

**ART 7400: 20TH-CENTURY CRITICAL THEORY AND ART**

PROFESSOR SUSAN RYAN

Class meets: Thurs. 12:10 - 3:00 PM

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**INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE**

This is a modification of the course listed as 7400 in the LSU catalog. It is *not* a survey of art criticism and collecting from ancient times, but rather an introduction to major schools, movements, and writers of late 19th-early 21st-century art theory, and developments in critical theory that pertain to the visual arts. In other words, the course deals with foundations of *most* critical and art historical (*not* journalistic) writing, whether it is about contemporary art or art of earlier periods. Nearly all serious art literature of the past century grows out of one or more of the "schools of thought" this course will cover.

The class will read original texts by Tolstoy, Greenberg, Freud, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Heidegger, Said, and many others. Short lecture segments will touch upon the history of criticism in the 20th century and the backgrounds of the writers. As often as possible, readings and discussion will address ways in which major critical schools of thought have influenced specific *art writers* (those, such as art historians and curators, whose writings are found in art periodicals and anthologies, not the popular press), and have also influenced artists, movements, and works.

The class will proceed through the theoretical texts with the objective of opening out their structures, cutting through the jargon, and, hopefully in the end, demystifying critical literature in the visual arts.

However, *students should be forewarned*. Even with our emphasis on historical contexts and reading "tactics." Some of the readings will still be difficult--but not impossible. Students should bring to class a willingness to invest the effort, which will sometimes require reading the same essay *more than once*. Theory builds upon prior theory (or, as often, reacts against it), just as art reacts to other art. Therefore falling behind in readings or class attendance will be detrimental to your success in the course.

**SEMINAR FORMAT**

This course is a graduate seminar. This means that, rather than having a passive role as listener, the student here will be actively engaged in all parts of the course. In fact, once we get rolling, students will lead the classes each week. In the seminar format, exams are optional *but pop quizzes may be administered as necessary*. As student dialogue and leadership are of utmost importance, naturally not coming to class or not doing readings are *unthinkable!*

**REQUIREMENTS**

- (1) Course performance and positive contribution to class discussions
- (2) Leadership of 2 or more weekly reading discussions
- (3) Seminar paper
- (4) Seminar presentation of paper material to the class

**TEXT AND READINGS** The key course texts are:

Thompson, James M., ed. *20th-Century Theories of Art*. Ottawa, ON: Carleton Univ. Press, 1990 (pbk)

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. 2nd edition. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Additional readings will be assigned. Many of these will be available through the Middleton Reserve Desk. Please note the **Middleton Reserve Reading List** attached. In addition to supplying resources for additional readings, books placed on reserve can help you with a term project topic; others can provide additional support for understanding or gaining background for weekly reading assignments. I will probably add to this list throughout the semester.

**BLACKBOARD**

The course will use Blackboard as a means of posting readings (when possible) and useful additional material and links, *and* as an extension of our classroom, where additional communication and discussions can be held.

Useful website:

[http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc\\_data/postmodern.html](http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc_data/postmodern.html)

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**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

Information on readings for each are preliminary here. Complete assignments will be provided as we go along.

1. Jan. 18 **Course introduction:** what is "critical theory"?  
background of critical theory in art history; background  
for expression theory
  
2. Jan. 25 **Expression theory:** Leo Tolstoy,  
Readings: Leo Tolstoy, Collingwood
  
3. Feb. 1 **Formalism:**  
Readings: Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg
  
4. Feb. 8 **Psychoanalytic theory:** Freud plus other psychoanalytical  
approaches such as Ego psychology and their use in art history  
Readings: Sigmund Freud, D.E. Winnecott, Ellen Handler Spitz
  
5. Feb. 22 **Marxism and Materialism**  
Readings: Karl Marx, Nicolas Hadjinicolaou,  
Louis Althusser, T. J. Clark
  
6. March 1 **Frankfurt School**  
Readings: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin
  
7. March 8 **Early Feminist and Revisionist Theories**  
Readings: Griselda Pollock, Judith Butler, Linda Nochlin,  
Thomas McEvilly, Craig Owens  
  
**Students hand in statement of their seminar topics**
  
8. March 15 **Structuralism and Semiotics**  
Readings: Irwin Panofsky, Ferdinand de Saussure,  
Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, early Rosalind Krauss

9. March 22 **Existentialism and Phenomenology**  
Readings: Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty
  
10. March 29 **Poststructuralism**  
Readings: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault
  
11. April 12 **Psychoanalytic Poststructuralism and New Feminism**  
Readings: Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous
  
12. April 19 **Cultural and Postcolonial Theories and More**  
Readings: Edward Said, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Siegfried Zielinski
  
13. April 26 TBA
  
14. May 3 Student presentations