

Kansas City Art Institute: ARTH14035-03
Postmodernism Seminar: Art and Theory
Tuesdays, 2:30-5:20pm, DSB 104

Professor: Maria Elena Buszek
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Office Hours: M/W, 11am-12:30pm, or by appointment

Helpsite: <http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai>
(go to "Postmodernism" to enter our class' primary site)

Course description and objectives: Unlike Modernist art, postmodernism no longer proclaims its autonomy, its self-sufficiency, or its transcendence. Instead it narrates its own contingency, insufficiency, and immanence. Postmodernism's deconstructive thrust allows us to compare art arising from a dissatisfaction with "modernity." This course focuses on the culture and codified signs of this dissatisfaction—reflected in art, theory, music, and politics—as well as the pleasures to be found therein. The course readings and discussions will address, and in their writing and class participation students will be expected to understand the art and culture of each movement. Assessment will be based on the mission and learning outcomes of the School of Liberal Arts, as published in the KCAI Catalog.

Grading: Your grade will be based on a take-home midterm essay "exam" and a final research paper, as well as your preparation for and participation in weekly discussion (which will involve composing and turning in typed and printed weekly questions based on that week's readings). All these grades hold equal weight in your final grade, which will be based on the average of these three grades. Because you will have plenty of lead-time to research and compose your essays/paper—the due dates of which have been included in the schedule from the beginning of the semester—**late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances.**

Students' grades will be assessed based on the student's average performance at midterm (at which point downgrades will be given for those earning a C- or less) and the end of the term. This course's grading scale is as follows: 100%-93%=A, 92%-90%=A-, 89%-86%=B+, 85%-83%=B, 82%-80%=B-, 79%-76%=C+, 55%-73%=C, 72%-70%=C-, 69%-66%=D+, 65%-63%=D, 62%-60%=D-, 59% and below, F.

Attendance and Absence Policy: Attendance in class is mandatory, not just because much of the lecture material will not necessarily be directly or extensively addressed in your readings, but also because discussion will be a crucial part of how we learn (and how students are graded) in this course. As such, one's success in the course will be in great part dependent upon one's presence in the classroom.

Each student will be allowed TWO unexcused absences from class over the course of the semester. Absences will only be excused when accompanied by official documentation from a physician or counselor explaining one's extended illness or extreme/unusual personal crisis. Such documentation must be presented within a reasonable amount of time (notes explaining one's illness from three months previous, for example, are not acceptable). Students with preexisting health issues that they anticipate may cause them to miss more than three classes are required to provide me with both a written explanation from and a phone number for the student's physician or counselor, so that I may speak directly with the health care provider should the student's absences begin to affect his/her grade. In any case, unless I am presented with the proper and timely documentation for a student's absence/s, **upon the THIRD unexcused absence, the student will automatically receive a failing grade ("F") in the class.** Remember that it is *the student's* responsibility to contact me and deal with absences as soon as possible! Please keep this

attendance policy in mind when mulling over your use of the “free” absences—I can assure you that you will regret those two days you skipped the day a flat tire/broken alarm clock/change in your work schedule occurs after you’ve used up your freebies.

Class Participation: Active participation on the part of each student is essential to the success and effectiveness of this course. Indeed, dialogue will be such a crucial part of the way this class addresses the information at hand that students will be graded on their preparation for and participation in class discussion. Contrary to popular belief, some teachers do *not* necessarily enjoy talking to themselves, and *really* want to hear your thoughts and insights into the material being discussed. (By the way...I am one of those teachers!) **Don’t be afraid to speak up! Or freak out!**

Cheating and plagiarism: Students are expected to be honest in both their test taking and paper writing assignments. Later in the semester, students will be given a handout (also available on our website) on guidelines for citing sources according to the Chicago Manual of Style, which is our discipline’s standard style and which I will expect all students to learn/follow in their writing assignments. Any dishonest student caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive an automatic “zero” on the exam/project at hand and be penalized to the fullest extent of the Academic Dishonesty policy stated in the KCAI Student Handbook. (This means anything from academic probation, to a failing course grade, to expulsion, depending on the findings of the KCAI Judicial Board.)

Students with disabilities: Please let me know as soon as possible if you have a disability that may hinder your performance or participation in this class, so that accommodations may be made to satisfy course requirements. Trust me: you will find that I am willing to be extremely accommodating when it comes to student success, and would like to assure just about any student with any disability that they can not only take but do well in my classes. In any case, whether you choose to discuss any disabilities with us or not, **all learning- or physically-disabled students are required to disclose as much with our Academic Resource Center in order to qualify for accommodations**—students can get further information through the ARC at (phone) 816/802.3371 or (e-mail) arc@kcai.edu.

A note on class readings: Your textbooks for this class are: **David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000***; and **Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory: 1900-2000***. You will also be assigned “reserve” discussion readings that will be linked to our website as they are assigned. I expect students to read ahead for each week’s class; the textbook readings are listed in our course schedule with specific chapters/pages/authors following each day’s lecture theme, and reserve readings will be posted as the semester wears on.

Questions? Problems? Frustrations? These, my friends, are what your professors are here to help you deal with! I place a priority upon making myself accessible to students, and do my best to be extremely flexible when it comes to meeting and talking with students who would like help. My crucial numbers (phone, e-mail, office) are located above, and I am always willing to answer questions, discuss problems, and ease anxiety.

DATES TO REMEMBER:

October 26th: Midterm essays due!

December 14th: Final papers due!

COURSE SCHEDULE:

August

28: Introductions, syllabus, questions
Modernism into Postmodernism

September

4: **The Politics of Modernism**

Readings: Hopkins, Chapter 1
Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer,
"The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (website)
Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (*Art in Theory*, 539-549)
Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (*AiT*, 562-568)
Arthur Danto, Introduction from *After the End of Art* [website]
(Suggested reading:) Robert Storr, "No Joy In Mudville" [website]

11: **Duchamp, Simulacra, and Author-ity**

Readings: Hopkins, Chapters 2-3
Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case" (*AiT*, 252)
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (*AiT*, 520-527)
Jean Baudrillard, "The Hyper-realism of Simulation" (*AiT*, 1018-20)
Pierre Bourdieu, "Being Different," (*AiT*, 1020-1025)
Jasper Johns, "Obituary of Marcel Duchamp" (*AiT*, 760-761)

18: **Pop toward postmodernism**

Readings: Hopkins, Chapter 4
Lawrence Alloway, "The Arts and the Mass Media" (*AiT*, 715-17)
Richard Hamilton, "For the Finest Art, Try Pop" (*AiT*, 742-3)
Claes Oldenburg, "Documents from *The Store*" (*AiT*, 743-747)
George Maciunas, "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art" (*AiT*, 727-729)

25: **Killing the author/empowering the reader**

Readings: Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" (*AiT*, 693-698)
Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (website)
Barthes, "From Work to Text" (*AiT*, 965-970)
Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (website)
Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (*AiT*, 949-953)

October

2: **Minimalism, performance, and the issue of "objecthood"**

Readings: Hopkins, Chapter 5
Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" (*AiT*, 824-828)
Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, 1-3" (*AiT*, 828-835)
Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (*AiT*, 835-846)
Allan Kaprow, "From *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings*" (*AiT*, 717-722)
Lawrence Weiner, "Statements" (*AiT*, 893-894)

9: **The death of the object/rebirth of the political**

Readings: Hopkins, pp. 161-183
Guy Debord, "Writings from the Situationist International" (*AiT*, 701-707)
Joseph Beuys, "I Am Searching for a Field Character" (*AiT*, 929-930)
Artforum "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium" (*AiT*, 922-926)
Dan Graham, "Presentation to an Open Hearing of the Art Workers' Coalition" (*AiT*, 915-17)
Victor Burgin, "Situational Aesthetics" (*AiT*, 894-896)

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16: More politics/more perspectives

Readings: Hopkins, pp. 183-195
Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture" (*AiT*, 710-715)
Edward Said, "From *Orientalism*" (*AiT*, 1005-1009)
Valie Export, "Woman's Art" (*AiT*, 927-929)
Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" (website)
Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (*AiT*, 982-989)

23: Blank generation: pop cultural echoes

Readings: Lester Bangs, "The White Noise Supremacists" (website)
Dan Graham "New Wave Rock and the Feminine" (website)
Greil Marcus, "Introduction" from *Lipstick Traces* (website)

MIDTERM TAKE-HOME EXAMS DUE TODAY!!

30: Declaring/defining the "postmodern"

Readings: Jean-François Lyotard, "Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*" (*AiT*, 1122-1123)
Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (website)
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Excerpt from *A Thousand Plateaus* (website)
Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse:
Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" (*AiT*, 1025-1032)

November

6: Postmodernism in practice: 1980s art world

Readings: Hopkins, pp. 197-219
Craig Owens, "The Discourse of others: Feminism and Postmodernism" (website)
Rosalind Krauss, "From *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*" (*AiT*, 1032-1037)
Krauss, "From *Cindy Sherman: Untitled*" (website)
Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs" (*AiT*, 1037-1038)

13: Difference, simulation, abjection

Readings: Hopkins, pp. 219-231
Mike Kelley, "Dirty Toys: Mike Kelley interviewed" (*AiT*, 1099-1102)
Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection" (website)
Cornel West, "The New Politics of Cultural Difference" (website)
bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness" (website)

20: Constructions: history and identity

Readings: Hopkins, Chapter 8
Jeff Wall, "From a discussion" (*AiT*, 1158-1161)
Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (website)
"The Body You Want: Liz Kotz interviews Judith Butler" (website)
Homi K. Bhabha, "On 'hybridity' and 'moving beyond'" (*AiT*, 1110-1116)

27: Transcendence or resistance? Post-what?

Readings: Frederick Jameson, Excerpts from *Postmodernism* (website)
Cathy Byrd, "Is there a 'post-black' art?" (website)
"Feminism and Art: 9 Views" (website)
Patricia Bickers, "'Oh, Politics Schmopolitics!' Art in the Postmodern Age" (website)

December

4: Trails blazed and rediscovered

READINGS TBA

11: FINAL PAPERS DUE/SHARED IN CLASS:

NO READINGS! In-class discussion: What next?