Bad Moderns: Aestheticism, Symbolism, Decadence

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Fall 2008 Graduate Seminar
Tuesdays 6-9pm; MC 919

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Course Description
This seminar focuses on art-historical methodologies through case studies devoted to alternative modern movements in the late nineteenth century. We examine tendencies in art and criticism that do not seem to fit into modernist narratives based on an evolution of styles. Nevertheless, they made contributions to the foundations of modern art in the twentieth century. The critical foundations of Aestheticism, Symbolism, and Decadence each set the stage for subsequent debates, but they have often proven resistant to the priorities of traditional art history. By contrast, we focus on recent books and exhibitions that seek to find different modes of evaluation for this work. Readings include both primary texts and current scholarship that sees in these alternatives to modernism a set of contemporary and 'postmodern' concerns. A guiding question for the seminar is why many contemporary artists have begun looking back to the art associated with these tendencies and how these critical texts and artworks (as well as the recent methodologies developed to study them anew) can be usefully deployed in the analysis of current art practice.

Course Structure
This is a reading-intensive, discussion-based seminar. Each three-hour session will focus on presentations and discussions of assigned texts. Students will be evaluated on the basis of their preparation, attendance, critical engagement with course themes, and research projects. We will take advantage of the relevant holdings of the Art Institute of Chicago and special exhibitions in the Chicago area.

There is one required textbook for the course: Elizabeth Prettejohn, Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007). Other readings will be made available on the Docutek electronic reserve system (docutek.artic.edu/eres) or are available from JSTOR, Project Muse, or posted as ‘Files’ on the course homepage on the SAIC Portal, where indicated. Students are expected to undertake substantial independent research for course presentations and the final paper. The resources of the Ryerson and Flaxman Libraries should be consulted regularly. For web resources, see below.

Students are expected to have read over the summer the following texts: Joris-Karl Huysmans, A rebours (Against Nature); Oscar Wilde, Picture of Dorian Gray; and Charles Baudelaire, Les fleurs du mal (Flowers of Evil).
**EVALUATION**

1. **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**
   
   All students are expected to attend class meetings prepared to discuss the required readings. This is a discussion-based class, and all students should regularly and productively contribute to class discussions. Attendance at all class meetings is essential. More than two missed classes may be grounds for a “no credit.”

2. **LEADING COURSE DISCUSSION**
   
   Each week, teams of seminar participants will lead the discussion of the required readings. This should *not* be organized as a summary of the readings. Instead, it should be framed around discussion questions posed to the group. Teams are expected to prepare all visual materials and conduct background research necessary to lead course discussion.

   For each presentation, students will be required to prepare **Images** prepared as a Powerpoint/Keynote document. Your image presentation must be fully-prepared and ready to go. The professionalism of your presentations will be considered as part of the evaluation of your work. Do not expect to just grab things off of Google Image at the last minute or in class.

3. **ARTIST PRESENTATIONS**
   
   Students will be assigned in different teams to prepare a short (15 minute) presentation on the assigned artist comparison. This presentation should attempt to link the contemporary artist with course themes for that week. Images should be prepared as outlined above at #2.

4. **RESEARCH PROJECT**
   
   All students will engage in independent, original research on a topic relevant to the course themes. Projects should be distinct from research or work done for other classes. There are four stages to your research project:

   A. **Topic approval:** A one-paragraph topic prospectus must be submitted in class on 7 October or before.

   B. **Preliminary draft:** A 2500-word (10-page) draft of your paper must be submitted by 31 October at 4.00pm. This draft will be returned to you before your oral presentations.

   C. **Oral research presentation:** An oral presentation and discussion of 45 minutes, with a full Powerpoint/Keynote. Presentations should be 30 minutes and allow for 15 minutes of discussion

   D. **Final paper:** The final research paper should be submitted by 4pm on Friday, 12 December. It should expand upon the work done and feedback received on the preliminary draft and the oral presentation. Research papers should be approximately 5000-6000 words (20-25 pages) for graduate students in Art History, Theory, and Criticism; Visual and Critical Studies; and Arts Administration and Policy. For students from other departments, papers should be 4000 words (16 pages).

   All assignments should be submitted as hard copies with all illustrations. They may be turned in during class or to MC 606. Papers should be standard, double-spaced typed pages. Word counts listed above are exclusive of bibliography, captions, and endnotes. Bibliographies must contain at least 15 items from valid sources. Websites and any form of encyclopedia entry are not acceptable sources. Books, journal articles, and online full-text articles from library indices and databases are acceptable sources.
**Electronic and Library Resources**

**SAIC Portal**  
http://go.artic.edu

**Docutek (e-reserves)**  
http://docutek.artic.edu  
Course password: bad

**Lecture images on MDID**  
http://mdid.artic.edu  
id + password = artic acct.

**Research**

- **Flaxman Resources for Art History**  
  http://library.saic.edu/arthistory

- **Flaxman integrate search engine**  
  http://search3.webfeat.org/wf3_artic.html

- **Ryerson full-text journals listing**  
  http://kxzf3kp7c.search.serialssolutions.com/

- **Flaxman databases**  
  https://startit.artic.edu/helpdesk/webproxy/databaselist.html
  - [Grove Dictionary of Art](https://startit.artic.edu/helpdesk/webproxy/databaselist.html)
  - [JSTOR (full-text journals)](https://startit.artic.edu/helpdesk/webproxy/databaselist.html)
  - [Project MUSE (full-text journals)](https://startit.artic.edu/helpdesk/webproxy/databaselist.html)
  - [ARTSTOR image and art database](https://startit.artic.edu/helpdesk/webproxy/databaselist.html)

**NOTE:** To use the above research sites from off-campus, you will have to sign on to the proxy server. To find out how to set up your computer to prompt for this access, log on to the Portal, and under the ‘Academic Resources’ tab go to the StartIt.Artic pages. From there, you can go to https://startit.artic.edu/helpdesk/webproxy/index.shtml for information on off-campus access.

**Differently-Abled Students**

Any students with exceptional needs or concerns (including 'invisible' difficulties such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, or psychiatric complications) are encouraged to make an appointment with the professor to discuss these issues by the end of the second week of the term so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Any student in need of academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should first contact SAIC’s Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC), formerly Services for Students with Disabilities. The Disability and Learning Resource Center can be reached by phone at 312.499.4278 or by sending an email to dlrc@saic.edu. DLRC will review the student’s disability documentation and will work with the student to determine reasonable accommodations. DLRC will then provide the student with a letter outlining approved accommodations. This letter must be presented to the instructor before any accommodations will be implemented.

**Plagiarism**

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago prohibits academic misconduct, which includes "both plagiarism and cheating, and may consist of the submission of the work of another as one's own; unauthorized assistance on a test or assignment; submission of the same work for more than one class without the knowledge and consent of all instructors; or the failure to properly cite texts or ideas from other sources" (Students' Rights and Responsibilities, Student Handbook, http://www.saic.edu/pdf/life/pdf_files/rights.pdf).

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. One can plagiarize even if one does not intend to. The penalty for plagiarizing may range from failure on the specific plagiarized assignment to failure in the class. Repeat offenses can lead to disciplinary action, which could include suspension or expulsion from the School. The Faculty Senate Student Life Subcommittee has prepared a 28-page handbook entitled Plagiarism: How to Recognize It and Avoid It. The document is available online on at http://www.saic.edu/webspaces/portal/library/plagiarism_packet.pdf.

The final page of the handbook has been designed as a one-page handout, When to Give Credit. It is available online in PDF format at http://www.saic.edu/webspaces/portal/library/plagiarism_credit.pdf.

Library staff has also prepared a two-page synopsis of the committee's handbook, designed as a handout for students. Avoid Plagiarism: Quick Guide, is available at http://www.saic.edu/webspaces/portal/library/plagiarism.pdf
COURSE CALENDAR

Please note: due to the dates of the “Ah… Decadence” exhibition in the Sullivan Galleries, the seminar will proceed out of strict chronological order, dealing with Decadence before its Aestheticist precedents.

2 September 2008

INTRODUCTION: AESTHETICISM AND DECADENCE IN MODERNIST NARRATIVES

Required reading


9 September

DECADENCE I: LITERATURE AND ART

Required reading

1. Passages on Gustave Moreau from Huysmans’s A rebours

Further reference


Artist comparison

• Paul McCarthy
16 September

Decadence II: Evolution and Degeneration

Required reading
1. Passages on Odilon Redon from Huysmans’s *A rebours*.

Further reference

Artist comparison
- Jake and Dinos Chapman

33 September

Contemporary Art and the Legacy of Decadence

Site visit to the exhibition “Ah… Decadence” at the Sullivan Galleries, School of the Art Institute of Chicago with exhibition walk-through with Lisa Wainwright, Professor of Art History, Theory, and Criticism and Interim Dean of Faculty.

→ Class will meet in the Sullivan Galleries, 7th floor, 33 S. State St.

Required reading

30 September

Aestheticism I: Classicist Aestheticism

Required reading
Further reference  

Artist comparison  
• Vanessa Beecroft

7 October  
AESTHETICISM II: JAMES McNEIL WHISTLER

Required reading  

Further reference  

Artist comparison  
• Jeff Koons

DEADLINE FOR RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS

9 October: SPECIAL MUSEUM SESSION on WHISTLER

Thursday, 9 October, 10.30am – 12.00pm

Art Institute of Chicago Curator of Prints and Drawings Martha Tedeschi will lead a discussion of works by Whistler in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Class will meet promptly at 10.30 in the Prints and Drawings Study Center on the ground floor of the AIC
14 October

AESTHETICISM III: WALTER PATER AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Required reading


2. Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Walter Pater,” 255-81


Further reference


• Laurel Brake and Ian Small, eds., Pater in the 1990s (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991)

Artist comparison

• Kehinde Wiley

21 October

OSCAR WILDE

Required reading

1. Review the “Preface” to Picture of Dorian Gray


Further reference


Artist comparison

• Damien Hirst

→ 23 October: REQUIRED OUT-OF-CLASS LECTURE: LINDA NOCHLIN

Thursday, 23 October, 6pm, Rubloff Auditorium, Art Institute of Chicago

Linda Nochlin presents the 20th-anniversary Norma U. Lifton Lecture in the Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism: "Courbet Now"

28 October

Performances & Projections: The Dandy, the Femme Fatale, and the Androgyne

Required reading


Further reference


Artist comparison

• Grayson Perry

10-PAGE DRAFTS OF RESEARCH PAPERS DUE FRIDAY 31 OCTOBER, 4pm

4 November

Alternative Symbolisms: Edvard Munch, Camille Claudel, and Auguste Rodin

Guest lecture by Jay Clarke, Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings, Art Institute of Chicago

Required reading


*Artist comparison*

- Maurizio Cattelan

**11 November**
Presentations

**18 November**
Presentations

**25 November**
Presentations

**2 December**
CRITIQUE WEEK / No class

**9 December**
Presentations

*FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE IN CLASS*
*(exception: presenters on 9 December must turn in papers by 12 December, 4pm)*