Art, Social Justice, and Critical Theory Colloquium:

Academic Year 2012/2013:

Wednesday Evenings, Fall, Winter, and Spring Terms

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE

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Offices Hours:
• Tuesday: 10:00 – 11:00
• Thursday: 10:00 – 11:00
• By Appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This one-unit course spans three terms -- fall, winter, and spring -- and is devoted to intensive readings of special topics in critical social theory, art, and social justice. The central purpose of the course is to prepare students to host, participate in, and reflectively assess four, thematically interrelated events involving outside speakers, artists, and specialists in the areas of critical social theory, social justice, and art. Students will meet on Wednesday evenings from 6:00 to 8:30 throughout the year to do the following:
• To discuss assigned readings and associated texts to deepen our understanding of key issues.
• To establish the format and the questions for our filmed and broadcast interviews with each of the guests.
• To prepare questions and comments on our speakers’ papers and books in order to robustly and critical respond to their talks.
• To use this intensive study of texts and artistic performances to deepen the individual student’s interest and involvement in a social justice issue of personal concern.
• To participate in the above activities in order to supplement and intensify research and writing projects such as SIPs, paper assignments in other courses, essay for submission to conferences and essay prizes, reviews of contemporary artworks, and personal reflections.
• To develop, in a cumulative fashion, a viewpoint upon how art is related to social justice issues.

COLLOQUIUM SPEAKERS 2012/2013:
• David Ingram (Philosophy, Loyola University Chicago) [early fall term: late September]: http://orion.it.luc.edu/~dingram/publications/
• Tina Chanter (Philosophy, DePaul University, Chicago) [late fall term: early November]: http://las.depaul.edu/philosophy/People/Faculty/Tina_Chanter.asp
• Lambert Zuidervaart (Philosophy, University of Toronto) [late winter term: early March]: http://faculty.icscanada.edu/~lzuidervart
• Martin Seel (Johann Wolfgang Universitaet, Frankfurt am Main) [spring term: middle of May]: http://www.philosophie.uni-frankfurt.de/lehrende_index/Homepage_Seel/index.html

REQUIRED TEXTS:
• Zuidervaart, Lambert.
  o Art in Public: Politics, Economics, and a Democratic Culture (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

THEME:
This year’s colloquium addresses the role of art in orienting and motivating critical theorizing, on the one hand, and social change, on the other, in response to social injustices. The scholars in Critical Social Theory whom we will host, interview, and argumentatively engage address a number of important questions:
• How do artworks function, and do possess they possess either a distinctive type of validity or perhaps a robust claim to truth?
• What is aesthetic experience, how is it constituted, and is there a unique type of aesthetic rationality that is the constitutive goal of this type of experience?
• How does art connect up with modern spheres of science and technology, on the one hand, and legal institution and moral
• Practices, on the other?
  • Is public art a catalyst of political activism and ameliorative social change, and, if so, how does it perform this function?
  • How do contemporary films depict marginalized figures, and do they reveal or conceal these social realities they fictively portray?
  • Can art directly and immediately political – that is, connected to political action – or is the relation between aesthetic experience and understanding only indirectly related to political agency?
  • How do artworks challenge and change ordinary modes of perception, sedentary motivational structures, and established personal identities? How can aesthetic experiences effect this type of existential alteration of our mode of being in the world?
  • Does aesthetic experience and art criticism alter scientific, political, and legal discourses, and, if so, how does it do this?
  • Is art independent or autonomous from economic, social, political, and cultural spheres, and, if not, then what is the nature of its relation to such other forms of social integration?
  • How is the relationship between art and philosophy, between aesthetic experience and theoretical formation?
  • Can art be directly and immediately political – that is, connected to political action – or is the relation between aesthetic experience and understanding only indirectly related to political agency?
  • How is the enjoyment of natural beauty similar to and different from the enjoyment of art, and how are we to understand the experience of the sublime in nature and in art?
  • Does aesthetic experience and art criticism alter scientific, political, and legal discourses, and, if so, how does it do this?
  • Is art independent or autonomous from economic, social, political, and cultural spheres, and, if not, then what is the nature of its relation to such other forms of social integration?
  • How is aesthetics as a branch of philosophy related to ethics (the study of normative concern) and epistemology (the study of knowledge)?

The title of the seminar – Art, Social Justice, and Critical Theory – arrays three distinctive terms and suggests an interconnection among them. None of the three terms is self-evident. What art is, how it works, how it is interpreted, whether art not only changes but develops, who decides what is or is not art, whether past art “speaks” to us now – all of these questions clamor when we refer to art. What is justice, how it is qualified as “social,” who decides and how, how justice is connected to morality and ethics and law, whether justice changes or develops – all of these questions clamor when we refer to social justice. Likewise, what is theory, how is it related to other human endeavors and practices, what makes a theory “critical” as opposed to a theory in the natural and social sciences, whether theories not only change but develop – all of these questions clamor when we refer to critical theory. If each term so complex, then linking them will appear more so. In fact, however, the questions that arise with one domain quickly link up with the other two. In this course, we will explore the overlap and interpenetration of these three domains.

READING SCHEDULE

FALL TERM:


Week One:
• Presentation of the Year’s Events and Activities
• Introduction.
• “The Philosophical Roots of Critical Theory”
• “From Theory to Practice: Freud and the Problem of Ideology”

Week Two:
• “Weber and the Dialectic of Enlightenment”
• “Marcuse and the New Politics of Liberation”
• “Marcuse and Freud”

Guest Artist Performance: Guillermo Gomez-Peña:
• Saturday, September 22nd: “Return of the Border Brujo” (Balch Playhouse, with an after-show “talk back” with the artist)

Week Three:
• “Horkheimer and Habermas on Critical Methodology”
• “Communication and Social Crisis: Habermas and Recent Critical Theory”
• “The Future of Critical Theory”
• “Postscript: Critical Theory and Contemporary Trends in Social Philosophy”

Week Four: First Speaker: David Ingram (Loyola University of Chicago):
• Wednesday Evening: Preparations:
• October 3rd Thursday Evening: “Key Concepts in Critical Theory”
• October 4th Friday Evening: “Critical Theory, Whiteness, and Race”

Part Two: Psychoanalytic Criticism of the Depiction of Difference in Cinematography: Tina Chanter’s The Picture of Abjection: Film, Fetish, and the Nature of Difference:

Week Five:
• “Abjection and the Unthought Ground of Fetishism”
• “Abjection as the Failure of Protection against Emptiness: Narcissism, Negation, and Klein’s Projective Identification”

Week Six:
• Abject Art: Destabilizing the Drive for Purification
• “Fantasy at a Distance: the Revolt of Abjection”
• “The Exotic-ization and Universalization of the Fetish, and the Naturalization of the Phallus”

Week Seven:
• “Prohibiting Miscegenation and Homosexuality: The Birth of a Nation, Casablanca, and American History X.”
• “Abject Identifications in The Crying Game: The Mutual Implication of Transgender/Race/Nationalism/Class”

Week Eight:
• “The Fetishistic Temporality of Hegemonic Postcolonial Nationalist Narratives and the Traumatic Real of Abjection”
• “Concluding Reflections on the Necrophilia of Fetishism”

Week Nine:
• Preparations

Week Ten: Second Speaker: Tina Chanter (DePaul University, Chicago):
• Wednesday: Preparations
• November 15th: Thursday Evening: “Cinematographic Art and Difference: The Picture of Abjection”.
• November 16th: Friday Evening: “Art, Politics and Rancière: Seeing Things Anew.”

WINTER TERM:

Part Three A: Lambert Zuidervaart’s Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure:

Week One:
• Introduction: Critical Hermeneutics
• “Kant Revisited”

Week Two:
• “Truth as Disclosure”
• “Imaginative Disclosure”

Week Three:
• “Artistic Truth”
• “Logical Positivist Dispute”

Week Four:
• “Goodman’s Nominalism”
• “Wolterstorff’s Realism”
• “Aesthetic Transformations”

Part Three B: Lambert Zuidervaart’s Art in Public: Politics, Economics, and a Democratic Culture:

Week Five:
• “Culture War”
• “What Good Is Art?”
• “Just Art?”

Week Six:
• “Public Sphere”
• “Civil Sector”
• “Countervailing Forces”

Week Seven:
• “Relational Autonomy”
• “Authenticity and Responsibility”
• “Democratic Culture”

Week Eight: Third Speaker: Lambert Zuidervaart (University of Toronto):
• Wednesday Evening: Preparations
• February 28th: Thursday Evening: “Artistic Truth.”
• March 1st, Friday Evening: “Public Art”

Week Nine:
• Debriefing

Week Ten:
• Introduction to Martin Seel’s Aesthetic Theory
Part Four: Martin Seel’s *The Aesthetics of Appearing*.

Week One:
- “A Rough History of Modern Aesthetics”
  - Eight Short Stories
  - “Aesthetics as Part of Philosophy”

Week Two:
- “Aesthetics of Appearing”
  - “What is Appearing”
  - “Being-so and Appearing”

Week Three:
- “Aesthetics of Appearing”
  - “Appearing and Semblance”
  - “Appearing and Imagination”

Week Four:
- “Aesthetics of Appearing”
  - “Situations of Appearing”
  - “Constellations of Art”

Week Five:
- “Flickering and resonating: Borderline Experiences Outside and Inside Art”

Week Six:
- “Thirteen Statements on the Picture”
- “Variations on Art and Violence”

**Week Seven, Fourth Speaker: Martin Seel:**
- **Wednesday: Preparations:**
  - May 16th, Thursday Evening: “The Aesthetics of Appearing”
  - May 17th, Friday Evening “Thirteen Theses on Pictures” (Martin Seel, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universitaet, Frankfurt am Main, Germany)
- Conference

Week Eight:
- Celebration Dinner

Week Nine:
- Concluding Comments