

Aesthetics and Phenomenology (Winter 2019)

FILMSTUD 253/453: Aesthetics and Phenomenology

Seminar:

Wed 1:30-4:20pm

Room: McMurtry 370

Prof. Shane Denson

Office: McMurtry 318

Office Hours: TBD

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Course Description:

This course explores central topics in aesthetics—where "aesthetics" is understood both in the narrow sense of the philosophy of art and aesthetic judgment, and in a broader sense as it relates to questions of perception, sensation, and various modes of embodied experience. We will engage with both classical and contemporary works in aesthetic theory, and special emphasis will be placed on phenomenological approaches to art and aesthetic experience across a range of media and/or mediums (including painting, sculpture, film, and digital media).

The course seeks to illuminate (theories of) the aesthetic forms and phenomena that are central to our experience of the world. We will engage with these topics through an intensive reading program; each class session will be devoted to the close reading and discussion of a canonical or contemporary work or selection of works.

Students will be responsible for presenting the readings in connection with outside materials of their own choosing (pairing the texts with artifacts, images, interfaces, artworks, etc.) that help to illuminate theoretical insights and enrich our discussion. The final two weeks will be devoted to formal presentations of the original research conducted for students' final papers.

Please make sure you are registered for the class on Canvas. Handouts and additional course material will be posted there.

Required Textbooks:

Don Ihde, *Experimental Phenomenology*. Second Edition. Albany: SUNY Press, 2012.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. James Creed Meredith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.

Galen A. Johnson, ed. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1993.

Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, eds. *The Phenomenology Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

Other texts will be made available.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular attendance and preparation for class. Irregular attendance will negatively affect your final grade. Active participation will help improve your final grade. Readings are to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.
2. Presentation (20-30 minutes) of readings and relevant materials, followed by moderation of discussion. Your presentation should summarize readings, highlight particularly interesting or controversial aspects, and connect them to other relevant materials (texts, films, videos, artworks, etc.) and contexts, as well as formulating questions that will help focus class discussion. Your task is essentially to frame and guide our discussion of a text, and to insert that text into our larger ongoing discussion.
3. Formal presentation of original research conducted for final project. These conference-style presentations will be held in the final two weeks of class.

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4. Final written project (details below).

Grading:

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

15% Class participation and preparation

20% Presentation and Discussion of Reading

30% Formal Presentation

35% Final Paper

Final Assignment:

Term papers (5000 words) are to be submitted by **Wednesday, March 20, 2019 (no later than 6:30pm)**. As a prerequisite for the final paper, a 1-2 page proposal will be due in class on **February 13, 2019**; an updated proposal and outline of the project will be due along with your formal presentation of research, in the final two weeks of class (**March 6 and March 13, 2019**). In your proposal, you should outline the focus or object of your analysis, explain the specific method(s) of analysis, state your reasons for choosing this approach to the topic, and formulate a tentative thesis statement. The final paper should be written in a scholarly format, with a complete bibliography, and should consist of the following:

1. A brief introduction outlining your topic and stating – as clearly and precisely as possible – the thesis of your paper. This section should usually be no more than one paragraph long.
2. A short description of the theoretical positions to be controverted and/or artworks, films, media, and other object(s) of your analysis. Here you should provide any essential background that might be needed for the reader to understand your analysis. You should assume an educated reader, who is familiar with film and media studies but perhaps has not read the books or seen the films (or other media) being discussed in your paper. If it is not relevant to your argument, do not engage in lengthy plot summaries. On the other hand, make sure that the reader has enough context (narrative or otherwise) to understand the more detailed analysis and argumentation that follows. Overall, in this section you must find the right balance, which you can do by considering whether each detail is truly relevant and informative with respect to your argument. Anthropologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson defined information as “a difference which makes a difference,” and you can use this formula as a test for determining which details truly belong in this section. If, for example, providing a plot summary or details about production costs and box-office revenues will make a difference with respect to your thesis (i.e. if a reader needs to know these things in order to process your argument), then this is clearly relevant and belongs in this section; on the other hand, if it doesn't make a difference to your argument, then it probably doesn't belong here. This section should usually be no more than 2-3 paragraphs long.
3. An in-depth engagement with the texts, artworks, and media objects under consideration. Your analysis should be interpretive and argumentative in nature. For example, in analyzing a film it is not enough simply to describe what you see on screen; you need also to persuade the reader that this is important, and that it has certain implications that may not be obvious at first glance. (If something is overly obvious, then it's probably not very informative and certainly not worth arguing.) You are not just describing things but providing a “reading” of them. Keep in mind that the analysis you provide in this section constitutes the main support for your thesis statement. Your analysis is the argumentation that you offer to back up your thesis, while the thesis statement should be seen as the logical conclusion of your argument/analysis. In other words, while you have already told the reader what your thesis statement is (in the introduction), it is through your analysis that you must now prove that your thesis is correct or plausible. Ideally, after reading the analysis in this section, the reader should see your thesis statement as the logical outcome. Keeping this in mind as the test of success, you again need to

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ensure that your analysis is relevant and informative with respect to your thesis statement (if it doesn't make a difference with regard to your thesis, then it can hardly prove it). In addition, you need to make sure that your analysis/argument proves your thesis *sufficiently*. This is a question of the scope of your thesis, and of your ability to prove it through your interpretive analysis. Have you claimed too much in your thesis? Not enough? Ideally, there should be a perfect match between what you claim in your thesis and what your analysis actually demonstrates. When writing this section, you may find that you have to adjust your thesis (and re-write your introduction accordingly) or look for stronger arguments to support it. This should be the longest section of your paper.

4. A brief conclusion. Try not to be too mechanical in summarizing and repeating what you've written, but do make sure that the conclusion demonstrates the paper's overall relevance and coherence. For example, you might return to a detail mentioned in the introduction and use it to highlight the significance of your argument: maybe the detail seemed rather unimportant before but has a very different meaning in the light of your analysis or interpretation. Foregrounding the transformative effect of your argument (i.e. the fact that it makes us see things differently) is a good way to demonstrate the overall importance of your paper, and the device of returning in the end to something mentioned at the beginning is an effective way of giving your paper closure. Obviously, though, it is not the only way to approach the conclusion. You might also demonstrate the relevance of your argument by opening up the scope even farther and considering the questions that your thesis raises for other areas of inquiry. Does your analysis suggest alternative readings for other theoretical texts and/or other media objects? Does it suggest the need to re-think various assumptions about media, about a given medium, or about some other aspect of media inquiry? However you decide to approach it, the point of the conclusion, generally speaking, is to take a step back from arguing for your thesis (you are supposed to be finished doing that by now) and to reflect, on a quasi meta-level, about the overall significance of your argument/thesis. This section should normally be only one or two paragraphs in length.
5. A full list of works cited, according to MLA (or other established) style.

Students with Documented Disabilities:

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://oae.stanford.edu>).

Course Schedule:

01.09. Aesthetics and Phenomenology between Art, Technology, Embodiment, and Sensation

Don Ihde, *Experimental Phenomenology* – Part One: Chapters 1-9.

Suggested further reading:

Dermot Moran, "Introduction" to *Introduction to Phenomenology*.

Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld*.

01.16. Kant's Aesthetics and the Bifurcation of Art and Technology

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* – Preface, Introduction, and First Section of Part One ("Analytic of the Beautiful" and "Analytic of the Sublime").

Suggested further reading:

Stefan Käufer and Anthony Chemero, "Kant and Wundt: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Background." Chapter 1 in *Phenomenology: An Introduction*.

Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Introduction." In: Steven M. Cahn and Aaron Meskin, *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology*.

Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics." <<http://susanbuckmorss.info/text/aesthetics-and-anaesthetics-part-i/>>.

Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*.

01.23. Husserl: "To the things themselves!"

Edmund Husserl, "The Basic Approach of Phenomenology" and "The Noetic and Noematic Structure of Consciousness." In: *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Ed. Donn Welton.

Donn Welton, "The Development of Husserl's Phenomenology." In: *The Essential Husserl*.

Suggested further reading:

Stephan Käufer and Anthony Chemero, "Edmund Husserl and Transcendental Phenomenology." Chapter 2 in *Phenomenology: An Introduction*.

Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Chapters 2-5.

Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*.

Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.

01.30. Merleau-Ponty's Embodied Aesthetics

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology" and "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences." In: *The Phenomenology Reader*. Ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt." In: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Ed. Galen A. Johnson.

Galen A. Johnson, "Preface" and "Phenomenology and Painting: 'Cézanne's Doubt'." In: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*.

Suggested further reading:

Stephan Käufer and Anthony Chemero, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty: The Body and Perception." Chapter 5 in *Phenomenology: An Introduction*.

Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Chapter 12.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*.

02.06. Heidegger: Technology and Art

Martin Heidegger, "The Worldhood of the World." In: *The Phenomenology Reader*. Ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney.

Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking." In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

Martin Heidegger, "The Thing." In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology." In: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

Suggested further reading:

Stephan Käufer and Anthony Chemero, "Martin Heidegger and Existential Phenomenology." Chapter 3 in *Phenomenology: An Introduction*.

Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Chapters 6-7.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art." In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*.

02.13. **Feminist and Queer Phenomenologies (Research Proposals Due!)**

Simone de Beauvoir, "Destiny" and "Woman's Situation and Character." In: *The Phenomenology Reader*. Ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney.

Iris Marion Young, "Lived Body vs. Gender: Reflections on Social Structure." In: *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays*.

Sarah Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.4 (2006): 543-574.

Suggested further reading:

Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

Toril Moi, *What is a Woman and Other Essays*.

Debra B. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*.

Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*.

Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*.

Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*.

02.20. **Phenomenology of Film and Media**

Vivian Sobchack, "Film's Body." In: *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*.

Suggested further reading:

Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic 'Presence'." In: *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*. Ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda. <<http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/>>.

Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*.

Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*.

Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*.

Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*.

Shane Denson, *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface*.

Scott Richmond, *Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating*.

Brendan Keogh, *A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames*.

02.27. Temporal Experience and Its Mediation

Edmund Husserl, "The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness." In: *The Phenomenology Reader*. Ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney.

Bernard Stiegler, "Introduction," "Cinematic Time," and "Cinematic Consciousness." In: *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*.

Suggested further reading:

Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*.

Mark B. N. Hansen, "'Realtime Synthesis' and the *Différance* of the Body: Technocultural Studies in the Wake of Deconstruction." *Culture Machine* 6 (2004):

<<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/9/8>>

Shane Denson, "Re-Focusing Cinematic Double Vision: Seriality, Mediality, and Mediation in Postnatural Perspective." In: *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface*.

03.06. Presentations

Formal presentations of research.

03.13. Aesthetics as First Philosophy

Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*.

Suggested further reading:

Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things*.

Mark B. N. Hansen, *Feed-Forward: On the Future of 21st-Century Media*.

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03.20. Final Papers Due! (by 6:30pm)