

# ART HISTORY 4724/001: Structuralism to Poststructuralism

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Texts: There are two required texts (available in student store):  
1) *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton (2nd edition)  
2) *Professor pack of xerox writings*

Synopsis: This course will trace the movement from Structuralism into Poststructuralism in the arts in recent theory. Weekly readings will be discussed, visuals (slides, video tapes) will be introduced that relate to lecture material. Lectures will often not merely elucidate readings, but introduce new material into discussion.

Evaluation: Three 5 page (doubled-space typed) papers; choose either type of paper as specified below:  
1) synopsis of reading/lecture/discussion material, or  
2) independent research on topic related to course material. Papers due at five week intervals throughout the semester.

**MAAH and VCS graduate students!** In addition to the above, you are required to give a 10 minute oral presentation any topic related to the course material at final class meeting.

Attendance: Miss more than 3 classes without medical excuse = NCR

Notes:

**ART HISTORY 4724/001:  
Structuralism to Poststructuralism Readings**

<u>Week</u>	<u>Readings to accomplish</u>
1	Course introduction/purchase texts.
2	Xerox pack excerpt from <u>Structuralism and Semiotics</u> , Terence Hawkes.
3	Xerox pack "Claude Levi-Strauss and the Search for Structure," David Maybury-Lewis; and p. 79 - 90 in <i>Literary Theory</i> , Eagleton.
4	Pp. 91 - 109 in Eagleton; in xerox pack: Rosalind Krauss's "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" and Bakhtin/Volosinov's "Marxism and the Philosophy of Language"; we will view slides on Structuralist-influenced artworks.
5	<b>First paper due</b> ; xerox hand-out "The Question of Postmodernism," Ihab Hassan, also "Introduction," <i>Postmodernism</i> ," Eleanor Hartney, and "Postmodernism and the Social Sciences," Pauline M. Rosenau; we will view excerpts from the film <u>House of Games</u> and the video <i>Marx: The Video</i> by Laura Kipnis.
6	Pp.110 - 116 in Eagleton. We will see the video <i>Interview with Cindy Sherman (Crossover Series)</i> .
7	Pp.117 - 130 in Eagleton and excerpt from James Hugunin's <i>Survey of the Representation of Prisons and Prisoners</i> , chapter 7, relating to the video <i>Nomads at the 25 Door</i> by Jeanne C. Finley which we will view in class.
8	Chapter 2 in <i>Postmodern Culture</i> , Steven Connor in Xerox pack: Lyotard, Jameson, Baudrillard.
9	Chapter 3 in Connor in Xerox pack; PoMo architecture and Photography.
10	<b>Second paper due</b> ; no readings; we will view and discuss the film <i>The Thin Blue Line</i> by Errol Morris.
11	Chapter 5 in Connor in Xerox pack: PoMo Performance; view excerpts of Louis Malle's <i>My Dinner with Andre</i> , Robert Rauschenberg's <i>Open Score</i> , and Matthew Barney's "The Order" from <i>Crewmaster 3</i> .
12	Chapter 6 in Connor in Xerox pack: PoMo TV & Video; view video tape <i>alienNATION</i> by Barbara Latham, et al.
13	<b>No class, Thanksgiving vacation.</b>
14	Chapter 9 in Connor in Xerox pack: PoMo and Cultural Politics; view video tape <i>Banana Split</i> by Kip Fulbeck and <i>Interview with John Tagg</i> by James Hugunin.
15	<b>No class, Critique week.</b>
16	No readings, final class: <b>third paper due</b> ; oral presentations by MAAH and VCS grads.

## **STRUCTURALISM: Shortcomings & Similarities to Poststructuralism**

- 1) Anti-historical—remote from concrete differences of human history. What about labor, sexuality, political power, etc.? What Poststructuralism attempts to correct by emphasizing utterance/discourse over the abstract system of language, stressing difference, and examining the development of discursive regimes. This tendency was early on attacked by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian linguist who is now very influential. Performativity of language is ignored, what J.L. Austin attempted to analyze with Speech Act Theory (a proto-Poststructuralist theory). Antipathy to notion that there is an overall pattern in history. **Poststructuralists are also so inclined.** But Marxists would ask the following question: What historical conditions themselves influenced this extreme foregrounding of language itself?
- 2) Shuts out the material world—we only have our sign systems that are not correspondent with reality. **This devaluing of material reality also occurs in Poststructuralism.**
- 3) Leads to formalism in aesthetics—and notion that work of art is an organic unity; promotes art as a closed system of signification with no inherent connection to the real world. What happened to the concept of art and literature as *social practice*?
- 4) Brackets off the objective and in doing also brackets off the human subject (anti-Existentialist); anti-Humanist, anti-metaphysics. **(this also defines most Poststructuralist thought which attacks notions of causality, of identity, of the subject, and of truth).**
- 5) Very static model of language—blind to the conflictual nature of utterance within a social context; unable to analyze power struggles (e.g., patriarchal discourse versus feminism); unable to demonstrate "the violence of representation" put on marginalized groups in society.
- 6) Merely assumes an abstract ideal reader—no account taken of the reading/viewing process; the co-production of the text by the reader is ignored. Reader-response theory is the Poststructuralist attempt to address that issue; so no stable meanings are pre-given by the text as Structuralists suggest.
- 7) Evades value judgements—seems complicit with the alienated theory of scientific practice which is so dominant in capitalist society; no critique of institutions developed from the practice of Structuralism. **Some accuse Poststructuralism of the same value indifference due to its extreme sense of the relativity of knowledge.**
- 8) Signifier/Signified are complementary, binary and stable—whereas Poststructuralism demotes the signified and sees the perpetual slippage of meaning in the infinite play of the signifier which has no determinable relation to extra-linguistic referents at all.