

Postwar French Art and Theory

Dr. Elliott H. King

Outline

The story of twentieth-century French art is a mirror onto the country's history, politics, culture, and evolving identity. Prior to the Second World War, Paris was practically the unchallenged 'capital of the arts', but when the city fell to German occupation in 1940, many artists and intellectuals emigrated to the United States, swiftly moving the spotlight from Paris to New York. This course returns the focus to *la belle France* by studying the emergence of French post-war art movements as well as the fate and influence of pre-war movements in the 1950s and 1960s. We will dissect Franco-American relations in terms of art and culture – what the French artists shared with their American counterparts, and how they distinguished themselves on such subjects as the Holocaust, 'outsider art', the Algerian War, and increased US influence on French culture.

N.b., Although we will attempt to adhere as closely as possible to this syllabus, details are subject to change.

Required books:

- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Vintage Press, 2000.
- Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968*, State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, University of Chicago, 1983
- .pdf readings

Week 1

9/14, Tuesday – Introduction

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
	Karl Marx, "Communist Manifesto"
	Salvador Dalí, "I defy Aragon"
	"Open the Prisons! Disband the Army!"
	Salvador Dalí, "Daydream"
	Antonin Artaud, "Letter to the Pope"

9/16, Thursday – Surrealism and the rise of Communism in France

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
Guilbaut, 16-47.	Leon Trotsky, "Literature and Revolution"
	Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch"

Week 2

9/21, Tuesday – How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
Guilbaut, 49-99	Leon Trotsky, André Breton and Diego Rivera, <i>FIARI Manifesto</i>
	Hitler, "Opening of the 1937 Exhibition of Degenerate Art"
	Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art"

9/23, Thursday – How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, part II

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
	Rachel Perry, "Jean Fautrier's <i>Jolies Juives</i> "
	Yves-Alain Bois, Introduction to <i>Informe</i>
Discussion lead: How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art	

Week 3

9/28, Tuesday – Trauma and Memory: Art of the Occupation

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
	Francis Ponge, "Braque's Drawings"
	Francis Ponge, "The Pleasures of the Door"
	Francis Ponge, "Rhetoric"
Report: Vichy	

9/30, Thursday – Guest speaker Dr. Jennifer Pap on Francis Ponge

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
	Breton, "The Great Transparent Ones", in <i>Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto</i>
	Peter Brunette, "But Nothing Happened: The Everyday in French Postwar Cinema", in <i>The Art of the Everyday</i> , pp. 79-92.
	Jean Dubuffet, "Crude Art Preferred to Cultural Art"

Week 5

10/5, Tuesday – No class

10/7, Thursday – Post-War France: In search of a new myth

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
	Sarah Wilson, 'Femmes d'Algerie et femmes francaises: Autour de Mireille Miallhe'
Report: The Fourth Republic (1946-58)	

Week 5

10/12, Tuesday – France and Algeria (1954-62)

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
Report: Algerian War	

10/14, Thursday – Godard – *Le Petit Soldat*

Week 6

10/19, Tuesday – Midterm

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
	Fred Gross, 'Mathieu paints a picture', http://web.gc.cuny.edu/ArtHistory/part/part8/articles/gross.html
	Michel Tapié, <i>Un art outre</i> (excerpt)

10/21, Thursday – Abstract Expressionism and *Taschisme*

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
	Guy Debord, Contribution to the Debate, "Is Surrealism Dead or Alive?" (1958)
	Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive" (1958)
	Guy DeBord, <i>Society of the Spectacle</i>

Week 7

10/26, Tuesday – Art/Revolution/Spectacle: International Situationism

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
Barthes, pp. 109-117; also one short text on which to write a response for Tuesday	Kristen Ross, "French Quotidian", in <i>The Art of the Everyday</i> pp. 19-29
To do for Thursday: Dérive	

10/28, Thursday – Art, Popular Culture, and ‘les sixties’ (part I): The everyday, Pop and *les nouveaux réalistes*

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
	Pierre Restany, “Constitutive Declaration of New Realism”
Dérive	

Week 8

11/2, Tuesday – Art, Popular Culture, and ‘les sixties’ (part II): *les nouveaux réalistes* and *Figuration narrative*

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
<i>When Poetry Ruled the Streets</i> , pp. 3-30	
Due: Response to Barthes’ <i>Mythologies</i>	

11/4, Thursday – From Mao to May: The events leading to May ‘68

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
Report: The Cultural Revolution	

Week 9

11/9, Tuesday – Film: *La Chinoise* (1967)

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
<i>When Poetry Ruled the Streets</i> , pp. 33-55	

11/11, Thursday – The Art of May 1968

Read (for Thursday): Books	Read (for Thursday): Readings
	Jean Dubuffet, “Crude Art Preferred to Cultural Art” (1948)
	“Letter to the Head Doctors of Insane Asylums” (1925)
	André Breton, “The Art of the Insane, the Door to Freedom”
	Antonin Artaud, Extract from “Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society” (1947)

Week 10

11/16, Tuesday – The (re)emergence of anti-psychiatry

Read (for Tuesday): Books	Read (for Tuesday): Readings
	Michèle C. Cone, “Métro, Boulot, Dodo: The Art of the Everyday in France, 1958-72”

Requirements

Required books:

- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Vintage Press, 2000.
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- .pdf readings

Class Meetings:

The class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00pm-1:50pm.

Policies:

Readings:

Please complete all required readings for each day prior to class. Given the lecture/seminar nature of the course, you will be expected to ask questions and contribute to class discussions based on the day's readings.

Attendance and make-up work:

Due to the relatively obscure nature of much of the course material, it will be very difficult to keep up – much less to succeed on exams and other assignments – if you miss class; punctual attendance of class is thus mandatory. If you must miss class or an exam, *you are responsible for informing me beforehand.*

Unexcused absences occur when you do not notify me that you must miss class. Unexcused absences will result in penalization of your grade. Excused absences for matters other than illness need to be cleared with me – in person, by phone, or by e-mail – two days before the date in question.

If you are absent during a day you are meant to give a report, you are responsible for contacting me in advance to determine whether an alternative assignment is possible. *An unexcused absence on the day you are meant to deliver a report will result in a 0 grade for that assignment (i.e., 20% of your final grade)! Class discussions cannot be made up.*

Academic Integrity:

Upholding academic integrity is a very serious issue. You are expected to be familiar with the Honor Code, to follow it, and to work to achieve the community of trust and the atmosphere of intellectual integrity that it aims to create. Using sources without documentation – including borrowing work and ideas from fellow students without citation – is intellectual theft. Not only is this a violation of the University of Denver's Academic Honor Code, but, more globally, intellectual

theft encourages a distrustful academic environment that readily impairs the progression of the intellectual discourse.

You must always cite information that is not considered common knowledge, regardless of whether you quote directly from a source or paraphrase. Although this is most directly applicable to research papers, it is important to credit your sources on all assignments. Plagiarized work receives a grade of "0".

ADA Questions:

If you have a disability and require accommodations for this course, please speak with me as soon as possible so that your learning needs will be appropriately met.

Military:

If you are a military student with the potential of being called to military service and/or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact me no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy.

Grading:

Graduate students will receive one grade for the course based on the following criteria: Final exam (30%), midterm exam (25%), in-class report (20%), response paper to Barthes' *Mythologies* (15%), and *dérive* report (10%).

Undergraduate students will receive one grade for the course based on the following criteria: Final exam (30%), midterm exam (30%), response paper to Barthes' *Mythologies* (20%), and *dérive* report (20%).

Each of these is assessed on the following criteria:

Final exam

The final exam is a take-home essay exam. Answers should be well-organized, which is to say that they *must contain a thesis that addresses the question or topic followed by supporting ideas*. I will assess essays based on thoughtfulness and originality, how adequately and interestingly the answer addresses the subject or question, and the organization of the essay.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will consist of any combination of the following: image identifications (single and/or comparison), factual questions, short answer questions, and/or short essays. For image identifications, you should be able to identify a work's artist, title, and year of execution, in addition to any other pertinent information. A make-up exam will be given to students with valid excuses who have informed me that they will miss the exam before it is administered. The format of the make-up will differ from that administered in class.

In-class report (if applicable)

The in-class report is an oral presentation on a given topic related to French history or class readings. The presentation is expected to be approximately 20 minutes in length with an accompanying visual presentation (e.g., Powerpoint). Although you are encouraged not to read your presentation, I will require a written paper with appropriate citations within one week of your presentation. Papers must:

- have 1.5 spacing
- be written in 10-12 pt font
- have 1" margins
- include proper footnotes (see below)
- include page numbers

For citations, use quotation marks and footnotes for all information that is not general knowledge, including information that you paraphrase. Please use the following format as a guide for footnoting:

1. Rudolf Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny", in Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (eds.), *Surrealism and Women* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 17-26.
2. Jean Clair, "Surrealism and the Demoralization of the West", http://watch.windsofchange.net/themes_39.htm (accessed 9 December 2008). Originally published in French as "Le surréalisme et la démoralisation de l'Occident", *Le Monde* (Paris), 21 November 2001.

Approximately 65% of your "in-class report" grade will be based on your oral presentation – how well it is organized, how thoroughly you cover the subject, how closely you adhere to the allotted time, demonstrated evidence of outside research, and how well you incorporate visuals into your presentation. *You will not be assessed on public speaking abilities.* The remaining 35% of the grade will be based on your written report considering, again, organization, thoughtfulness, coverage, and proper use of citations and grammar. Students who work in groups will each receive the same single grade.

Everyone will appreciate it if you please give yourself enough time to prepare a thoughtful presentation for the class.

Mythologies report

This is a short written response to Roland Barthes' essay, 'Myth Today', as well as one other short essay from the *Mythologies* book. This should be your own assessment of Barthes' observations, taking into account the context of 1950s France and issues of the quotidian we will discuss in class.

Dérive report

One of the basic Situationist practices was the *dérive* (literally "drift" or "drifting"), a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Between October 26 and October 28, you must take a *dérive* and record your experience (e.g., in writing, digital photographs, etc.). We will discuss the *dérive* in class on Thursday, October 28. Following class discussion, you must submit to me some material evidence for assessment. Grading will be based on creativity and how well you followed the assignment instructions.

Class participation

My intention is to conduct this class as a seminar in which everyone speaks freely about questions and issues related to course material. Although there is no set participation grade, I will take participation into account during final grading, especially for those whose final letter grade is on the 'borderline'. Class participation is based on individual performance in class discussions and other contributions, including arranging meetings with me outside class if needed.

Grading standard:

A range: Excellent. "A" work is truly exceptional. It achieves a very high degree of originality and insight and shows intellectual sophistication and mastery of the course material. "A" papers take into account required readings and may include additional materials as well. They are technically perfect and written with elegance and style.

Lower "A" range work demonstrates that the student is capable of independent, creative, and critical thought, can synthesize their knowledge well, and can produce a finely wrought product.

This level of work contains significant insights and ideas deriving from the student's own research and understanding of the course materials. In addition to the "B" qualities listed below, an "A-" paper is also very well written.

B range: Very good. "B" work indicates the student demonstrates sound knowledge of all the facts and information given concerning the object or issue in question. "B" projects will show the student thinking clearly and with rigor about issues and ideas. The student also has the ability to articulate his or her knowledge in the form of a clearly written essay.

Upper and lower ends of this range will indicate, for the former, a higher degree of performance, or, for the latter, a corresponding loss of clarity, insight, sophistication, and/or writing ability.

C range: Adequate. "C" work demonstrates the student's basic understanding of the material, with some mistakes or gaps in knowledge of relatively minor import. There may be flaws in written ability or expression (e.g. lack of coherence and organization, spelling and word choice issues, and inability to clearly express ideas or opinions) which detract from the student's ability to demonstrate his or her knowledge.

D range: Poor. "D" work displays meager comprehension of the basic course material and major gaps and flaws in the amount and quality of the student's knowledge. "D" papers and exams have serious flaws in factual information or written expression.

F: Failure. Failing work shows no knowledge or that the student cannot pull together the few things he or she does know into any synthetic understanding of the material of the class. "F" work will have serious flaws in writing, grammar, spelling, and structure.

How you can reach me:

If you feel lost or have any questions at all about the course, please email me at xxx or call me at xxx.xxx.xxxx (personal mobile); I check my email obsessively and will respond as quickly as possible. I am not as effective at responding to text messages, but I will respond (with brevity – my phone is archaic). Remember that I am here to help you. *Please* ask for help anytime! **The only truly bad question is the one you don't ask!**