

“A Design for Life”: Aesthetico-Politics in Semio-Capitalism

This course engages with aesthetics and art, and how their demands sometimes stand in uneasy tension with established conceptual frameworks. Starting from Kant and Hegel, we will move on to Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, who in their own way attempted to let the aesthetic ring through in their writing.

This seminar will also focus on ‘media archaeology’ (Parikka, Huhtamo) as a mode of Benjaminian allegorical thinking which traces parallel futures on the basis of discarded, obsolete technologies (so-called “zombie media”). Also heeding the allegorical impulse, while using Jacques Rancière’s “distribution of the sensible” as a means to conceptualize the politics of the aesthetic, Alexander Galloway’s *Interface Effect* (Polity, 2012) presents an aesthetico-political intervention meditating on the shift towards absolute equivalence of representational forms through algorithmic culture. We will examine how the interface – as allegorical device – is a conceptual figure for examining aesthetic form and the socio-political, historical context it forms part of.

Taking Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* as our guide, we will also examine the role of aesthetic and arts in ‘cognitive capitalism’- or “semio-capital” (Berardi) - and technology’s role in disclosing this new world. Sianne Ngai proposes new aesthetic categories attuned to the Anthropocene and the changing self-conceptualization of the human: the “zany,” “cute” and “interesting” now inform “our” (Western) aesthetic horizon. To combat the threat of Ngai’s provincialism, we will lastly take inspiration from post-colonial and global perspectives on the potentially liberating role of a new ‘aesthetic education.’ The work of Spivak and Sloterdijk will prove paradigmatic as well as the irreverent, “ethno-techno” aesthetics of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña.

Texts:

* This is a provisional list.

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Benjamin, Walter. 1977. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Verso.

Benjamin, Walter. 2008. “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” Belknap Press.

Berardi, Franco. 2009. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Semiotext.

Guattari, Félix. 1995. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Indiana University Press.

Galloway, Alexander R. 2012. *The Interface Effect*. Polity.

Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. 2005. *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism and Pedagogy*. Routledge.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1994. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Penguin.

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka, eds. 2011. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*. (selections)

Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by Werner Pluhar. Hackett.

Ngai, Sianne. 2012. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. Harvard UP.

Rancière, Jacques. 2013. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. Verso.

Parikka, Jussi. 2012. *What Is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sloterdijk, Peter. 2017. *The Aesthetic Imperative: Writings on Art*. Polity.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2012. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Harvard University Press.