

Jonathan Auerbach

Response to the *Apertúra* Questionnaire 2018

Szerző

Jonathan Auerbach a Marylandi Egyetem professzora. Amellett, hogy számos amerikanisztikai tanulmányt írt, négy könyvnek is a szerzője: *The Romance of Failure: First-Person Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and James* (Oxford UP, 1989); *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (Duke UP, 1996); *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations* (U California, 2007); és *Dark Borders: Film Noir and American Citizenship* (Duke UP, 2011). Jelenleg *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies* című munka társszerzőjeként dolgozik. Kurzusai az amerikai irodalommal, a sci-fi és a technológia kapcsolatával, a hidegháborús politikával és a filmmel foglalkoznak. Fulbright-ösztöndíjasként Portugáliában, Cipruson és Tunéziában kutatott, Írországbán, Németországban, Japánban, Hong Kongban, Vietnámban és Egyiptomban tartott előadásokat.

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1. I think the question of justifying the humanities in relation to academic policy spurs a further set of complications when we ask: justified to whom? Ourselves, our institutions, our students? Depending on the constituent, there are different answers. In the US, and presumably in Europe as well, after the great recession of 2007-8, undergraduates majoring in humanities fell sharply from one in five to one in twenty, fueled by anxieties about finding jobs. To treat a degree as a means to an end, as many students would have it, assumes that university education is primarily a way to master a certain set of skills. Even if against the narrow notion of vocational training, we in the humanities emphasize the importance of critical thinking, clear reading and writing, verbal/visual literacy and so on, this is still an instrumental model. Institutions in the US, both private and public, for the most part embrace this model, increasingly along a pragmatic business approach that sees the mission of universities as solving problems and regards students as consumers who are entitled to a tangible return on their tuition dollars. Under threat, professors have tried to defend/update/tweak traditional liberal arts values by claiming that a humanities degree can make students more socially engaged, or more responsible citizens, or better, more empathetic persons. But that's a pretty tough case to make beyond abstractions, and frankly I don't see much hope for reestablishing our legitimacy and prestige given the corporatizing taking hold in higher education across the globe.
2. I would simply point out that in the US, since the 1930s, film studies has rarely, if ever been an autonomous academic discipline, perhaps because film theory is relatively weak here. Depending on the university, cinema has been taught and continues to be taught in literature departments (main as narrative), art departments (focusing on visual aesthetics), communications departments (subset of media), language departments (expression of national cultures), and history departments. So any clear distinction between trans- and interdisciplinarity is a bit moot in an American context, I would say. I would also point out that there's no National Curriculum in the US, so no opportunity to standardize the teaching of film studies along those lines, either.

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