

remixes, memes, and mashups:
appropriation and authorship in
contemporary literature and media



EN 364-01

Wednesday/Friday 12:20-1:40 PM

Bolton 102

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Office Hours: Monday 4-6pm, Wednesday 4-5pm, and by appointment

Course Blog: <https://rmmf17.wordpress.com/>

Course Description

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.

—T.S. Eliot, 1920

What is currently compelling is our pervasive cybernetic mode, which plunks copyright into mythology, makes origins a romantic notion, and pushes creativity outside the self. Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine—that's the way to go.

—Sturtevant, 2003

Most studies of literature and culture privilege originality: the work of a usually singular author bringing something new into the world. In this course, we'll pursue an alternate approach to understanding cultural production by considering the artistic and social value of creations that are made of pre-existing material. These deliberately derivative works raise far-reaching questions about authorship and artistry: how do practices like copying, collage, sampling, and remixing alter our conception of what it means to create literature and art? How do different forms and technologies—print, film, recorded sound, digital media—make possible different modes of appropriation and reuse? What new aesthetic, cultural, and political possibilities emerge through these approaches?

To engage with these and other questions, we'll consider a wide range of modern and contemporary literature, art, and media that relies on practices of appropriation. We'll study novels, poems, and films that are copied and stolen from other sources, explore found art at the Tang Museum, post memes as a form of social critique, and try our hands at guerrilla remakes of classic films. Texts to be considered will include work by Andy Warhol, Jorge Luis Borges, Ishmael Reed, William S. Burroughs, Cindy Sherman, Kenneth Goldsmith, Jonathan Lethem, Michel Gondry, Marcel Duchamp, Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky, Girl Talk, and others.

Course Goals

In this course, you will

- Become conversant with a range of major texts, techniques, and creators of appropriation-based cultural production within literature, film, art, and digital culture
- Employ theoretical and critical writings in order to engage course texts with an eye towards the larger social, cultural, and historical questions raised by different forms of appropriation
- Experiment with techniques such as appropriation, collage, and remaking as a way to develop critical skills as a scholar of literature and culture
- Participate in class discussions and workshops focused on the formal and cultural analysis of appropriation-based texts
- Write thoughtfully and critically about appropriation-based literature and culture in a range of formats and contexts

Required Texts

Hari Kunzru, *White Tears* (978-0451493699)

Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (978-0684824772)

Selected other texts available in Course Packet (marked CP below)

In addition to these print texts, we will also study and discuss texts in a range of other formats, which will be accessible either through Blackboard (BB), a class YouTube playlist at <http://bit.ly/en364> (YT), or otherwise as noted in the course schedule below.

Grading

You must complete all of the following course assignments in order to pass the course:

Class Participation	20%
Class Blog	15%
Appropriation Essay	10%
Collage/Essay	20%
Tang Programming	10%
Swedemore Film and Presentation	10%
Swedemore Analysis	15%

Late work will be marked down one grade level for each class period after the due date (for example, from a B+ to a B for one late day). Extensions will only be granted in the case of an emergency documented by a college dean.

Preparation, Participation, and Class Structure

We will spend our class time each day on a variety of different activities, including but not limited to full-class discussions, small-group discussions, close study of short clips (video, sound, etc.), and in-class writing. While I may occasionally give short lectures, the bulk of our time will be spent talking and engaging together with the course material and with each other's ideas. In order to do this, it is essential that you come to class prepared to address the day's material. This means completing all reading/viewing/listening before class, bringing the text(s) to class where appropriate, and being prepared to discuss them thoughtfully. You should have interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these and to be called on in our conversation during each class. Strong class participation includes contributing regularly to class discussion, listening respectfully and attentively to others, responding thoughtfully to their comments, and working diligently during in-class work both on your own and with others—in order to do well in the participation element of the course, you should expect to do each of these each day. The more each of you brings your own thinking to the discussion, the more all of us will get out of class—I encourage you to offer perspectives, ideas, examples, oppositions, questions, and other contributions as much as possible. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in class, please let me know or come see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work together to make things easier for you.

In order to facilitate a productive experience for everyone in class, please be in your seat and ready to start at the beginning of class time. Unless I indicate otherwise or there is an emergency, please remain in your seat during class—this will allow us all to remain focused on our work at hand (this means using the restroom, getting water, etc., before or after class rather than during class).

Although I will rarely lecture, that does not mean that you should not take notes on what the class has to say about the material we are discussing, just as you would in a lecture course. Having a record of the class' comments, concerns, debates, etc., will be extremely valuable to you in preparing to develop topics and arguments for further writing and thinking in the course. More broadly, consistently remaining actively engaged in our discussions, even if only as a listener and note-taker at

certain moments, will help you to develop as a critical thinker and writer.

During class discussion, I expect you to be attentive to what your classmates have to say and respectful of their ideas and opinions. Thinking critically and openly about complex issues is a crucial part of college education—we all have a responsibility to create a classroom atmosphere where everyone is free to offer his or her opinion, as long as we all do so respectfully and kindly.

Laptops and tablets may be used in class only for class-related work such as note-taking, class writing, and research. Even if you are using such a device for class work, please put it away promptly if and when I ask so that we can turn our attention to specific other things. If inappropriate computer or electronic use becomes a problem for some members of the class, I will revoke permission to use them for the class as a whole. If you have questions about whether a certain use of technology is appropriate or not, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Course Blog

Over the course of the semester, you will post regularly to a course blog focused on the texts and issues we will be discussing in class. This work will serve several purposes: firstly (and most immediately), it will give us a chance to think and talk critically about some of the course material before we discuss it in class and to gear our discussion towards issues and questions that are important to you or that you are curious about. In giving you the opportunity to bring new material and new areas of concern into our conversation, it will also help you to generate topics, ideas, and arguments for papers.

Blog Posting. Note that the blog is located on our independent course website at <https://rmmf17.wordpress.com/>, **not on Blackboard** (although we will use Blackboard for email, papers, and other elements of the course). You are not required to register with WordPress in order to post on the blog, but you must subscribe to the blog so that you receive notifications of new material that I post, and you should include your name or other identifying information in your posts so that we can all follow the conversation online and I can give you credit for your work. The current post will appear at the top of the page—click on the comments link for that post to read what others have written and post your writing.

Blog Content. Your work on the blog will take two forms: analytical response posts and passage posts. The topics and focuses for your analytical posts to the blog are largely open-ended: while I will sometimes suggest issues or questions for you to write about, particularly early in the course, what you focus on will largely be up to you. The blog is a space for us as a group to be reflective about the material we are discussing, and to begin to air initial responses, interpretations, and reactions before we pursue them more fully in class discussion. In this spirit, your posting to the blog should be thoughtful and analytical—you should always ground your writing in quotation and close analysis of our reading for the day, and you should offer interpretations and critical questions rather than summaries or solely personal responses. There are a number of ways you might do this: you might write about a particular element or issue in the day's material that strikes you as especially important in some way, you might respond to the material using critical approaches you're already familiar with (whether from earlier in our course or from other courses), you might raise a few questions about the material and work to think through answers to them, or any number of other approaches. The more engaged an approach you take, the stronger your posts will be and the more you will be able to bring to our discussions.

Each of your analytical posts should be **at least 300 words** (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page—you might write and edit your post in Microsoft Word or a similar program so that you know the length of your post and so that you have a backup of it on your computer).

Your passage posts should present a substantive passage from the reading for that day that you find particularly interesting, surprising, problematic, or otherwise significant; you do not have to write about your chosen passage for these posts, but you should be prepared to talk in our discussion about why you chose it and what is significant about it for you.

Blog Scheduling. Unless I specify otherwise, each week's main analytical blog post will be due before Wednesday's class (consult the course schedule below for specific details). In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to read comments and absorb the online discussion before we meet on Wednesday, **analytical posts are due by midnight on Tuesday night. Response posts are due by class time on Friday. Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts will not receive credit.**

Blog Grading. I will grade your main analytical posts on a scale of 0-4 each week. Criteria for each grade are as follows:

Grade Characteristics

- 0 The post is missing or late.
- 1 The post is severely underdeveloped, showing minimal engagement with the text and the issues it raises.
- 2 The post is underdeveloped: it meets at least some of the technical requirements of the assignment, but consists mostly of summary, generalization, and/or personal response rather than close analysis of or critical thinking about the text.
- 3 The post is successful: it uses textual or other material to make analytical claims, and begins to develop them, but those claims or connections are not fully developed or analyzed.
- 4 The post is exceptional: it uses textual or other material to make thoughtful, original analytical claims and/or connections, and engages and analyzes the issues it raises in independent, in-depth ways.

I will grade passage posts on a credit/no credit basis based on your completing them substantively and on time.

Appropriation Essay

For the first major assignment of the course, you will write a paper of 5-6 pages that engages with multiple texts and/or authors from the first section of the course in order to explore the implications of appropriation in relation to another cultural issue (authorship, cultural identity, consumerism, etc.) I will provide more in-depth instructions for this assignment in advance of the due date.

Collage/Essay

As part of our work in the second section of the course, you will produce a two-part analysis of the aesthetic and cultural issues raised by practices of collage and remix. The first part of this work will itself be a collage, while the second part will be a more traditional essay of 5-6 pages that both frames your own collage and puts it in dialogue with one or more texts or authors from this section of the course. I will provide more in-depth instructions for this assignment in advance of the due date.

Tang Programming

Over the course of the semester, we will work individually, in groups, and as a class to conceptualize and propose programming to accompany the Tang's spring 2018 exhibition *Living with Duchamp*. This is a unique opportunity for us to collaborate with the museum and make a meaningful cultural intervention that both utilizes and reflects on the modes of appropriation we will be studying. We will take time at various points through the semester to brainstorm, research possibilities, and discuss our ideas with members of the Tang staff. I will provide consistent information, instructions, and timelines for this work as we proceed.

Swedemore Film and Presentation

As part of our work in the third section of the course, you will work with a group of classmates to conceptualize and produce a "sweded" film in the tradition of *Be Kind Rewind*. This is a multipart assignment: you will collectively produce a proposal for your film, discuss it in a group conference with me, film it, and present and discuss it at a public event at the end of the semester; each of these steps will count towards part of your grade for the project. I will provide more in-depth instructions for this assignment in advance of the due date.

Swedemore Analysis

After our Swedemore presentations and the end of classes, your final assignment for the course will be a reflective essay that analyzes your group film, another group's film, and other texts from the final section of the course. In this paper you will have an opportunity to both reflect on your group's work and place your film within the context of the course's larger questions and issues.

Attendance

You are permitted a total of **two absences** throughout the semester without penalty. For each subsequent absence, your final course grade will drop one-third of a letter (e.g., from an A- to a B+), and after four absences, you risk failing the course. Repeated or excessive lateness will also count as an absence.

If you miss all or part of a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work for the course—make sure to follow the syllabus, stay on track with the reading, turn in any written work that was due for the day, and consult a classmate, check the course website on Blackboard, or come see me during my office hours to talk about what you might have missed in class.

Note that the course schedule below contains several events that, although they take place outside of regular class time, are nonetheless effectively mandatory. These events include content and activity that are fundamental to both your success in the course and your overall experience and enjoyment of the course, and as such missing them is equivalent to missing a class meeting. Put these in your schedule at the start of the semester and plan for them so that you are definitely able to attend; if you anticipate any difficulties with this, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can plan accordingly together.

Office Hours

I want each of you to be successful in this class. Helping each of you develop as readers, writers, thinkers, and students of literature and media is important to me, and I want to do what I can to help you achieve those goals and succeed in my class. More importantly, I have a great deal of interest in the material we will be working on this semester, and I would love for you to get the same enjoyment and excitement from it that I do. If you have any questions, problems, or things you want to discuss—about the course, the readings, writing assignments or paper ideas, the English major or the Media and Film Studies minor, life

at Skidmore, future academic or career plans, or anything else at all—or if you simply want to talk more about what we’re doing in class, please come see me. I encourage you to think of meeting with me not just as a last resort or something to do when you need help, but as a central part of making your learning more productive, meaningful, and enjoyable. My office hours are Mondays from 4-6pm and Wednesdays from 4-5pm in Tisch Hall 327—this time is set aside for us to talk and for me to help you and work with you. If you aren’t free during that time, get in touch with me before or after class or by email and we can set up a time that is more convenient. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are having trouble or feel you need help, or for any other reason at all.

Accessibility

If you anticipate needing accommodations regarding any element of this course, please come talk with me early in the semester so that we can work together to address these issues. You should also visit the Office of Student Academic Services at <http://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/index.php> for more information.

Academic Integrity

As you might expect given the subject matter of this course, questions of authorship, originality, and intellectual property will be a recurring concern for us on multiple levels: we will discuss these issues in relation to the materials of the course, and you will also complete class assignments that will ask you to work with found material in ways that might feel unusual or unconventional. For these assignments, I will give you clear instructions on how (and how not) to work with this material. In all other work for this course, the normal principles of academic integrity at Skidmore apply as they would in any other course. Violating these principles through plagiarism or other academic dishonesty is a serious offense. Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade for the assignment and may result in more serious consequences as well. If you have any questions about citation, attribution, or plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me before you hand in your work. For more information about Skidmore’s academic integrity policy, visit <http://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.php>.

Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

Course Schedule

The schedule below may change over the course of the semester. I will announce any changes in class and/or via email. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes by attending class, checking your email and the class blog regularly, and coming to my office if you have any questions.

Appropriation, Copying, Theft | Art, Authorship, Ownership

- Weds. September 6 **Course Introduction: Why Recreative Thought Matters**
- Fri. September 8 **View:** Marcel Duchamp, selected images (BB)
Read: Anonymous, “The Richard Mutt Case (CP)
Louise Norton, “Buddha of the Bathroom” (CP)
Arthur Danto, “Wakeful Dreams” section marked 1 (CP)
Marcus Boon, “Fountain(s)” (CP)
Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of ‘Readymades’” (CP)
Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight THURSDAY
- Weds. September 13 **View:** Andy Warhol, selected images (BB)
Sherrie Levine, selected images (BB)
Richard Prince, selected images (BB)
Time, “*Untitled (Cowboy)*: The Story Behind Richard Prince’s Photograph” (YT)
Read: G.R. Swenson, “What is Pop Art?” (CP)
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, selections from “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966” (CP)
Arthur Danto, “Wakeful Dreams” section marked 2 (CP)
Francis M. Naumann, “Sherrie Levine” (CP)
Jerry Saltz, “Richard Prince’s Instagram Paintings Are Genius Trolling” (CP)
Jerry Saltz, “Richard Prince Just Showed Artists a Way to Fight Trump...” (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. September 15 **Appropriation and Art at the Tang (meet in museum atrium)**
Readings TBD
- Weds. September 20 **Read:** Ryan Milner, “Logics: The Fundamentals of Memetic Participation” and
“Grammar: Structures for Making Statements and Making Do” (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. September 22 **Read:** Ryan Milner, “Voice: Pop and Populism in Public Commentary” (CP)
Listen: Reply All, “The Grand Tapestry of Pepe” (podcast on Spotify, Soundcloud,
etc. -- listen until 21:00)
Reply All, “In the Tall Grass” (start at 15:00)
Passage Post Due by Class Time

Weds. September 27 **Read:** Hari Kunzru, *White Tears* 1-92
Kenan Malik, “In Defense of Cultural Appropriation” (CP)
K. Tempest Bradford, “Cultural Appropriation Is, In Fact, Indefensible” (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday

Fri. September 29 **Read:** Hari Kunzru, *White Tears* 93-188
Artforum Roundtable on Cultural Appropriation (CP)
Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, “Dana Schutz’s Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Sparks Protest” (CP)
Brian Boucher, “Social Media Erupts as the Art World Splits in Two Over Dana Schutz Controversy” (CP)
Brian Boucher, “Dana Schutz Responds to the Uproar Over Her Emmett Till Painting at the Whitney Biennial” (CP)
View: Katy Perry, “This Is How We Do” (YT)
Jay-Z, “Moonlight” (YT)
Passage Post Due by Class Time

Weds. October 4 **Read:** Hari Kunzru, *White Tears* 189-end
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday

Mixing, Collage, Remix | Culture, Identity, Politics

Fri. October 6 **Read:** Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage is Conflict” (CP)
William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, “The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin,” “Cut-ups Self-Explained,” “First Cut-ups” (CP)
Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, “Directions for the Use of Detournment” (CP)
Dodie Bellamy, selected poems (CP)
Timothy Donnelly, “The Dream of a Poetry of Defense” (CP and Soundcloud clip)
Passage Post Due by Class Time

****Saturday, October 7: Bruce Conner Mini-Retrospective at the Tang, 4:00pm****

Weds. October 11 **View:** Bruce Conner, films from Tang mini-retrospective
Read: Jaimie Baron, “History, the Archive, and the Appropriation of the Indexical Document” (CP)
Bruce Conner, “Speaking of Found Footage” (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday

Fri. October 13 **View:** Joseph Cornell, “Rose Hobart” (YT)
Dara Birnbaum, “Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman” (YT)
Craig Baldwin, “Wild Gunman” (YT)
Naomi Uman, “Removed” (YT)
Read: William Wees, “In the Domain of Montage: Compilation, Collage, Appropriation” (CP)
Passage Post Due by Class Time
Appropriation Essay Due Sunday, October 15 by Midnight

- Weds. October 18 **Listen/View:** Grandmaster Flash, “The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel” (all versions on YT)
Eric B. and Rakim, “Paid in Full” (all versions on YT)
Kembrew McLeod, *Copyright Criminals* (YT)
Read: Ulf Poschardt, *DJ Culture* (selections) (CP)
David Foster Wallace and Mark Costello, “Paid in Full” transcription (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. October 20 **View:** Brett Gaylor, “RiP: A Remix Manifesto” (YT)
Read: Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, selections from *Rhythm Science* (CP)
Passage Post Due by Class Time
- Weds. October 25 **Read:** Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* 1-75
Jonathan Lethem, “The Ecstasy of Influence” (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. October 27 **No Class: Work on Research and Brainstorming for Tang Programming**
Preliminary Brainstorms Due Sunday, October 29 by Midnight
- Weds. November 1 **Read:** Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* 75-141
David Shields, “Collage” from *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (CP)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. November 3 **Read:** Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* 141-end
Passage Post Due by Class Time

Remaking, Rewriting, Re-Enactment | History, Memory, Ethics

- Weds. November 8 **View:** Michel Gondry, *Be Kind Rewind* (class screening in Emerson evening of Monday, November 6)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. November 10 Michel Gondry, *Be Kind Rewind*, discussion continued
Tang Programming Preliminary Proposals Due by Class Time
Collage/Essay Due Sunday, November 12 by Midnight
- Weds. November 15 **Read:** Emily Dickinson, selected poems from *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (CP)
Paul Legault, introduction and selected poems from *The Emily Dickinson Reader* (CP)
Herman Melville, selections from *Moby Dick* (CP)
Amazon Mechanical Turk, selections from *Emoji Dick* (CP)
View: Lisa Gitelman, “*Emoji Dick* and the Eponymous Whale” (Vimeo)
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday

****Thursday, November 16: *twohundredfiftysixcolors* at the Tang, 7:00pm****

- Fri. November 17 Eric Fleischauer and Jason Lazarus, *twohundredfiftysixcolors* discussion
Read: Kate M. Miltner and Tim Highfield, “Never Gonna GIF You Up: Analyzing the Cultural Significance of the Animated GIF” (CP)
Passage Post Due by Class Time
Swedemore Proposals Due Sunday, November 19 by 5:00pm
Swedemore Conferences Monday, November 20
- Weds. November 22 **No Class: Thanksgiving**
- Fri. November 24 **No Class: Thanksgiving**
- Weds. November 29 **Read:** Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard: Author of the *Quixote*” (CP)
Tang Programming Presentations and Discussion
Analytical Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. December 1 **Read:** Kenneth Goldsmith, *Day* (selections) (CP)
Kenneth Goldsmith, *Traffic* (excerpts) (CP)
Kenneth Goldsmith, “Introduction,” *Uncreative Writing* (CP)
Annette Gilbert, “How to Read...” (CP)
- Weds. December 6 **Read:** Kenneth Goldsmith, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (selections) (CP)
Daniel Morris, “Kenneth Goldsmith’s ‘The Body of Michael Brown’ as ‘The Eighth American Disaster’” (CP)
Brian Droitcour, “Reading and Rumor: The Problem with Kenneth Goldsmith” (CP)
Wendy Davis, “Let Her Speak” (selections) (CP)
- **Thursday, December 7: Swedemore Screening and Discussion in Emerson Auditorium, 6-8pm****
- Fri. December 8 **Final Class: Conclusions, Reflections, Celebrations**
- Weds. December 13 **Swedemore Analysis Due**