Proseminar: Interdisciplinary Critical Theory in Practice

Spring 2015 - CORE-GG2018.001 – Mondays, 6:20 – 9:00 – 1 Wash Pl 527

Karen Hornick
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1 Wash Place, Room 605
kah3@nyu.edu / 212-998-7331

Course description and objectives:

This class provides an interdisciplinary survey of major recurring questions, approaches and modes of inquiry, and current trends in art and humanities research. Whether considering philosophy, religion, literature, visual art, or any of the other branches of the arts and humanities singly or in combination, we are always concerned in this class with human symbolic expression of some sort—and the theories devised to approach questions about that expression.

Rather than tracing humanistic/artistic inquiry as a chain of movements through history, this class moves generally from big questions (what is “culture,” anyway?) through general humanistic approaches (formal analysis, taxonomy, content analysis) and concludes by focusing on a number of issues and intellectual turns that feature prominently in contemporary American humanistic study (environmental humanism, cultural memory studies, affect theory). It is hoped that students will collaborate with the instructor to revise the syllabus as we go along to accommodate the particular interests of the group. The syllabus is somewhat provisional—and especially after the middle of the semester.

To anchor our work, we will reach beyond the traditional scope of the humanities to consider the current position of the humanities and arts in relation to relatively social and technological developments said to have changed cultural consumption and production and ideas about those activities. For example, is the so-called “mass audience” a product of the goods and entertainment it consumes (as midcentury ideology theorists believed) or is it an outmoded concept lost in the wake of globalization, the sharp focusing techniques of digital marketing, crowd sourcing, and participatory culture? What are the implications of these developments for aesthetic appreciation, the formation of pleasure and desire, the relationship between culture and politics? Where do you stand as a critic, scholar, or artist in relation to such questions?

With some regret, it must be admitted that most of our focus will fall upon works and theories originating in the West. This issue will itself receive some attention in our class discussions, although most often through reading Western writers writing critically about Western attitudes to the non-West. Interested students,
however, will have a number of opportunities to submit work that incorporates a more comprehensive global reach.

From the Stanford University Research Center Website:

A hallmark of humanistic study is that research is approached differently than in the natural and social sciences, where data and hard evidence are required to draw conclusions. Because the human experience cannot be adequately captured by facts and figures alone, humanities research employs methods that are historical, interpretive and analytical in nature.

Professors who engage in humanities research are often posing questions about common assumptions, uncovering new meanings in artistic works, or finding new ways to understand cultural interactions. This type of inquiry can produce clearer pictures of the past, uncover the many insights that we can draw from our forbears, and in turn, help us better to prepare for the future. (http://shc.stanford.edu/how-humanities-research-conducted)

Readings:

Most readings are essays and book chapters and will be distributed via our NYU Classes site. You must obtain three books:

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
Carl Wilson, *Let’s Talk about Love* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014 edition)
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (any legit publisher)

Assignments / Grades

Short weekly responses to the readings (post on NYU Classes Forum by noon on class days) (20 percent of grade)

Midterm paper (10 – 12 pages) (30 percent of grade)

Final paper (15 – 20 pages) (40 percent of grade)

Attendance and participation (10 percent of grade)

All papers should be submitted as Word documents to the Assignments page of our NYU Classes site.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>SYLLABUS</th>
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<td><strong>January 26</strong></td>
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| **February 2** | Matthew Arnold, from *Culture and Anarchy*  
Newton Minnow, “Television and the Public Interest” |
| Introductions | Dwight Macdonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture”  
| | Louis Menand, “Browbeaten”  
| | Joshua Rothman, “The Meaning of ‘Culture’”  
| | F. R. Leavis, from Mass Civilization and Minority Culture |
| Why so much fuss about Culture? | Plato, The Meno  
| | Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from Emile  
| | Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?”  
| | Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment”?  
| | Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case”  
| | Ralph Ellison, “Becoming a Writer” |
| February 9 | Plato, The Meno  
| | Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from Emile  
| | Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?”  
| | Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment”?  
| | Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case”  
| | Ralph Ellison, “Becoming a Writer” |
| Where do individuals come from? | Plato, The Meno  
| | Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from Emile  
| | Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?”  
| | Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment”?  
| | Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case”  
| | Ralph Ellison, “Becoming a Writer” |
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| | Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from Emile  
| | Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?”  
| | Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment”?  
| | Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case”  
| | Ralph Ellison, “Becoming a Writer” |
| February 16 | President’s Day, no class |
| February 23 | Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents  
| | Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto |
| Forum comment due by noon. | Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents  
| | Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto |
| March 2 | John Fiske, “Popular Culture”  
| | Simon Frith, “The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent: Saving Popular Culture from the Populists”  
| | James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”  
| | Stuart Hall, Selected essays  
| | Janice Radway, from “Reading the Romance”  
| | Matt Hills, “Storyselling and Storykilling: Affirmational/Transformational Discourses of Television Narrative |
| Is culture a product or a process? Who determines cultural meaning? | John Fiske, “Popular Culture”  
| | Simon Frith, “The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent: Saving Popular Culture from the Populists”  
| | James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”  
| | Stuart Hall, Selected essays  
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| | Matt Hills, “Storyselling and Storykilling: Affirmational/Transformational Discourses of Television Narrative |
| The “Active Audience” thesis | John Fiske, “Popular Culture”  
| | Simon Frith, “The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent: Saving Popular Culture from the Populists”  
| | James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”  
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| March 9 | Carl Wilson, Let’s Talk about Love  
| | Brief oral reports on student midterm papers. |
| March 16 | Spring Break  
| March 23 | Linda Nochlin, “Why There Have Been No Great Women Artists”  
| | Maureen Ryan, “Who Creates Drama at HBO?”  
| | Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”  
| | Jason Mittell, “Complexity in Contemporary American Television”  
| Who gets to produce? | Linda Nochlin, “Why There Have Been No Great Women Artists”  
| | Maureen Ryan, “Who Creates Drama at HBO?”  
| | Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”  
| | Jason Mittell, “Complexity in Contemporary American Television” |
| Formal analysis, Genre Study | Linda Nochlin, “Why There Have Been No Great Women Artists”  
| | Maureen Ryan, “Who Creates Drama at HBO?”  
| | Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”  
| | Jason Mittell, “Complexity in Contemporary American Television” |
### Due: Midterm Papers on Carl Wilson: a critical reading of this book that draws from the authors we discussed in the first half of the semester

- Dave Hickey, “The Kids Are Alright”
- Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised”

### March 30

**Images and Symbols, Tropes and Memes**

- Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”
- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*
- George Orwell, “Boys Weeklies”

**The Linguistic Turn: Performance**

- Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”

*Forum comment due by noon.*

### April 6

**“Narrative” / Representation and Form / Narrative as Ideology**

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
- Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*”
- Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”
- Drew Westin, “What Happened to Obama?”
- Roxane Gay, “The Price of Black Ambition”

*Forum comment due by noon.*

### April 13

**Narrative As A Form Of Analysis: Periodization**

- Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduceability”
- Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”
- __, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture”

*Forum comment due by noon.*

### April 20

**The Humanities Meet the Social Sciences**

- Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” and “On Fashion”
- Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”
- Theodor Adorno, “How to Look at Television” and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry” and “How to Look at Television”

*Forum comment due by noon.*

### April 27

**Daniel Merlin Goodbrey, “Distortions in Spacetime: Emergent Narrative Practics n Comics’ Transition**
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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New Media / Science and Technology</strong></td>
<td>Forum comment due by noon.</td>
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<td>from Print to Screen”</td>
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<td>Henry Jenkins, from “Media Convergence”</td>
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<td>Blakey Vermeule, from <em>Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?”</em></td>
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<td>Ed Finn, “Becoming Yourself: The Afterlife of Reception” (Stanford Literary Lab)</td>
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<td><strong>May 4</strong></td>
<td>Affect Studies</td>
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<td>Sara Ahmed, from <em>The Promise of Happiness</em></td>
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<td>Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death”</td>
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<td>Clara Latham, &quot;Listening to the Talking Cure: Sprechstimme, Hypnosis, and the Sonic Organization of Affect&quot;</td>
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<td><strong>May 11</strong></td>
<td>Place Studies / Environmental Humanism</td>
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<td>Rob Nixon, from <em>Slow Violence</em></td>
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<td><strong>May 15</strong></td>
<td>Final papers due by end of day.</td>
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<td><strong>Academic Integrity:</strong></td>
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<td>As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (<a href="http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html">www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html</a>)</td>
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