

Paper Assignment 5 – RESEARCH OPTION

Percentage of final grade: 35%

Write an essay of 10 to 15 pages that

- 1) examines a work of art (or several works by a single artist from a specific period), clearly discussing how the work was made,
- 2) situates that work in the historical context of its production and reception (with particular attention to the work's relation to popular culture, mass media, mass culture, advertising, market, commodity, spectacle, and other formations appropriate to the time the work was made), *and on that basis*,
- 3) argues for its relation (resistance or affirmation?) to theories of modernism or postmodernism, demonstrating which theories the artist could have been aware of and/or which theories would have colored the work's reception as "modernist" or "postmodernist".

You may consider work in any genre of visual art (architecture, painting, sculpture, print, drawing, photography, film, video, or new media), but choose wisely so that you can mine its potential for revealing specific aspects of an engagement with mass culture and the theories in question. Note that engagement can consist of resistance as well as embrace, and can be located in the eye of the beholder as well as (or despite) the intention of the artist. The first part of your paper should describe the art, and the second part should examine the theories pertinent to its interpretation. Ideally, there will be evidence internal to the artwork that its maker was strategically utilizing ideas of modernism or postmodernism, or was tactically refusing to adopt them. That is, ideally you will find *evidence* in historical material and the artwork itself that supports your claims.

Effective essays will state a thesis in the first page, develop it in the body of the paper along with your analysis of the artwork, and return to it in an informed conclusion. It is expected for this major assignment that you will conduct research (in consultation with your teachers) both on and off the bibliography for this subject. As always, cite any sources with *Humanities-style* foot- or end-notes using an approved style.¹ Internet sources must also be cited.² Any uncited sources will be considered plagiarism.

Your T.A., the Writing Advisor, your professor, and the Writing Center are all available to help. You are strongly encouraged to use the peer review system (see Sylvan Barnet in Writing about Art). Cite your peer reviewer and your paper will receive extra credit.

¹ Firstname Lastname, "Title of this essay," Journal name Vol. No. (Date), pp. x - xx.

² Firstname Lastname, course website, <http://www.mit.edu/~carolj/4.602/>, date (or at least date available on the web).

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