

# English 119: The New York Underground in Film, Music and Literature 1955-1985

Summer, 2019

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:45 - 5:50

Royce 154

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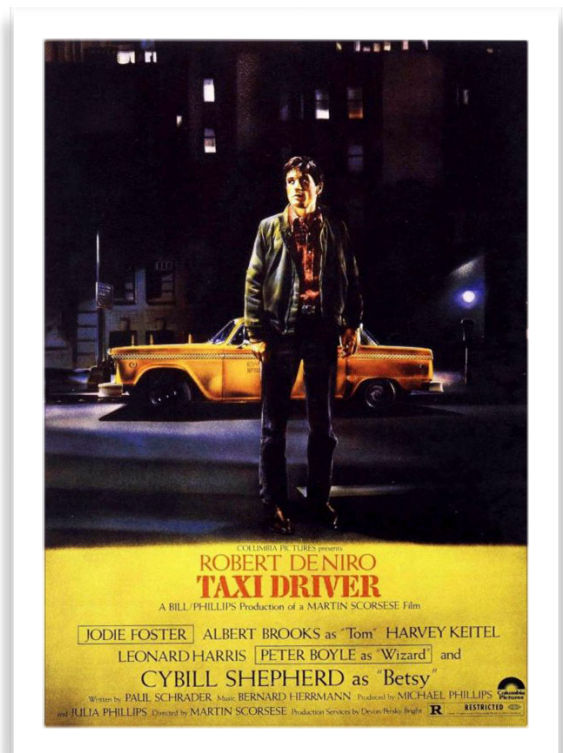
Website

<https://uclanewyorkunderground.art.blog/>

## INTRODUCTION

This course examines the gritty realities and artistic glories of New York from the mid-50s to the mid-80s. This is the period that saw the emergence of Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, rebel feature filmmakers such as John Cassavetes, Martin Scorsese and Spike Lee, the birth of the Black Arts Movement with Amiri Baraka, new voices for the women's poetry in Anne Waldman and Eileen Myles, the rise of punk music with Patti Smith and others, and, prior to and during the AIDs crisis, new forms of queer sensibility in writing and art in Joe Brainard, Keith Haring, David Wojnarowicz and others. This is a New York that many say doesn't exist any longer—a city that often teetered on the border of chaos but bubbled with a creativity often coming from the “underground,” whether that be of avant-garde artists, people living on the edge of respectability (such as hustlers, punks and drug addicts), or people marginalized by dominant cultural norms.

Films include two early features by Martin Scorsese, Mean Streets and Taxi Driver, the classic Midnight Cowboy, Spike Lee's controversial Do the Right Thing, and groundbreaking experimental short films and videos. Fiction and memoirs that take you on the “wild side” (in Lou Reed's phrase) of New York include short novels by Burroughs, Hubert Selby Jr. and Jay McInerney along with Jim Car-



roll's *The Basketball Diaries*, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* and *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* by David Wojnarowicz. We'll also listen to and discuss some of what was happening in the music scenes during this period, notably 50s jazz, the folk revival of the 60s, the birth of punk music in the 70s and early hip hop and the "new wave" in the early 80s.

## BOOKS

*Junky: The Definitive Text of "Junk"*  
William S. Burroughs

*Last Exit to Brooklyn*  
Hubert Selby Jr.

*Great Jones Street*  
Don DeLillo

*Fast Speaking Woman: Chants and Essays*  
Anne Waldman

*Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*  
Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain

*Bright Lights, Big City*  
Jay McInerney

*Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*  
David Wojnarowicz

*The Basketball Diaries*  
Jim Carroll

The rest of the reading will be distributed in PDF form and is also available on the class Google drive.

## CLASS POLICIES

### THE CLASSROOM

Though this is technically a lecture class, I like to conduct it largely as an open discussion. Please don't ever feel shy about contributing. I often ask questions, not because I am testing you but really to see if you can think through (and help me think through) problems in the texts or the films. To this end, always be sure to take notes when you read or watch the films for homework.

It goes without saying that everyone should be polite and attentive when others are talking. If I see frequent use of your phone or typing on your computer that clearly doesn't have anything to do with the class, then this will count against your grade. Arriving frequently late will also count against your grade.

## ASSIGNMENTS

The large part of the grading will be based on short writing assignments, some of which will be creative. Many of these will be in the form of comments on the blog. Comments on the blog are due by noon the day of class. This gives me time to read them prior to class. Always remember to quote from the text (or give clear citations to moments in the films) in these comments.

Other assignments will be in the form of “worksheets” that I will ask you to either hand in on the day of class or to upload to a Google drive.

## FINAL PAPER

The final paper for this course will be more in the form of a reflection on the reading and viewing during the quarter, written in a clear and engaging prose.

## GRADING

Blog Responses / Worksheets: 75%

Final Paper: 25%

Class Participation: +2

## SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1

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#### 1 : INTRODUCTION (MODERNISM)

*Tuesday, June 25th*

#### 2 : POETRY IN THE 50S

*Thursday, June 27th*

Read:

Frank O'Hara, selections of poetry

Allen Ginsberg, selections of poetry

Watch:

Billie Holiday documentary

### WEEK 2

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#### 3 : BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

*Tuesday, July 2nd*

Read:

LeRoi Jones, *The Dutchman* (1964)

Jones, sections from *Blues People*

Amiri Baraka, selection of poems  
Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement"

4 : NO CLASS

Thursday, July 4th

WEEK 3

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5 : JUNKIES

Tuesday, July 9th

Read:

William S. Burroughs, *Junky* (1953)  
Burroughs, selections from *Naked Lunch*  
Hubert Selby Jr., *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1957)

Watch:

Shirley Clarke, *The Connection* (1961)

6 : JOHN CASSAVETES

Thursday, July 11th

Watch:

*Shadows* (1959) — online  
*Faces* (1968) — online  
*Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976) — online

WEEK 4

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7 : GREENWICH VILLAGE BOHEMIANISM

Tuesday, July 16th

Read:

Don DeLillo, *Great Jones Street* (1973)  
Bob Dylan, chapter from *Chronicles: Volume 1* (2004)

Watch:

Selected videos

8 : FAST SPEAKING WOMEN

Thursday, July 18th

Read:

Anne Waldman, *Fast Speaking Woman* (1974)

Patti Smith, selections of poems  
Bernadette Mayer, selection of poems

Watch:  
Selected videos

## WEEK 5

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### 9 : MEAN STREETS

*Tuesday, July 23rd*

Read:  
Jim Carroll, *The Basketball Diaries* (1963)

Watch:  
*Panic in Needle Park* (1971)  
*Taxi Driver* (1976)

### 10 : PUNK!

*Thursday, July 25th*

Read:  
*Please Kill Me*, by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain (1996)

Watch:  
Selected videos

## WEEK 6

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### 11 : THE 1980S

*Tuesday, July 30th*

Read:  
Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984)

Watch:  
Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)

### 12 : TK

*Thursday, August 1st*

Read:  
David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives* (1991)

Watch:  
Henry Hills, *Money* (1985)  
Julian Schnabel, *Basquiat* (1996)