](#) by Lawrence Lessig.
- Read [Remix Defined](#).
- Critically listen to some of Public Enemy's [Fear of a Black Planet](#).
- Critically listen to some of DJ Earworm – [United States of Pop 2012](#).
- Critically listen to some of GirlTalk – [All Day](#)
- Watch this [interview with GirlTalk](#)

Th. 6/20

Assignments for Next Class

- Find at least two things on the internet that strike you as relevant to our class. Come to class ready to share them (having previously posted the links on the blog, or tweeted them with the #stealart hashtag).
- Watch [RIP: A Remixing Manifesto](#)
- [A Brief History of Remix Video](#)
- Read [Free Culture](#) (PDF download) – Introduction, ch1, ch2 & ch4
- **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: MAKE A REMIX – Due June 27**



Week Five | Remix into Free/Open Source Culture

Tu. 6/25

Assignments for Next Class

- Read [Introduction](#) in the Social Media Reader
- Read ch1 [The People Formerly Knows as the Audience](#) in the Social Media Reader
- [Free Culture](#) (PDF download) – ch9
- Glance through [The Philosophy of Decomposition](#) by Michael Leong (poetry mash-up of Gertrude Stein and Edgar Allen Poe) (optional)

Th. 6/27

Assignments for Next Class

- Watch [Secret History of Hacking](#)
- Read ch3 [Open Source as Culture/Culture as Open Source](#) in the Social Media Reader
- Read ch8 [Phreaks, hackers, and Trolls: The Politics of Transgression and Spectacle in the Social Media Reader](#)

Week Six | The Open Web, Open Source Software, Programming, Gaming

Tu. 7/2

Assignments for Next Class

- [Yes Men Save the World](#)
- [The Corporation](#)
- Adbusters – [The Production of Meaning](#)
- Ch.9 [The Language of Internet Memes](#)
- [Anonymity as Culture: A Treatise](#)
- **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: CULTURE JAMMING**
 - Pick a target (usually institutional, corporation, a church, an organization)
 - Come up with an IDEA for disrupting/disturbing their world/business/environment. (You do not have to execute this, so scale should be no obstacle, but it must remain in the realm of possibility, in other words even if you couldn't do it, it should be feasible to do.)
 - Detail the execution of your idea. This should read like a blueprint, or outline of actions and imagined results of these actions.
 - Reflect critically/creatively on your plan (the plan is the hows, this should answer the whys).

Th. 7/4 – No class. Happy Independence Day!



Week Seven | Memes & Internet Culture

Tu. 7/9

Assignments for Next Class

- Make your own memes. Post to blog.
- Come prepared to discuss the best practices/ethics of appropriation.
- Bring collage journal to final class.
- **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: MEMES!**
 - 1. Flarf Poem
 - Write a flarf poem. Choose a source (a place on the internet: Youtube comments, Amazon product reviews, your spam folder, Yahoo answers, 4chan, Reddit, etc.). Choose a search term or terms (this can be, but doesn't have to be, meme-related, i.e. cheeseburger & cat) (i.e. "diabetic & bitch" or "evil & monkey" or "emo"). Search your source with your term, and collect the ones you think of as being the most interesting based on a given selection principle (i.e. worst, most offensive, funniest, worst spelled, etc.). Collage them together with a little or no manipulation to create a flarf poem. Post this to the blog and be prepared to read it in class Thursday.

OR

- 2. Meme Project
- Pick a meme you find interesting (i.e. LOLcats, Advice Puppy, etc.) and participate in it by creating one (propagating it). Think about and prepare to present what makes the meme work (how it functions) and where it came from. Post the meme and your explanation to the blog.

Th. 7/11 – Last Class!