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ARTH 503.01: Critical Theory in the Visual Arts

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Syl-F13-A503-01-HRC
ARTH 503.01, CRITICAL THEORY IN THE VISUAL ARTS

“Theory, that capitalized catch-all term which is meant to cover all the various ways of studying the arts so as to make the student feel as smart as the artist.” Clive James

Term: Fall 2013

Course Information:

School of Art

ARTH 503, Section 01, **CRITICAL THEORY IN THE VISUAL ARTS,**

3 credits

Professor Information:

H. Rafael Chacón, Ph.D.

Office hours: Monday - Thursday, 11-12 AM, Fine Arts 305B, tel. ext. 2735, hrafael.chacon@umontana.edu. Messages can also be left in my mailbox in the main office (FA 205).

Meetings:

Fine Arts, Room 302, Monday, Wednesday & Friday, 2:10-3:30 PM.

Course Objectives & Description:

This course is an exploration of art criticism as a particular kind of discourse about art. We aim to be not just consumers of criticism--students of influential writings on everything from easel paintings to YouTube videos--but also producers of critical thinking, discussion, and writing. This course combines theory and practice by providing the opportunity to take a position on criticism and to cultivate skills as critics of contemporary art and culture. The changing dynamics of art criticism cannot be understood in isolation from the larger debate about the nature of contemporary experience which encompasses many disciplines. In studying the evolution of criticism, we should note that art critics have addressed other issues: philosophy, religion, psychology, politics, history, etc., making this a very interesting field.

Course Format: The success of this course rests on the quality of our discussions. Since it is a seminar, we shall all take part in leading the discussions. Your grade relies in large part on class participation, which may count for more if it has been exceptionally good or less if exceedingly poor. Improvement over the course of the quarter will be registered in the final grade. Note that the syllabus is arranged by topic. We shall allow the discussions and debates to develop lives of their own; we are on a tight schedule and I shall avoid carrying over unfinished work into the next session. Don't panic if that occurs as there is some flexibility in the schedule.

Policies: Students will utilize the course management tool Moodle for the syllabus and other course materials. **THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE CHECK MOODLE REGULARLY FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES.**

Requirements and Grading Policies: You will be expected to engage the ideas discussed in class, to stay abreast of the readings, to share your thoughts and ideas, and participate fully in all

class activities.

Attendance/Absence Policy: I expect at least 85% attendance and occasional participation to earn a "C" and 95-100% participation with consistent and thoughtful contribution to class discussion for an "A".

Excused Absences:

What warrants an excused absence? A death in the family, a court or legal issue (for example: jury duty, parole meeting, court date, incarceration), an appointment for public benefits or entitlements that cannot be scheduled at any other time, or a severe health issue.

What is a severe health issue? Being contagious (with flu or pink eye, for example), an incident that requires a visit to the emergency room or hospitalization, or having a medical condition requiring an immediate appointment that cannot be scheduled at any other day/time. Upon returning to class, the student must show documentation regarding the exact date of the absence (except in the case of family death). Absences due to a severe health issue can be excused only if, upon returning, the student brings a signed note from his or her attending health care provider (physician or RN, not a member of the secretarial staff) stating that the student was ill the day of the absence and sought medical attention. The note must include: the exact date of class missed and the actual signature of the attending physician or RN and his/her contact information.

Credit/No Credit Option:

When you matriculate in this class and register for a traditional grade, you make a contract to do your best and accept the grade assigned. I do not convert a traditional grade to credit/no credit and release a student from her contract unless I have evidence of an emergency, health crisis, or extreme personal situation in which the student cannot possibly finish the course assignments in the normal fashion. The possibility of failing the class or earning a low grade and lowering your overall GPA does not rise to that standard.

Drop/Add Forms:

As per the previous paragraph, I do not sign drop/add forms after week 10 of the term.

Texts and Readings: The readings are mostly articles and excerpts from journals, anthologies, and other books. These will be made available electronically on Moodle. Good class participation depends on your ability to prepare in advance of the discussion. Understanding the readings is crucial. Since many of the texts may be initially difficult, give yourself plenty of time to read them. Read them twice if necessary. Focus on the main thrust of the argument and take notes, and, by all means, bring your thoughts and questions to class.

Introductions: Each student will take responsibility for introducing the day's topic and framing the readings in such a way as to stimulate discussion. This is done by giving a brief introduction to the class and handing out any of the following discussion aids: an outline of the salient points or key questions for discussion, an abstract of the author's biography, a brief analysis of the text in question, etc. Everyone will do this at least twice during the semester. In addition, each

student will keep a journal in which you will write short critical essays on the texts or responses to discussion questions.

Midterm Examination and Term Paper: There will be a take-home Midterm Examination at midsemester worth 50 % of your grade. The exam will be in the form of a series of essay questions which may be revised for the final grade. **Exams will be due at the start of class and please note that I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS without prior consent.** A longer term paper, a critical essay (Research Paper) on a topic of the student's choosing, will be due on at the end of the term.

Grades:

Class Participation (attendance, intros. & journals)	25 %	100 pts.
Midterm Exam	50 %	200 pts.
Term Paper	25 %	100 pts.
Total	100%	400 pts.

Access/Special Needs/Disabilities:

If you have any access concerns, special needs, and/or learning disabilities, medical conditions, and/or physical impairments that may impede the successful completion of this course, please contact the office of Disability Services for Students (DSS) at x. 2243 (Lommasson Center 154) and speak with me as soon as possible.

Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/Index.cfm/page/1321.

Use of Cell Phones, Blackberries, and other Electronic Devices:

Please turn off all cell phones, Blackberries, I-phones, and other mobile devices or set them on vibrate prior to the start of class. Students failing to do so will be asked to leave class and may not be allowed to return to class that day at the instructor's discretion. However, if you are in the midst of an emergency, please communicate with me about your situation, immediately. I-pods, laptops, or other recording devices for note-taking may be used but only after you have received explicit written permission from me.

Syllabus:

THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE CHECK MOODLE REGULARLY FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES.

PART 1. MODERNISM

Week 1:

The Idea of Art Criticism

Introduction to the course.

Jaucourt, in Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, trans., (Indianapolis, 1965), 278-282

Saint-Lambert, in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory; 1648-1815*, (2000), 587-590.

Week 2:

Diderot, Denis, "Art" from the *Encyclopédie* (1751-76), in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory; 1648-1815*, (2000), 581-587.

Montesquieu, Baron de, essays on "Taste" and other issues from the *Encyclopédie*, in Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, trans., (Indianapolis, 1965), 340-44, 353-57.

Kant, Immanuel, selections from *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory; 1648-1815*, (2000), 780-788.

Week 3:

Romanticism vs. Realism

Balzac, Honoré de, "The Unknown Maspterpiece," 223-254.

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life*, trans. J. Mayne, (New York), 1-40.

Week 4:

Formalism

Bell, Clive, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," in *Art*, (London, 1931), 3-30.

Fry, Roger, "Art and Life," in *Vision and Design*, (London, 1920), 1-15.

Early Modernist Dialectics

Greenberg, Clement, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, (New York, 1985), 21-33.

Week 5:

Early Modernist Dialectics continued...

_____, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," in Frascina, 35-46.

Abstraction

Barr, Alfred H., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, (New York, 1936), 10-46.

Week 6:

Abstraction

Schapiro, Meyer, "The Nature of Abstract Art," in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, (New York), 185-212.

Abstract Expressionism

Rosenberg, Harold, "The American Action Painters," (1952) in *The Tradition of the New*, (New York, 1965), 23-39.

Week 7:

Kozloff, Max, "American Painting during the Cold War," in Frascina, 107-24.

Cockcroft, Eva, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," in Frascina, 125-33.

Midterm Examination assigned on Wednesday, March 13

Week 8

NO CLASS

Work on exams.

Week 9

NO CLASS

Work on exams.

Week 10

Midterm Examinations due at the start of class on Monday, October 28. Please note that I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS without prior consent.

Climax or Dissolution? Minimalism and Conceptual Art

Rose, Barbara, "ABC Art," in Gregory Battock, ed., *Minimal Art*, (New York, 1968), 274-97.

Fried, Michael, "Art and Objecthood," in Battock, 115-47.

Wednesday, October 30, Term paper assigned.

PART 2. POST-MODERNISM

Week 11

Graded midterm exams returned, Monday, November 4

Origins of Postmodernism: Dialectical Materialism

Benjamin, Walter, "The Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," (1938), in Berel Lang and Forrest Williams, eds., *Marxism and Art*, (New York, 1972), 281-300.

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972), 7-34.

Week 12

NO CLASS, Monday, November 11, Veteran's Day

Revised midterm exams due by noon, Tuesday, November 12

Pop and the End of Modernism

Alloway, Lawrence, "The Long Front of Culture," (1959), in Gablik and Russell, 41-43.

McHale, John, "The Plastic Parthenon," (1967), in Gablik and Russell, 47-53.

Gablik, Suzi, and John Russell, eds., *Pop Art Redefined*, (New York, 1969), 9-20.

Week 13

Postmodern Pop and Other Simulations

Baudrillard, Jean, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Smagula, 100-07.

Linker, Kate, "From Imitation to the Copy to Just Effect: On Reading Jean Baudrillard," in Smagula, 108-15.

Week 14

Term papers due at the start of class, Monday, November 25

Feminist Criticism

Spencer, Ana Garlin, "Woman's Share in Social Culture," (1912), in Miriam Schneir, *Feminism: The Essential Writings*, (New York, 1972), 268-85.

Foucault, Michel, "The Subject and Power," (1982) in David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram, eds., *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, (New York, 1992), 303-19.

NO CLASS Wednesday, November 27, Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 15

Term papers with final grades returned Monday, December 2

Duncan, Carol, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," *Art Journal* (Summer 1989), 171-78.

Frueh, Joanna, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Art Criticism," in Smagula, 50-64.

Revised papers due Wednesday, December 4.

Finals Week

There is no final examination in this class. We shall only meet this week if discussions run over.