

HPRS5042/6042 COMPLEX BODIES: QUESTIONING GENDER, RELIGION, & SEXUALITY

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PAIN, SUFFERING, AND THE BODY

In the last lecture we engaged with a number of thinkers on the role that pain and suffering play in our society – thinkers like Bentham, De Sade, Levinas, and Girard.

In this lecture, we move on from that discussion towards one that is more orientated towards the way in which suffering is represented in art and its connection to the theories we have previously studied.

FOUCAULT AND SUFFERING

Just to quickly round off the previous section, I want to return to the work of Foucault.

We have seen that suffering and pain are intrinsic qualities of our bodily reality, intimately connected to our physical realities, our emotional worlds, and our social identities.

They are connected to the way in which we understand ourselves, the way we understand others, and the extremes of our experience are often bound up with our sensory feeling of pain and / or pleasure.

FOUCAULT AND SUFFERING

Understanding the way in which we connect pain / pleasure to social construction is a classic example of Foucauldian deconstruction, whereby we begin to uncover the assumptions that underpin the way our society is.

Critically, the more we become aware of the way our society works, the more aware we are that our society does not HAVE to be this way.

Criticality breeds alterity.

ROUND UP

Bentham – Utilitarian vision of pain / suffering

De Sade – Pain and suffering as truth, state power and the infliction of pain

Girard – mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism

Levinas – pain as alterity, compassion as the foundation of ethics

Foucault – suffering as structural, knowledge / power / desire

THE SUFFERING BODY IN ART



MIMESIS AND GIRARD

- 1 - What does mimesis mean?
- 2 - What words have a similar etymology as mimesis?
- 3 - Where does Girard find the idea?



MIMESIS AND GIRARD

“Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind.

We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.”

Girard

1 - What are some examples of things we desire because others desire it?

2 - Are these things just material?

3 - What do we desire and why?

4 - What would a Christian / religious response to Girard be?

THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

So far, we have looked at a number of theories that all deal with how complex our bodies are – whether in the context of society, sex, gender, pain and suffering, identity, or culture.

But where do we see these theories and how might these theories help us to apply and understand the world around us?



The background of the slide features three dark silhouettes. At the top center is a large dragon with its wings spread. In the bottom left corner is a silhouette of a queen wearing a crown and a long dress. In the bottom right corner is a silhouette of a knight in armor riding a horse and holding a sword aloft.

THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

Theories often seek to explain the stories by which we live – a theory of culture, for example, may seek to explain why and how a certain piece of culture exists and operates.

But where do we get the stories by which we live from?

For Girard, we get them from others and learn them through our interaction with others.

THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

The thing is, we are also, constantly, telling our own stories back to those broader social and cultural stories.

We take the stories we are given, and make them different – we each, in our own way, queer the dominant narrative discourse.

Women are weak – but we weightlift...

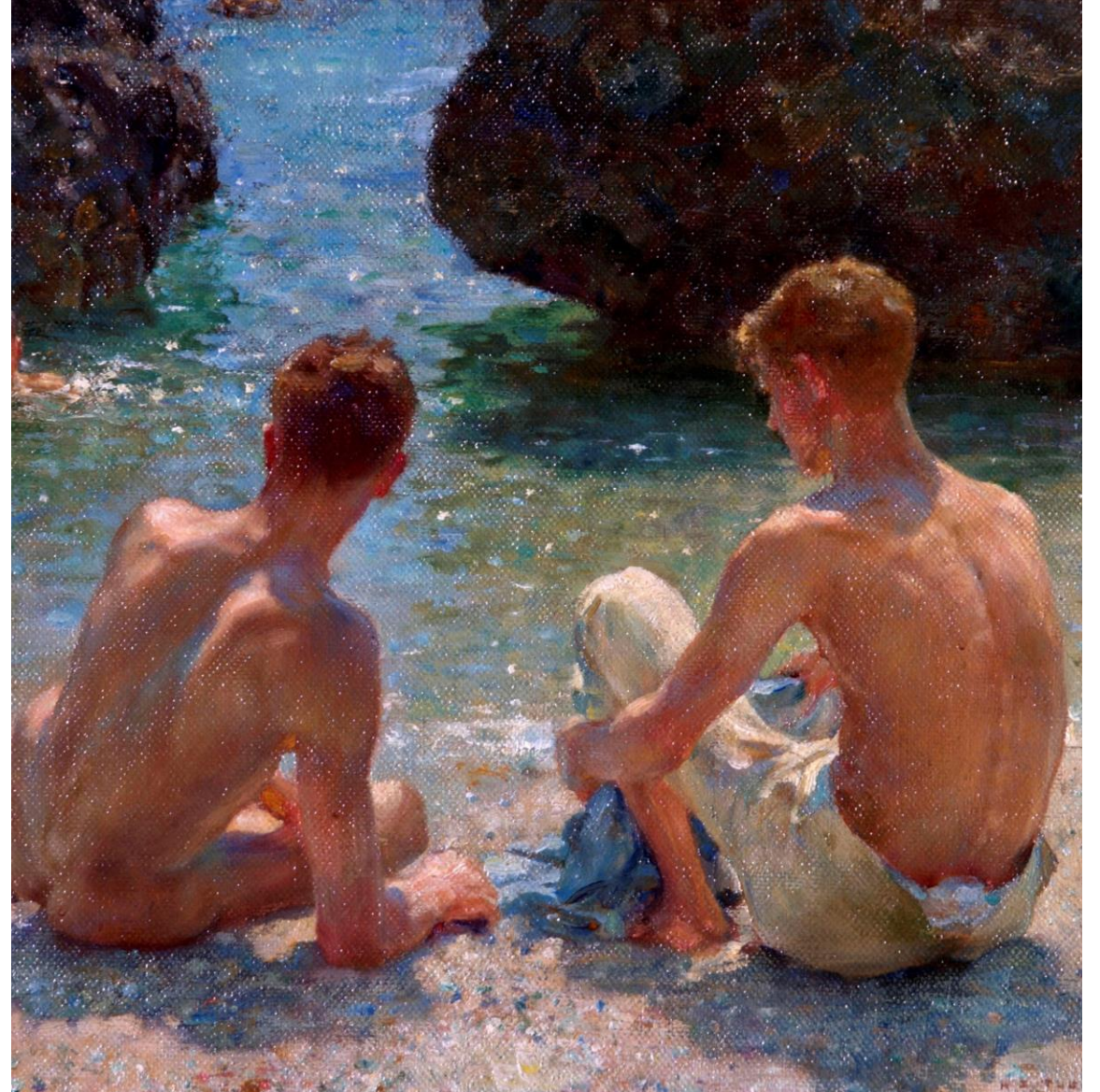
Men are strong – but we cry...

WE ARE NOT AN ISLAND
WE ARE A COLOMBIAN
COFFEE SIPPING, AMERICAN
MOVIE WATCHING, SWEDISH
FLAT-PACK ASSEMBLING,
KOREAN TABLET TAPPING,
ARGENTINIAN STRIKER
SUPPORTING, DUTCH BEER
CHEERS-ING, TIKKA MASALA
EATING, WONDERFUL LUMP
OF LAND IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE SEA. WE ARE PART
OF SOMETHING FAR BIGGER.

THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

One of the most interesting areas to examine this in is through art – because in art, the artist seeks to convey a story, and the viewer seeks to understand it.

But this raises a number of difficult questions...





WHAT IS ART?



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ART?



HOW DOES ART TELL STORIES?



WHY DOES ART SPEAK TO CULTURE?



WHAT DOES SUFFERING HAVE TO DO
WITH ART?

THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

Split into four group

Grab a piece of art

Research the origins of the piece

Identify the key themes within the piece

Answer the following questions

Write down some notes and be prepared to talk about your piece



THE SUFFERING REPRESENTATIVE BODY

1. *What does this particular piece seek to say to us?*
2. *Why is this?*
3. *What is our reaction to this piece?*
4. *Does its story move us?*
5. *How does this piece illuminate an aspect of our culture?*
6. *How does theory help us to understand this piece?*









ROUND UP

Art is a vitally important part of our culture and the way that we understand the world.

Art attempts to tell stories, which we then weave into our own stories.

In this way, art is like a conversation between the experiences of the artists and the experiences of the viewer.

We come to understand more about ourselves and others through sharing these stories

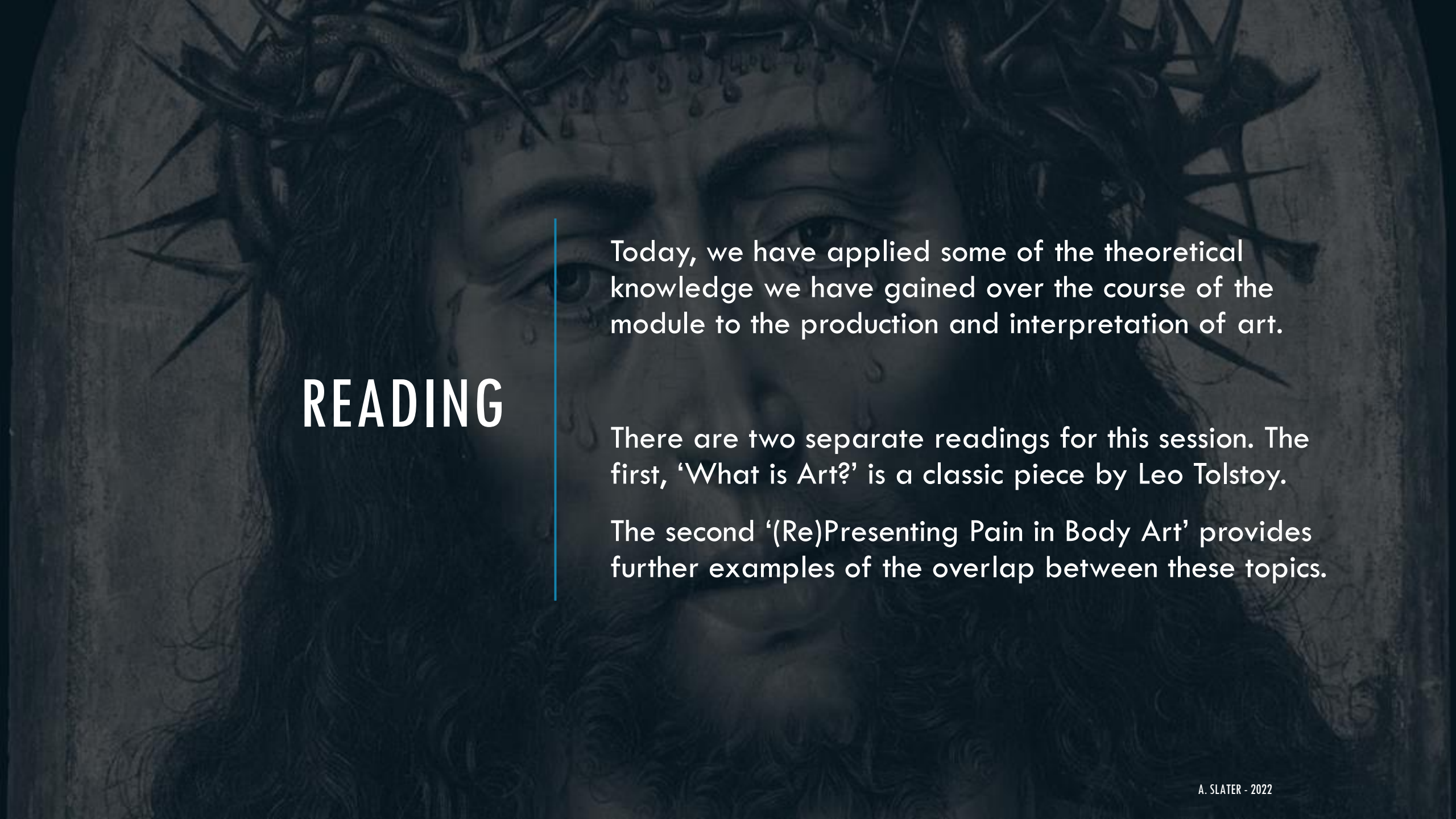


ROUND UP

Queer culture has often depended on art to convey its part of the dominant story, and has often read into art subversive themes and storylines that mirror its experience

This mirroring and reading is a political project of expression by artists and reclamation by the audience – it is the formation of a culture that mirrors the queer experience itself.





READING

Today, we have applied some of the theoretical knowledge we have gained over the course of the module to the production and interpretation of art.

There are two separate readings for this session. The first, 'What is Art?' is a classic piece by Leo Tolstoy.

The second '(Re)Presenting Pain in Body Art' provides further examples of the overlap between these topics.