Eng 502 (26274) Contemporary Critical Theory

Aesthetics **in Theory**

*I produce an object. What people make of it is not my concern* – Beckett





**Φ Φ Φ**

**Professor Gregory Castle**

Spring Semester 2016 ♠ MW 4:30-5:45

 Off: LL 202A ♠ Off Hrs: MW 2-3 and by appt.

 965-0856 ♠ dedalus@asu.edu

 Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1920)

**Course Description**

This course will consider literary theory from Kant to Žižek, in a straightforward historical framework, with an emphasis on theories of aesthetics and art. We will start with the German idealist tradition (Kant and Hegel), which forms a bedrock for modern theories of aesthetics, and then move forward to Nietzsche, who offers the first serious critique of this tradition. After Nietzsche, the development of literary theory begins in earnest, as does the development of new theories of literature, art and aesthetics.

The course has two broad objectives: to acquire a firm background in twentieth- and twenty-first century theory and pursue in detail one of the most important questions confronting literary and cultural studies today: what is art and how do we know good art from bad art? Is it even possible or desirable to make aesthetic judgments? What is the relation between aesthetics and politics? What is the role of gender and sexuality in making art and judgments about it?

Our main text will be Cazeaux’s *Continental Aesthetics Reader*, which I will supplement with readings in areas not fully covered by this anthology (e.g., feminism, postcolonial studies, disability studies, ecocriticsm, cognitive theory).

**Course Goals**

Students successfully completing the course will be able to

* understand the main themes and ideas of modern aesthetic theory, including philosophical and popular aesthetics;
* demonstrate a basic knowledge of the chief social and culture contexts of aesthetic theories and principle lines of their historical development;
* apply theoretical concepts and ideas effectively, in the analysis of theoretical and literary texts;
* create effective arguments based on theoretical concepts and methodologies and using language clearly and persuasively.

**Assigned Texts**

Cazeaux, Clive, ed. *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (2nd ed)

Gregory Castle, *Literary Theory Handbook* (Wiley-Blackwell 2013)

*Some additional matterials will be posted on Blackboard*.

**Course Requirements**

**Assignments and Examinations**.

Two critical term papers (8-10 pp): 40 pts ea.

Participation\* 20 pts

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Total 100 pts

\* Class participation means more than simply taking part in class discussion. It also means attending class regularly, bringing your book, taking notes, demonstrating you’ve read the assignments, attending office hours, turning assignments in on time and, of course, *not* reading materials for other classes or texting or sleeping, or… well, you get picture. *Note*: not everyone need be doing all these things well all at once. But they are the factors that help me determine the “class participation” grade.

Standard format for papers is 12pt type (preferably Times New Roman), 1¼ inch margins. No cover sheets please. Policy on late assignments: 2 pts per day, incl. weekends. Missed assignments may result in a failing course grade. Grading based on the following scale:

A+ 97-100 A 93-96 A- 90-92 // + 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82 // C+ 77-89 C 73-76 C- 70-73 // D 60-69 // E 59

**NOTA BENE**. For more information about paper format and construction, citation guidelines and matters of style, consult the *ASU Guide to Style*, which is now available on line: [http://www.public.asu.edu/~dedalus/guidetostyle/index.html](http://www.public.asu.edu/~dedalus/guidetostyle/index.html.) (for citation and format, chose the fourth link, “Format Procedures and Research Aids”)

**Attendance and Class Decorum**.Attendance, of course, is mandatory. Anything beyond two (3) absences may result in a grade penalty. Excused absences beyond this limit must be documented.\* Excessive absence may result in a failing grade for the course. Excessive tardiness may have the same effect.

\* Doctor’s notes must be produced immediately after the absence in question and must indicate a *specific and sufficient reason* for missing class. Whenever possible, notify the instructor via e-mail if you are going to claim an excused absence.

All students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner befitting a college classroom. Electronic devices are permitted for notetaking and ebook reading. Try not to leave before class is over, unless it is an emergency.

**Plagiarism**.Academic dishonesty (cheating and plagiarism) will not be tolerated. In the “Student Academic Integrity Policy” manual, ASU defines “’Plagiarism” [as] using another's words, ideas, materials or work without properly acknowledging and documenting the source. Students are responsible for knowing the rules governing the use of another's work or materials and for acknowledging and documenting the source appropriately.”  For additional information, See *Guide to Style* and the student affairs website: <http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/judicial/academic_integrity.htm#definitions>

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

Students should complete assigned readings by the days indicated below. Except where noted, all readings are in the *Continental Aesthetics Reader*. LTH = *Literary Theory Handbook*.

**Week 1** Wed Jan 13 Course Introduction

**Week 2** Mon Jan 18 MLK Holiday

 Wed Jan 20 Kant, fr. *Critique of Judgment*

**Week 3** Mon Jan 25 Hegel, fr. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*

 Wed Jan 27 Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies”; fr. *Birth of Tragedy* (PDF)

**Week 4** Mon Feb 1 Modernism (*LTH* 18-24) and Formalism (*LTH*)

 Wed Feb 3 Marxism & Postmarxism (*LTH*)

 Marx, “Private Property and Communism”

**Week 5** Mon Feb 8 Critical Theory (*LTH*)

 Adorno, fr. *Minima Moralia*

 Wed Feb 10 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

**Week 6** Mon Feb 15 Phenomenology and Hermeneutics (*LTH*)

Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”

 Wed Feb 17 Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”

 Bachelard, “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside”

**Week 7** Mon Feb 22 Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow”

Dufrenne, “The World of the Aesthetic Object”

 Wed Feb 24 Gadamer, “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics”

 Ricoeur, “What is a Text?”

**Week 8** Mon Feb 29 Psychoanalysis (*LTH*)

 Freud, “The Unconscious”

 Wed Mar 2 Lacan, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious”

**Spring Break March 6-13**

**Week 9** Mon Mar 14 Bataille, “Sanctity, Eroticism and Solitude”

 Wed Mar 16 Poststructuralism (*LTH*)

 Barthes, “Death of the Author”

 Foucault, “What is an Author?”

 **First Critical Term Paper Due, in class**

**Week 10** Mon Mar 21 Deconstruction (*LTH*)

 Derrida, “The Parergon”

 Cixous, “The Last Painting or the Portrait of God”

 Wed Mar 23 Feminism and Gender Studies (*LTH*)

 Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection”

**Week 11** Mon Mar 28 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (PDF)

 Wed Mar 30 Žižek, “Pornography, Nostalgia, Montage: A Triad of

 the Gaze”

**Week 12** Mon Apr 4 Butler, “Gender is Burning”

 Wed Apr 6 Postmodernism (LTH)

 Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity” (PDF)

 Lyotard, fr. *The Postmodern Condition* (PDF)

**Week 13** Mon Apr 11 Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde”

Baudrillard, “The Evil Demon of Images”

 Wed Apr 13 Deleuze and Guattari, “Percept, Affect, and Concept”

 Guattari, “The New Aesthetic Paradigm”

**Week 14** Mon Apr 18 Postcolonial Studies (*LTH*)

 Bahri, “Aesthetic Dimension of Representation” (PDF)

 Wed Apr 20 Postmarxism and Posthumanism (LTH)

 Agamben, “The Melancholy Angel”

 Nancy, “Art, A Fragment”

**Week 15** Mon Apr 25 Badiou, “Art and Philosophy”

 Wed Apr 27 Rancière, “Aesthetics and Politics”

 **Second Critical Term Paper Due, in class**

Drop/Add Deadline Jan 17 /// Tuition & Fees Refund Deadline Jan 24

Course Withdrawal Deadline Apr 3///Complete Withdrawal Deadline April 29