MSL1300H Contemporary Theories of Art and Culture
Winter Session 2016

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Class Hours: Wednesday 1:00-4:00 pm – Room BL728  
Office Hours: Wednesday 4:00-5:00 pm, or by appointment – Room BL650

Course Description
This interdisciplinary course offers students an overview of a wide range of contemporary developments in theoretical approaches to the study of art and culture. In particular, the course focuses on the recent turn towards more socially and historically-grounded modes of analysis within a number of disciplines and research fields, including art history, philosophy and museum studies. The course also traces the development of contemporary cultural theory, surveying recent work in sociology, feminism, postmodernism, and cultural studies.

Course Objectives
This course presents a survey of theoretical work addressing issues in art and culture, examining a number of foundational texts in a variety of disciplinary fields and movements. The eclectic range of readings is intended to familiarize students with a wide spectrum of the theoretical positions at play within contemporary discourse. The course examines the manner in which theories of art and culture can be used to illuminate particular issues, and the ways in which these theories can both complement and contradict one another. Students are not expected to become experts in all of the theoretical positions surveyed, but rather will gain a sound understanding of their key elements and applications. A thorough and critical engagement with all the course material, including full participation in class discussions, is required of all students.

Required Readings
All Required Readings are listed in the Schedule of Topics, and are available as short-term loan Course Readings in the Inforum or as Electronic Resources. The electronic version of the Course Outline has hyperlinks for direct access to Electronic Resources, and is available on Blackboard. In addition to the Course Readings, all students are required to access, download, and read these Electronic Resources. (Please note that hyperlinks are provided for convenience only – if any links are broken, students should access the required reading through the Library website).
MARKING SCHEME

1. **One Critical Summary = 25%** (Variable deadlines)
   Students will be required to write one Critical Summary from a choice of nine specifically designated readings during the course of the Winter Session. Those readings on which Critical Summaries will be accepted are clearly indicated in the Course Outline (**CS**).
   Critical Summaries should outline briefly the central concepts and issues covered in the reading, and provide a concise critical commentary on the reading.
   Critical Summaries should be four double-spaced pages in length, and are due by 12:59 pm at the beginning of the class for which the reading is set. Papers should be submitted both on Blackboard (in either PDF or Word format) and as hard copies in class.

2. **Cultural Text Analysis = 45%** (Due 8 April 2016)
   Students will be required to write a ten-page paper that analyses a cultural text from the perspective of two of the theoretical positions addressed in the course. The purpose of this assignment is to allow students to reflect on the explanatory powers and limitations of specific cultural theories. The paper should examine how the two different theoretical approaches situate and interpret the cultural text – i.e. exploring which aspects of the cultural text the theories emphasize and/or illuminate, and which aspects they neglect and/or obfuscate. Note that the term “cultural text” should be interpreted broadly, and can be understood to encompass art objects, anthropological objects, public art, musical pieces or performances, literary fiction and poetry, theatre and dance productions, films, television shows, fashion, etc.
   Students must discuss and agree their choice of cultural text with the Instructor before writing their paper. Cultural Text Analysis papers are due by 12:59 pm on Friday 8th April, and should be submitted via Blackboard (in either PDF or Word format).
   
   NOTE – COURSE PAPERS: All course papers should have a title page and numbered pages, and must be word-processed, using one-inch margins, double-spacing, and standard fonts (e.g. 12-point Times New Roman). Late papers will be subject to a penalty of 5% reduction per day on the total mark available for the paper.

3. **Class Presentation – Postmodern Cultural Practice = 20%** (23 March 2016)
   In the class session on 23 March 2016, students will be required to give brief, individual presentations on postmodernism. These presentations should be approximately five minutes in length, and should address an example (or examples) of postmodern cultural practice, which should be analyzed/interpreted with reference to the readings on postmodernism in the relevant sessions (16/23/30 March). The presentations should be illustrated with a maximum of three PowerPoint slides. Presenters should leave a folder on the Desktop of the classroom computer containing the PowerPoint files.

4. **Class Participation = 10%** (Throughout course)
   Students will be expected to attend all meetings of the class, and to arrive punctually for each session (i.e. no later than 1:10 pm). Students will be expected to be thoroughly familiar with all the Required Readings and to play an active role in discussion sessions. Marks will be awarded on the basis of familiarity with the course material, as evidenced by participation in class discussions. Students must inform the Instructor – in advance – of any class absences, which must be accompanied by a valid and substantive reason. Students who miss more than three meetings of the class with no advance explanation will receive a Participation mark of 0%.
Schedule of Topics and Required Readings

13 JAN  Class No 1 – Introduction: Course Outline/Marking Scheme
Course Outline, Marking Scheme, and Summary of Course Content

20 JAN  Class No 2 – Any Bonds Today?
Ninety Seconds of Cultural History (or, “Fantastic, Isn’t It?”)

Raymond Williams (1961) ‘The Analysis of Culture’

Sean Matthews (2001) ‘Change and Theory in Raymond Williams’s Structure of Feeling’

Christopher P. Lehman (2007) ‘Black Representation and World War II Political Concerns’
in *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Short Films, 1907-1954*,
Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 73-86 (*Course Readings*)

Viewing: *Any Bonds Today?* (Bugs Bunny – Warner Bros., 1942) (1.5 minutes)

27 JAN  Class No 3 – Marxism: Adorno, Benjamin, and Mechanical Reproduction

Theodor Adorno (1941) ‘On Popular Music’
(Fourth Edition), London: Pearson Longman (pp. 63-74) (*Course Readings*)

**CS** Walter Benjamin (1936) ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’

3 FEB  Class No 4 – Sociological Perspectives and Interdisciplinarity


**CS**  Pierre Bourdieu (1993) ‘The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic’


10 FEB  Class No 5 – Art History and Philosophical Aesthetics

Arthur C. Danto (1964) ‘The Artworld’

John Berger (1972) ‘Essay 1’/‘Essay 5’
in Ways of Seeing, London: Penguin, pp. 7-34 and 83-112 (Course Readings)

**CS**  Michael Baxandall (1988) ‘Conditions of Trade’/‘The Period Eye: Volumes’
in Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-27 and 86-93 (Course Readings)

17 FEB  READING WEEK – NO MEETING OF CLASS

24 FEB  Class No 6 – Discourse, Communication, and Listening


2 MAR  Class No 7 – Feminist Approaches to Art and Culture

Linda Nochlin (1971) ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’
New York: Thames & Hudson (Course Readings)

Lana F. Rakow (1986) ‘Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving
Patriarchy Its Due’
(Fourth Edition), London: Pearson Longman (pp. 183-198) (Course Readings)

**CS** Janet Wolff (2006) ‘Groundless Beauty: Feminism and the Aesthetics of
Uncertainty’
Feminist Theory, Vol. 7 No. 2: 143–158 (Electronic Resource)

9 MAR  Class No 8 – Museums and Feminist Interventions

in Amy K. Levin (ed.) (2010) Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader,
London: Routledge, pp. 53-64 (Electronic Resource)

1970s’
Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 64-84 (Electronic Resource)

**CS** Viv Golding (2013) ‘Museums, Poetics and Affect’

16 MAR  Class No 9 – Postmodernism I: An Idiosyncratic Introduction

Umberto Eco (1985) ‘Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable’
in Reflections on The Name of the Rose, London: Secker & Warburg, pp. 65-72
(Course Readings)

in John Shepherd, David Horn, Dave Laing, Paul Oliver and Peter Wicke (eds.)
The Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 1: Media,
Industry and Society, London: Continuum, pp. 106-111 (Course Readings)
23 MAR  Class No 10 – Postmodernism II – Cultural Logic/Cultural Change  
+ Student Presentations on Postmodern Cultural Practice

**CS**  Fredric Jameson (1984) ‘Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’  
*New Left Review* No. 146: 53-92 (*Electronic Resource*)

David Harvey (1989) ‘Postmodernism’  
in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*,  
Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 39-65 (*Course Readings*)

NOTE: In addition to discussion of the course readings, this week’s session will involve a series of brief (c. 5-minute) presentations by students. See the Marking Scheme on page 2 for further details of this class session.

30 MAR  Class No 11 – Museums and the Postmodern Turn


*Public Archaeology*, Vol. 5 No. 3: 185-197 (*Electronic Resource*)

**CS**  Carly Smith (2014) ‘Post-Modernising the Museum: The Ration Shed’  

6 APR  Class No 12 – Cultural Value and New Museum Theory

**CS**  Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1988) ‘Fixed Marks and Variable Constancies: A Parable of Value’  


Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 64-84 (*Electronic Resource*)