

**WINTER 2018 | ARTH 353 Selected Topics in Art History 1:
The Dematerialized Artwork**

Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University
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Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:35-3:55pm, Arts W-215
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursdays, 1:30-2:30pm, Arts W-287 (email in advance)
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"Voids, A Retrospective," 2009, installation view. Presented at Kunsthalle Bern and Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Course description:

The visual arts at the moment seem to hover at a crossroad that may well turn out to be two roads to one place, though they appear to have come from two sources: art as idea and art as action. In the first case, matter is denied, as sensation has been converted into concept; in the second case, matter has been transformed into energy and time-motion.

– Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art" (1967)

This course, which focuses primarily (but not exclusively) on the European and Anglo-American art world of the last 50 years, offers a survey of art works which either do not take the form of physical objects or in which, to borrow Lucy Lippard's words, "the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious, and/or 'dematerialized.'" Lippard offered these words as a definition for conceptual art. Accordingly, this course is focused on the emergence of conceptualism in the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as its precursors in earlier twentieth-century art, its various legacies and offshoots, and its lasting impact on contemporary art up until the present.

Beyond simply relating to a specific art movement however, this course posits that it is possible to chart a history of contemporary art as a whole (or at least a major stream within it) through the heuristic of immateriality. Key to this trajectory is the passage from the notion of art as primarily based in the formal, visual qualities of discrete objects to the notion of art as a system of information, discourse, institutions and social relations in which physical objects play a contingent, rather than necessary, role.

Moreover, this course ties the development of dematerialization in art to larger shifts in culture, technology, and economics. First, this course argues that the effects of dematerialization in art are constitutively related to the transition from an understanding of art of the present as “modern” to the understanding of such art as “contemporary” via the theorization of postmodernism. The rise of critical theory also correlates to the growth in professionalization and the adoption of academic discourse within the art world – that is, a situation in which art is mediated primarily through language. Immateriality in art has also paralleled the emergence and widespread influence of digital technologies and the theorization of the so-called “information society.” Finally, artistic dematerialization is also profoundly related to broader shifts in the capitalist economy towards globalization, outsourcing, services and flexibility – in other words, the constellation of developments that are often brought together under the heading of post-Fordism or post-industrialism and theorized in terms of “immaterial labour.”

We will examine how art production, particularly from the late 1960s onwards, shifts away from a focus on the craft of specific media (painting, sculpture) towards a post-medium, post-studio, or research-based practice (“practice” itself being a key term of contemporary art) that might equally employ crafted or readymade objects and images, installation, performance, video, digital media, or various combinations thereof.

We will also examine how value and authorship are assigned to works that are ephemeral, reproducible, experiential, or collaborative – a process that is intimately related to the political implications of immaterial art. For many first-wave conceptual artists, immaterial works presented a way to escape from the ethical compromises represented by established museum and market relations. In the intervening decades, immaterial forms have often been hailed as essentially non-commodifiable and enlisted towards activist ends, even as artists have also developed novel ways to package and promote their performances, videos, photographs, installations, and personas. Moreover, a number of recent commentators have pointed out how immaterial artistic practices actually parallel recently dominant forms of capitalist exchange: the provision of services, the marketing of experience, and the management of information. This course will proceed with an eye to these issues.

Readings

The majority of the assigned texts for the course will be available online, either through MyCourses or e-publications from the McGill library.

In addition to these, this course also draws on Martha Buskirk's book *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), which will be available in the bookstore and in the library on reserve.

Readings marked as "suggested" are provided primarily for students who wish to write a research paper related to the given topic; students are not expected to have read these texts for lectures, discussions, or exams. Suggested readings will sometimes (but not always) be uploaded to MyCourses.

Assignments and Evaluation:

1. Reading Response	5%
2. Take-Home Midterm	25%
3. Research Paper Proposal	5%
4. Research paper	30%
5. Take-Home Final Exam	30%
6. Attendance	5%

1. Reading Response (5%)

Each student will write a one-to-two page response (double-spaced) to a selected course reading that discusses the author's background, describes the main concepts and argument of the text, and offers at least three potential discussion questions. Responses will be **due by email the day before the selected reading is assigned**. A sign-up sheet will be posted to MyCourses; each student must choose their reading by the end of Week Two. No more than three students may choose the same reading.

2. Take-home Midterm Exam (25%, distributed Feb. 15, due Feb. 22, in class)

The midterm will consist of three short essay questions. Each should be answered in 600-800 words. Any sources quoted or referred to must be cited using correctly-formatted Chicago Style footnotes and bibliography.

3. Research paper proposal (5%, due March 1)

Students will submit a one-page paper proposal on a topic chosen from a series of options provided earlier in the term by the instructor. This includes at least a paragraph about your main argument and choice of subject matter, and a bibliography of at least five key sources. Proposals will be returned with written feedback within two weeks. Topics outside of the given options will be permitted, but consultation with the instructor *prior* to submitting the paper proposal is recommended.

4. Research Paper (30%, due April 3rd)

Students will research and write an 8-10 page paper (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, bibliography not included) based on their proposal. Students are expected to research widely outside of assigned course material while also addressing themes and concepts learned in the course.

5. Take-home Final Exam (30%, distributed April 12, due April 26 by 4pm)

The final exam will consist of three short essay questions. Each should be answered in 800-1000 words. Any sources quoted or referred to must be cited using correctly-formatted Chicago Style footnotes and bibliography.

6. Attendance (5%)

Taken regularly throughout the term.

Further information about all assignments and exams will be provided in class well in advance of the due dates. Students must complete all assignments and exams to pass the course.

Presentation Guidelines:

- Only printed copies of written assignments will be accepted – no electronic submissions (with the exception of the Reading Response).
- Written assignments must be typed and doubled-spaced on 8 ½" x 11" paper with 1" margins.
- The font must be roughly equivalent to Times New Roman 12 point.
- Include a title page.
- All pages except your title page must be numbered.
- Images should appear on separate pages at the end of your paper. Images must have typed captions including artist, title, date, and medium.
- Written assignments must include proper citations in Chicago Style, in the form of footnotes and a bibliography. Notes must be included not only for direct quotations but for ALL ideas that are not your own. Do not use in-text parenthetical references. For more information on citations, visit the library website: <http://www.mcgill.ca/library/services/citation>
- All titles of books must be italicized. Titles of all articles are in quotation marks. All titles of artworks must be italicized. Their dates must be indicated, either in the text, or in parentheses after the title.
- Quotations that exceed four lines of text must be indented from the left margin and single-spaced. They do not need quotation marks when indented.
- Grammar counts! Be sure to check it carefully.
- Staple papers together (no paper-clips, please).
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Plagiarism:

If you use someone else's words or ideas without citing them properly, it is plagiarism. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

Late Policy:

Late papers must be handed to me in person in class or during office hours. Do not leave them under my door or with anyone else. All late papers will be penalized 5% per day, including weekends.

COURSE CONTENT**Week One**

January 9

Introduction (plus overview of syllabus and assignments)

Required reading: Martha Buskirk, "Introduction," in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) 1-18.

Suggested reading: Jasper Bernes, "Introduction," *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2017).

January 11

The Historical Avant-garde: Anti-Art and the Readymade

Required reading: Tony Godfrey, "Anti-art gestures in early modernism: Duchamp and Dada," in *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 17-52.

Suggested reading: Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act" in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Week Two

January 16

The Historical Avant-Garde: Revolutionizing the Audience in Dada, Russian Revolutionary Art, and Surrealism

Required reading: Claire Bishop, "Artificial Hells: The Historic Avant-Garde," in *Artificial Hells* (London: Verso, 2012), 41-76. [eBook]

January 18

Leaping into the Void: Klein, Beuys, Manzoni, and the Post-War Artist as Charlatan

Required reading: David Hopkins, "The Artist in Crisis: From Bacon to Beuys," *After Modern Art: 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66-93 [eBook]; *Art Since 1900: Year 1960a* (Nouveau Réalisme), p. 472-476.

Suggested reading: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Beuys: Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," *Artforum* (January 1980) 35-43; Thomas McEvelley, "Yves Klein: Conquistador of the Void" in *Yves the Provocateur: Yves Klein and Twentieth-century Art* (New York: McPherson & Company, 2010).

Week Three

January 23

Do It Yourself: Neo-Dada, Fluxus and Happenings

Required reading: David Hopkins, "Duchamp's Legacy: The Rauschenberg-Johns Axis," 37-48; 54-64, and "Blurring Boundaries: Pop Art, Fluxus, and their Effects," in *After Modern Art 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 95; 104-110. [eBook]; Alan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in *Alan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, edited by Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 1-10.

Suggested readings: Dick Higgins, "Intermedia," *Leonardo* v. 34 (1966).

January 25

Minimalism: The Present Viewer's Body and the Absent Artist's Hand

Required reading: Martha Buskirk, "Authorship and Authority," in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 19-58; Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood (1967)" in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Suggested reading: Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Donald Judd, "Specific Objects (1965)" in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005); Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," in Robert Morris, ed. *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993); Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts magazine*, v. 54 n. 5 (January 1990): 44-63.

Week Four

January 30

Conceptual Art I: Dematerializing the Object

Required readings: Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: a critical anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999); Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts," in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; reprint edition, original 1973).

Note: Five of our classes (January 30 – February 13) are devoted to specific issues in conceptual art, each with their own set of required readings. Our MyCourses website also includes a general survey of conceptual art – "Survey," in Peter Osborne, ed. *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2011) – which you are encouraged to read at any point over the course of these four sections.

February 1

Conceptual Art II: Immaterial Work and Gendered Labour

Required reading: Julia Bryan Wilson, "Introduction" in *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 1-12 [eBook]; Helen Molesworth, "Work Ethic" in Helen Molesworth, ed. *Work Ethic*, exh. cat. (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003).

Suggested reading: Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," *October* vol. 92 (Spring 2000), 71-97; Sabeth Buchmann, "Under the Sign of Labour," in *Art After Conceptual Art*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Molesworth, "Cleaning up in the 1970s : the work of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly and Mierle Laderman Ukeles ," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, edited by Jon Bird and Michael Newman (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

Week Five

February 6

Conceptual Art III: Art As Information

Required Reading: Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," *Artforum* v. 7 n. 1 (September 1968); Kynaston McShine, "Introduction to Information," in Kynaston McShine, ed. *Information*, ex. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970).

Suggested reading: David Joselit, "Art as Information: Systems, Sites, Media," in *American Art After 1945* (London: Thomas and Hudson, 2003); Caroline Jones, "Systems Symptoms," *Artforum* (Sept. 2012).

February 8

Conceptual Art IV: Conceptual Bodies

Required reading: Tony Godfrey, "Where Were They? The curious Case of Women Conceptual Artists," in *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998).

Suggested reading: Amelia Jones, "The rhetoric of the pose: Hannah Wilke and the radical narcissism of feminist body art," in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The woman who never was: self-representation, photography, and first-wave feminist art," in Cornelia Butler, ed. *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).

Week Six

February 13

Conceptual Art V: Global Conceptualisms

Required readings: Stephen Bann, "Introduction," in *Global Conceptualisms: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999); Claire Bishop, "Social Sadism Made Explicit" in *Artificial Hells* [eBook].

Suggested reading: Sophie Cras, "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentering," *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, edited by Thomas DaCosta, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 196-182.

February 15

The Post-Medium Condition of Contemporary Art

Required reading: Martha Buskirk, "Medium and Materiality," in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 107-160.

Suggested reading: Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition," Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture, 1999.

****TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED****

Week Seven

February 20

The Dematerialized Image: Photography, Video, and Performance After Conceptualism

Required reading: Martha Buskirk, "Contingent Objects," in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 211-260.

Suggested reading: Douglas Eklund, "Image Art After Conceptualism" in *The Pictures Generation 1974-1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009); Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" *October* v. 15 (Oct. 1980), 91-101; Victor Burgin, "Photographic Practice and Art Theory (1975)," in Alexander Streitberger, ed. *Situational Aesthetics: Selected Writings by Victor Burgin* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 63-108.

February 22

Appropriation and Simulation: Postmodernism and the Rise of Theory

Required reading: Martha Buskirk, "Original Copies," in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 59-106.

Suggested reading: Amy L. Brandt, "Critical Theory in the New York Art World," in *Interplay: Neo-Geo/Neo-conceptual Art of the 1980s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014); Douglas Eklund, "The Jump: Appropriation and its Discontents" in *The Pictures Generation: 1974-1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009); Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

****TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE****

Week Eight

February 27

FIELD TRIP: "Buveurs de Quintessences" exhibition at Fonderie Darling

March 1

Framing and Being Framed: Institutional Critique

Required reading: Martha Buskirk, "Context as Subject," in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 161.

Suggested reading: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: from the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions," *October* v. 55 (Winter

1990), 105-143; Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* v. 44, n. 1 (Sept. 2005), 278-86.

****PAPER PROPOSAL DUE****

Week Nine

STUDY BREAK

Week Ten

March 13

Activated Contexts: Installation and Site-Specificity

Required reading: Claire Bishop, "Introduction: Installation Art and Experience," in *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6-13; Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity," *October* v. 80 (Spring 1997), 85-110.

Suggested reading: Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *e-flux journal* n. 2 (Jan. 2009). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-installation/>

March 15

Culture Wars: Art, Activism, and Politics in the 1980s and 90s

Required reading: Helen Molesworth, "This will have been: art, love & politics in the 1980s," in *This Will Have Been: art, love & politics in the 1980s*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2011); Nina Felshin, "Introduction," in Nina Felshin, ed. *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 8-29.

Suggested reading: Jerry Saltz, "Jerry Saltz on '93 in Art," *New York*, Feb. 3, 2013

Week Eleven

March 20

Neo-conceptualism, Spectacle, and Celebrity: the YBA Phenomenon and Its Cognates

Required reading: Julian Stallabrass, "Consuming Culture," in *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Suggested reading: Thomas Crow, "Marx to Sharks: the Art-Historical 80s," *Artforum* (April 2003)

March 22

Immateriality Online: New Media and Early Net Art

Required reading: Mark Tribe, "Introduction," in Mark Tribe and Reena Jana, eds. *New Media Art* (London: Taschen, 2006); Julian Stallabrass, "Can Art History Digest Net Art?" in Dieter Daniels & Gunther Reisinger, eds. *Net Pioneers 1.0 : contextualizing early net-based art* (Berlin and New York; Sternberg Press, 2009).

Suggested reading: Domenico Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art* (Brescia: Link Editions, 2013), 19-45, 177-224.

Week Twelve

March 27

Sociality as Medium: Relational Aesthetics

Required reading: Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), 51-79.

Suggested reading: Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Paris: Presses du réel, 1998), 7-64; Lane Relyea, "Your Art World, or the Limits of Connectivity," *Afterall* 14 (Autumn/Winter 2006); John Kelsey, "Next-Level Spleen," *Artforum* (Sept. 2012).

<https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201207&id=31940>

March 29

Activism as Form: Participation and Social Practice

Required reading: Grant Kester, "Introduction" in *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) 1-18 [eBook]; Nato Thompson, "Living as Form," in Nato Thompson, ed. *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (Cambridge, Mass. and New York: MIT Press/Creative Time, 2012), 16-33.

Suggested reading: Claire Bishop, "Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?" in Nato Thompson, ed. *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (Cambridge, Mass. and New York: MIT Press/Creative Time, 2012), 34-45; Yates McKee, *Strike Art* (London: Verso, 2017).

Week Thirteen

April 3

Institutions Without Objects: Spectacle in the Experience Museum

Required reading: Caroline A. Jones, "Biennial Culture and the Aesthetics of Experience," in Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, eds. *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 192-201 [eBook]; Ben Davis, "State of the Culture, Part I: Museums, 'Experiences,' and the Year of Big Fun Art," *Artnet News*, December 27, 2017.

Suggested reading: Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence," in *TDR* Vol. 55, No. 1 (Spring 2011) 16-45; Felicity Scott, "Limits of Control: On *Rain Room* and Immersive Environments," *Artforum* (Sept. 2013). <https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201307&id=42636>.

****RESEARCH PAPER DUE****

April 5

Re-materializing Networks: Post-Internet Art

Required reading: Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" *e-flux journal* (Nov. 2013). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>; Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, "Introduction" and "Essay" in *Art*

Post-Internet: INFORMATION/DATA, exh. cat. (Beijing: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, 2014). <http://post-inter.net/>
Suggested reading: Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide" *Artforum* (Sept. 2012), 434-441;
Seth Price, "Dispersion," (Artist's Book, 2008):
<http://www.distributedhistory.com/Dispersion2008.pdf>

Week Fourteen

April 10

Global Markets, Global Discourse: Post-conceptual Art as International Style

Required reading: David Joselit, "On Aggregators," *October* n. 146 (Fall 2013): 3-18;
Hito Steyerl, "Duty Free Art," *e-flux journal* n. 63 (March 2015).

Suggested reading: Olav Velthuis, "Globalization and Commercialization of the Art Market" in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, edited by Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) [eBook]; Olav Velthuis, "ArtRank and the Flippers: Apocalypse Now?" *Texte zur Kunst* n. 96 (December 2014);
Alix Rule and David Levine, "International Art English," *Triple Canopy* (2012).

April 12

COURSE REVIEW

****TAKE-HOME FINAL DISTRIBUTED****