

## **Periodic Course Evaluation for KUN 2550/4550, Autumn 2018**

### *Topics in Modern and Postmodern Art: Rethinking Indifference*

Professor Aron Vinegar

This course is focused on rethinking the word “indifference,” which is perhaps the most prevalent word used to describe Postmodern art and architecture is. As in our common understanding of the word, indifference is most often used by critics as a negative and judgmental term that puts forth a certain characterization, or better yet, caricature, of Postmodernism’s ambitions and achievements. Postmodernism’s equation with indifference is meant to criticize it in terms of its:

- 1) embracing a condition of neutrality suggesting lack of commitment, taking shape in various forms of irony, cynicism and nihilism.
- 2) a moral weakness due to a general coldness, emotional distancing and a lack of affective connectivity.
- 3) an aesthetic and political failure that suggests it is a form of weak relativism that eschews any particular stance, position, judgment, value, or hierarchy.
- 4) a general passivity, inertia, or lack of will.
- 5) its full-scale capitulation to the tenets of capitalism in its emphasis on a general equivalence of things, most often characterized as a leveling or flattening of existence.

This course is meant to explore a very different and more complex sense of indifference than the negative interpretation outlined above. In doing so, it will open up a different framework for thinking about art, architecture, and urbanism of the last fifty years. Throughout the course we engaged with a broad range of art and architectural examples, as well as drawing upon relevant art historical, literary, theoretical, and philosophical writings on topic

The course aims to develop students’ awareness of and criticality towards our understanding of modern and postmodern art and culture. The class is mostly conducted in seminar style, where we address a different topic each week, with assigned readings posted on Canvas, and visual materials that are discussed collectively in class. Students read assigned essays before class, and then discuss them in groups and collectively as a class. The class takes place once a week for three hours. The main compulsory activities are centred around the final assignment, which is an 8-10-page essay based on a topic of the student’s choosing that grapples with the issue of indifference in relationship to modern and postmodern art. Students are required to meet with me in person to discuss their topics halfway through the course, and also to submit a short draft of their papers towards the end of the class.

From the student evaluations of the course, I am confident that the learning outcomes provided in the course descriptions provide a good description of what the students should be able to derive from the course after its completion:

- Have a more nuanced understanding of postmodern art, architecture, and urbanism and its relationship to broader intellectual currents.
- Have a better and more nuanced sense of how postmodern art has been characterized in relationship to modern and contemporary art.

- Develop the ability to move supply between close attention to works of art and the kinds of ideas, words, and frameworks that we use to describe, explain, and interpret them.
- Analyze artworks from this period using the terms and concepts presented in the course literature.
- Identify and present the most important critical and theoretical positions in the art historical literature dealing with this period, and define the key terms and concepts in this literature.
- Develop an ability to verbalize statements about works of art and to communicate your knowledge to others.
- Have improved writing skills in academic English.

From the feedback I have received from the Student Evaluations I believe the course description for this course works very well. All of the student evaluations for the course indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with how the teaching covered the course content. Furthermore, all of the student evaluations except one, which was “neither satisfied or disappointed,” indicates that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the course overall. 23 BA students registered for the course and 18 wound up taking it and completed it. 6 MA students started the course, and 6 completed it. There were no registered complaints by either set of students. KUN 2550/4550 is placed as an “elevator” course, which includes both BA and MA students, so in total 24 students completed all the requirements for the final grade, with most distributed within the B-D range for BA students, and A-B range for Masters students.

This is the second time I have taught this course, and believe it was quite successful in terms of content and student satisfaction. In the future, I might consider changing some of the topics and/or readings.