

School of Art  
George Mason University  
Spring 2018

AVT 620--Theory, Criticism, and the Visual Arts

Prof: Paula Crawford

Office: Art Building 2018

Office Hours: M 2:30-4:30pm (and/or by appt)

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my cellphone: 703-862-5481 (only for you!)

Catalog Course Description: This is a cross-disciplinary graduate seminar focusing on key theories and themes that have informed 20th- and 21st-century art practice. Explores theory and criticism in a variety of contexts, from popular to scholarly, and considers the role of artists as thinkers and writers.

Overview and expectations:

In this graduate seminar, we will be reading philosophical and critical essays—some directly about art, others influential to the historical trajectory of art practice and criticism. The readings are not presented as a resolved historical chronology, but rather as a set of interconnected discourses. In class, we will discuss the ideas examined in the readings with an eye to understanding, interpreting, and re-imagining the world through presented critical and philosophical paradigms. Be fully prepared for these discussions. Preparedness for, and full participation in class discussions, is essential to the success of this seminar.

Course Requirements and Grading Scale:

30% Reading Logs (see handout)—1<sup>st</sup> half due W 3/5; 2<sup>nd</sup> half due W 4/23

30% Final Art/Theory Project (*Details provided on handout*)  
Due for presentation M April 30

40% Participation (Discussion Ownership)  
This is a Seminar, which means group discussion is the heart of the course. Do the readings religiously and be fully prepared for class discussion of material at the highest graduate level. Your overall engagement in seminar discussion will determine your *Class Participation* grade. Attendance is crucial for a good grade and a successful seminar.

Readings on Blackboard

Readings are available on Blackboard as PDFs. We are using Blackboard only as a content holder for the Course Readings folder. No other course materials will be posted.

Go to BB, click on AVT 620, click on Course content and you'll find the Course Readings folder. Readings are in pdf form in alphabetical order by author. Please print them out as we go and bring them to class with you. If you have a problem getting readings, email me for help.

## Class Schedule<sup>1</sup>:

### WEEK 1

1/22

*Introduction: goals, requirements, expectations, syllabus; introductory remarks; in-class survey*

Topic 1: Language and the language of criticism: Specialty language: obfuscation or shorthand?  
*Writing tips and pitfalls* (hand out)

Topic 2: The context of early Modernism (a changing view): linear progress, scientific knowledge, beginning to rethink the centered human subject and models of reality; grounds of existence

#### **Discussion Readings:**

George Orwell, *The Politics of the English Language*

Judith Butler, *A 'Bad Writer' Bites Back*

Werner Haftmann, 'Introduction' to *Painting in the Twentieth Century*

### WEEK 2

#### MODERNIST CONSTRUCTS

2/29

Topic 1: Defining the avant-garde (freshness, impermanence, resistance, annihilation); modernist procedures, modernist ethos, form as content; authenticity, originality (Rosenberg); Memesis vs. improvisation (Aristotle);

Topic 2: Question of avant-garde content without avant-garde form; elitist innovation vs. accessible conventional forms (Greenberg)

#### **Discussion Readings:**

Harold Rosenberg, *The Avant-garde; The American Action Painters*

Aristotle, *Poetics* (excerpt)

Clement Greenberg, *Avant-garde and Kitsch*

### WEEK 3

#### APOLLO AND DIONYSIS

2/5

Topic: The Apollonian/Dionysian duality; Early Nietzsche; A look at binary thinking since Plato (at least!)

#### **Discussion Readings:**

Euripides, *The Bacchae*

Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (excerpt)

#### Class Videos:

- *The Drug Years* (Bacchus comes to San Francisco-the beginning of an historical cultural shift)
- TED: *Stroke of Insight*

### WEEK 4

#### ART FOR ART'S SAKE OR FOR SOCIETY; DEATH OF MODERNISM

2/12

Topic 1: Moral questions about the artist's obligation to society (Gablik 2); The death of Modernism and rise of Postmodernism. (Gablik 8);

Topic 2: Camp (What is it?); Modernism, postmodernism, and camp (Kramer)

Topic 3: The ethos of the earnest, searching artist (abstraction)

#### **Discussion Readings:**

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<sup>1</sup> Class schedule is subject to change

Suzi Gablik, Ch.2: *Individualism: Art for Art's Sake or Art for Society's Sake*; Ch. 8: *The end of Modernism?*

Hilton Kramer, *Postmodern: Art and Culture in the 1980s*

Fendrich, *Why Abstract Painting Still Matters*

Optional: Susan Sontag: *Notes on Camp*

## WEEK 5

ORIGINALITY, REPRODUCTION, AND VALUE; MEDIUM AND MESSAGE

2/19

Topic 1: Ramifications of transmittable art; the camera and film; exhibition value and cult value (aura); mass media; is the fact of the medium more important than the content it carries?(McLuhan)

Topic 2: Revisionist look at the masters (Hockney)

Topic 3: Medium/Message (McLuhan)

Discussion Readings:

Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*;

David Hockney, *Through a Glass Darkly*

Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*

Extra reading (optional): Roberta Smith: *The Google Project*

Videos:

*Ways of Seeing*, John Berger Tape 1

Hockney: Revisionist history with lenses

## WEEK 6

TBA (We will use this class time either to catch up on content or, if we stay on schedule, it will be free time to work in your studios and/or refine your reading logs for next week)

2/26

## WEEK 7

REVIEW OF HUMANIST PRINCIPLES; INTRODUCTION TO POSTMODERNISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM -- BARTHES, FOUCAULT

READING LOGS DUE TODAY (1<sup>st</sup> half)

POSTMODERNIST CONSTRUCTS AND BEYOND

3/5

Topic 1: Review of humanist and enlightenment principles: stable, transcendental human subject, a knowable world, binary thinking; Some important terms and concepts; metaphysics; the problem of *being* (ontology), the problem of *knowledge* (epistemology)

Topic 2: Introduction to poststructuralist theory:

- Foundations: Russian Formalism; (Jacobson), Structural Linguistics, Structuralism and Semiotics (Saussure, Levi-Strauss, early Barthes); Poststructuralism and Deconstruction/Derrida (critique of logocentrism, metaphysics, and the legacy of humanism: the question of subjectivity (decentered or worse?), critique of:
  - i. The transcendental signifier/ied (subject)
  - ii. Binary thinking
  - iii. Essentialism
  - iv. Self
  - v. Truth with a capital 'T'
  - vi. The problem of Being
  - vii. The problem of Knowledge

**Discussion Readings:**

Plato (excerpt from *Republic*, Book VII-allegory of the cave)

Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*

Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*

## WEEK 8

3/12 Spring Recess--NO CLASS THIS WEEK (But read for next time)

## WEEK 9

CRITIQUE OF THE LOGOS, METAPHYSICS, BINARY THINKING, ETC. → DECONSTRUCTION

3/19 Topic: Poststructuralism continued:  
Deconstruction and Derrida; critique of structuralism, metaphysics, logocentrism, binary thinking; death of the subject; Derrida's *différance*; aporia; bricolage

### **Discussion readings:**

Jacques Derrida, *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences; Of Grammatology* excerpt; Derrida (bio)

## WEEK 10

IDEOLOGY/COLLAPSE OF HISTORY

3/26 Topic 1: What is ideology? (Althusser)  
Topic 2: Jameson's postmodern reality: Pastiche and Schizophrenia; Collapse of history

### Discussion Readings:

Althusser, excerpt from: *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*; Althusser (Murder)  
Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* (*The Anti-Aesthetic*)

## WEEK 11

FEMINISMS (THE LACK, DIFFERENCE, THE PRIVILEGED SIGNIFIER)

4/2 Topic 1: Background Review: Freud to Lacan (locating *the lack*). Postmodernism and Feminism (the dominant/the other; the gaze/ privileging the "eye", sexuality) (Owens); Dual others paradigm (Irigaray); Hesiod, *Theogony* excerpt (lines: 115 – 200, esp. 115 – 138)

Topic 2: Marguerite Duras, From interview on *silence* (New French Feminisms); Rebecca Walker, *Becoming the Third Wave*, Sexuality as power— who is the subject?

Topic 3: Feminism now: #metoo, #timesup, etc. (Harvey Weinstein, Charlie Rose, Matt Lauer...)

Video: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Ted Talk: Ted ex Euston), *We should all be feminists* (Beyonce sampled this on her song 'Flawless')

Martha Rosler, Semiotics of the Kitchen

John Berger, Ways of Seeing Part 2, *History of nude in oil painting*

*Oppressed Majority* (short French film)

### **Discussion readings:**

Craig Owens, *The Discourse of others: Feminists and postmodernism* (*The Anti-Aesthetic*);

Marguerite Duras (on silence);

Luce Irigaray, *The Question of the Other*;

Rebecca Walker, *Becoming the Third Wave*; Hesiod, *Theogony* excerpt (lines:115–200, esp.115–138)

## WEEK 12

### OTHERING/MASTER NARRATIVES/POSTCOLONIALISM

4/9

Topic 1: Postcolonial: privilege and *othering* in a master narrative

Discussion Reading: Okwui Enwezor, *The Short Century*; Klages, *Race and Postcolonialism*; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Ch. 2 & 9)

Topic 2: Postmodernism: question of originality, reproductive media, and avant-garde notions of authenticity; the grid: Avant-garde ground zero or postmodernist repetition?

Discussion reading: Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde: a postmodernist repetition*

## WEEK 13

### SCENE/MIRROR → SCREEN/NETWORK → RHIZOMES

4/16

Topic 1: Paradigms of scene/mirror vs. screen/network; collapse of public and private space; Political consequences of reality as pure representation; (Baudrillard)

Topic 2: Models of reality: trees and rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari)

Discussion Reading: Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (*The Anti-Aesthetic*); Baudrillard Obit; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Rhizome*

## WEEK 14

### OBJECT ORIENTED ONTOLOGY/SPECULATIVE REALISM

READING LOGS DUE (2<sup>nd</sup> half)

4/23

Topic: Object Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism

Discussion Reading: Graham Harman, *The Third Table*, (More TBA)

## WEEK 15

4/30

Final Project Presentations

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### SOME COVERED TOPICS:

#### Modernism: a master narrative

Language, thinking, transparency/objectivity

Philosophical foundations: enlightenment principles

Changing views of reality, problem of knowledge (epistemology)

Form as content (language and material)

Avant-gardism (freshness, originality, genius, authenticity)

The tyranny of the “new”

Critique of representation (re-presentation and mimesis)

Kitsch and Camp

Social theories and paradigms

The Age of Reproduction (fetishes, auras, exhibition value)

Media/message

Art for art’s/art for society’s sake

End of Modernism?

#### Postmodernism: a confluence of narratives

Review metaphysics: ontology and epistemology

Language’s loss of innocence (language and signification)

The loss of history

Originality challenged

Challenging dominant narratives

Critique of transcendental subjectivity

Critique of transcendental signification (and hierarchy)

Othering

Discourse as reality

The death of the subject/ deconstruction

Feminisms

Essentializing

Postcolonialism

Authorship

Object Oriented Ontology

## University Policies

Important University Dates:

Martin Luther King Day (no classes)	Mon Jan 15
<b>First day of classes;</b> last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date; full semester waitlists removed	Mon Jan 22
<b>Last day to add classes</b> —all individualized section forms due Last day to drop with no tuition penalty	Mon Jan 29
<b>Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty</b>	Mon Feb 12
<b>Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition penalty)</b>	Fri Feb 23
Immunization Record Deadline	Thu Mar 1
Midterm progress reporting period (100-200 level classes)—grades available via <a href="#">Patriot Web</a>	Mon Feb 19 – Fri Mar 23
Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only)	Mon Feb 26 – Fri Mar 30
Spring Break	Mon Mar 12 – Sun Mar 18
<b>Incomplete work from Fall 2017 due to Instructor</b>	Fri Mar 23
<b>Incomplete grade changes from Fall 2017 due to Registrar</b>	Fri Mar 30
Dissertation/Thesis Deadline	Fri May 4
<b>Last day of classes</b>	Sat May 5
<b>Reading Days</b> Reading days provide students with additional study time for final examinations. Faculty may schedule optional study sessions, but regular classes or exams may not be held.	Mon May 7 – Tue May 8
<b>Exam Period</b> (beginning at 7:30 a.m.)	Wed May 9 – Wed May 16
<b>Commencement</b>	Fri May 18
<b>Degree Conferral Date</b>	Sat May 19

**ArtsBus Credit and Policies:** You are responsible for knowing and following Artsbus policies and rules. Please go to the ArtsBus website: <http://artsbus.gmu.edu> "Student Information" for important information regarding ArtsBus policy. For credit to appear on your transcript you must enroll in AVT 300. This also applies to anyone who intends to travel to New York independently, or do the DC Alternate Assignment. \* If you plan/need to go on multiple ArtsBus trips during a semester and need them towards your total requirement, you must enroll in multiple sections of AVT 300\* Non-AVT majors taking art classes do not need Artsbus credit BUT may need to go on the Artsbus for a class assignment. You can either sign up for AVT 300 or buy a ticket for the bus trip at the Center of the Arts. Alternate trips must be approved by the instructor of the course that is requiring an ArtsBus trip.

ArtsBus - Dates for Spring 2018: February 24, March 24, April 14

**Visual Voices Lecture Series Spring 2018:** Visual Voices is a year-long series of lectures by artists, art historians and others about contemporary art and art practice. Visual Voices lectures are held on Thursday evenings from 7:20- 9:00 p.m. in Harris Theater: <http://soa.gmu.edu/visualvoices/>

January 24 – Brian Noyes

March 1 – Juliet Bellow

February 1 – Teresa Jaynes

March 8 – John Henry

February 22 – Sharif Bey

**Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences** If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Disabilities Resource Center (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474). You must provide your instructor with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the DRC.

**Cell Phones:** School of Art Policies in accordance with George Mason University policy, turn off all beepers, cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class. The instructor of the class will keep his/her cell phone active to assure receipt of any

Mason Alerts in a timely fashion; or in the event that the instructor does not have a cell phone, he/she will designate one student to keep a cell phone active to receive such alerts.

**Commitment to Diversity:** This class will be conducted as an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

**Statement on Ethics in Teaching and Practicing Art and Design:** As professionals responsible for the education of undergraduate and graduate art and design students, the faculty of the School of Art adheres to the ethical standards and practices incorporated in the professional Code of Ethics of our national accreditation organization, The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

**Open Studio Hours:** SOA teaching studios are open to students for extended periods of time mornings, evenings and weekends whenever classes are not in progress. Policies, procedures and schedules for studio use are established by the SOA studio faculty and are posted in the studios.

**Official Communications via GMU E-Mail** Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

**Attendance Policies** Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

**Honor Code** Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, and are responsible knowing the rules, as stated on the George Mason University website' Academic Integrity page (<http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>). "To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, trust, and fairness among all members of the Mason community, and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: ***Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.***"

Mason's Commitment: To create an environment that is innovative, diverse, entrepreneurial, and accessible-helping you avoid accidental or intentional violations of the Honor Code."

**Writing Center** Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis. The Collaborative Learning Hub Located in Johnson Center 311 (703-993-3141), the lab offers in-person one-on-one support for the Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Blackboard, and a variety of other software. Dual monitor PCs make the lab ideal for collaborating on group projects, Macs are also available; as well as a digital recording space, collaborative tables, and a SMART Board. Free workshops are also available (Adobe and Microsoft) through Training and Certification; visit [ittraining.gmu.edu](http://ittraining.gmu.edu) to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.