"Nature has wisely provided an aristocracy of virtue and talent for the direction of the interest of society, and scattered it with equal hand through all its conditions." – Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 1821.

REQUIRED READINGS

ADDITIONAL READINGS WILL BE ADDED AS THE COURSE PROGRESSES

ALL READINGS WILL BE PROVIDED AS WORD DOCUMENTS OR MADE AVAILABLE ON ELECTRONIC RESERVE

EACH READING MUST BE PRINTED OUT AND A COPY BROUGHT TO CLASS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Through a broad range of readings and other media, "Democracy & Art" will explore the following questions: On what basis do we judge a work of art good or bad? Where do our standards of artistic excellence come from? Is artistic excellence an aristocratic value, or is there a democratic version of it? Are some art practices more inherently democratic than others? How do the ideologically based "people's art" of totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany compare with American-style popular culture? Are the electronic media good or bad for the arts?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

READING NOTES

To promote a fruitful discussion, you are required by 4 PM EACH SUNDAY to email me 1-2 pages of single-spaced notes on the reading to be discussed in class that evening. (If you must write longer,

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1 To access E-Reserve readings, go to the Holmes Library Catalog and click "Course Reserves," then search for the course number, HP260.0 (don't forget the period). The readings will come up in alphabetical order, not the order in which they are assigned. Be careful to check the title as well as the author, since some authors are listed more than once.
try to be concise.) The most reliable method is to write notes as a document, so you can save them, and then to email them to me as either an attachment or an email message. I KNOW THIS IS THE ERA OF FACEBOOK AND TWEETING, BUT THIS COURSE REQUIRES THE REGULAR USE OF EMAIL.

By “notes” I mean a serious effort to wrestle with the substance of the reading in response to questions provided by me. I do not mean free association between minor aspects of the reading and other topics you find more congenial to ponder. We will relate the reading to the larger themes of the course, but this is possible only after grasping the substance.

The style can be informal. Use the first person and casual language if it aids understanding. Quote the reading but not at length. Find your own words, but make sure you proofread the text. Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and mechanics will be marked down. The notes will be graded and handed back after each class.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION
I will take attendance and mark down for tardiness and absence.

FINAL EXAM
The final will be take-home and involve writing short formal essays on assigned questions. You may quote the readings, but only briefly. The essays must be proofread, typed, and double-spaced, with proper citations for all quotations and references. Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and mechanics will be marked down. You should use your reading notes as a study aid and reference for the exam, but do not reproduce them as a substitute for answering the exam questions. I will consider that plagiarism.

ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST BE HANDED IN ON TIME. I do not give extensions except under unavoidable circumstances. Late papers not given an extension will be penalized one grade level per 12-hour period. That means if an “A” paper due at 4 PM misses the deadline but comes in before 6 AM, it will be graded “A minus.” If it comes in before 4 PM the next day, it will be graded “B plus.” And so on.

I take very seriously academic integrity and intellectual property rights. Cheating, plagiarism, and misuse of sources will result in a failing grade and referral to the dean of students. For more information on the College’s policies, see:
http://www.bc.edu/bc-org/avp/enmg/stserv/acd/univ.html#integrity

GRADES WILL BE BASED ON:

50% Notes on reading
25% Attendance, participation
25% Final take-home exam
SYLLABUS

CLASS 1 / September 10: Introduction

CLASS 2 / September 17: Democratic Culture and “Mass Society”

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, SEPT. 16

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America,
Volume Two, Part I, chapters 9-19, pp. 454-493

Edward Shils, “Mass Society and Its Culture”
in Rosenberg and White, Mass Culture Revisited

CLASS 3 / September 24: Foundational Ideas: Music and Mimesis

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, SEPT. 23

Plato, selections from Republic, Books III and X,
in Hofstader and Kuhn, pp. 24-45

Aristotle, selections from Politics and Poetics,
in Hofstader and Kuhn, pp. 131-139 and 97-106

CLASS 4 / October 1: Foundational Ideas: Tragedy and Catharsis

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, SEPT. 30

Aristotle, selection from Poetics and Rhetoric,
in Hofstader and Kuhn, pp. 106-112 and 126-131

Additional reading TK

OCTOBER 8 - NO CLASS - COLUMBUS DAY
CLASS 5 / October 15: Origins of the American “Vernacular”

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, OCT. 14

John A. Kouwenhoven, “What is Vernacular?”
in The Arts in Modern American Civilization, pp. 13-42 (plus illustrations)

Robert C. Toll, “The Emergence of a ‘Common Man’s Culture’
and “The Evolution of the Minstrel Show,”
in Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America, pp. 3-57

CLASS 6 / October 22: Highbrow, Lowbrow

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, OCT. 21

Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare in America”
in Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America, pp. 13-81

Dave Hickey, “Unbreak My Heart, an Overture,”
in Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy

CLASS 7 / October 29: Two Perspectives on Modernist Art

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, OCT. 28

Clement Greenberg, “Collage,” on CG website:
http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/collage.html

Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,”
in Other Criteria, pp. 55-91

CLASS 8 / November 5: Spirituality and Transgression

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, NOV. 4

Wassily Kandinsky, “About Painting,”
in Concerning the Spiritual in Art, pp. 23-45

CLASS 9 / November 12: The Dada Legacy

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, NOV. 11

Tristan Tzara, Dadaism

Selection from
RoseLee Goldberg, Performance Art

Additional reading TK

CLASS 10 / November 19: Totalitarian “People’s Art”

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, NOV. 18

Boris Groys, “The Culture of the Stalin Era” and “The Russian Avant-Garde,” in The Total Art of Stalinism, pp. 3-32

Selection from
Frederic Spotts, Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics

CLASS 11 / November 26: The Democratic Alternative: Classic Pop Culture

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM, SUNDAY, NOV. 25


Selections from
Henry Pleasants, The Great American Popular Singers
CLASS 12 / December 3: The Crisis of Postmodernism

NOTES ON THESE READINGS
DUE 4 PM SUNDAY, DEC. 2

Tzvetan Todorov, “Art and Ethics,”
from The Limits of Art

Julian Spalding, “Busy Doing Nothing,”
from The Scotsman (2003)

Additional reading TK

CLASS 13 / December 10: Postmodernist Pop Culture?

Readings TK

FINAL EXAM (TAKE-HOME) DUE MIDNIGHT WEDNESDAY, DEC. 19

*** HAPPY HOLIDAYS ***