Stony Brook MA Courses: Spring 2015

SPRING 2015

David Kleinberg-Levin: Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory (PHI 507) (Visiting Professor)
Monday 2 – 5 PM

The history of aesthetic theory and the philosophy of art in the Western world begins in ancient Greece with Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Poetics. In modern times, the two greatest contributions to that story come from Kant and Hegel in the eighteenth century, and to a lesser extent, from Nietzsche in the nineteenth. But after them, by far the greatest contribution comes from Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), musician, composer, philosopher, and founding member of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, the participants in which launched the movement still known today as “critical social theory.” Adorno’s aesthetic theory and philosophy of art played, and still play today, a key role in that movement. We will be reading parts of his major, posthumously published work, confronting all the basic questions, including: Can there be truth in art? What is the significance of the break with representationalism that took place in abstract art? Is it possible for art to transform society today? What role can art play in society? Is “beauty” still an important category? How important are artists’ intentions? How should one judge a work of art?

Required Texts:
Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory [to buy or borrow from a library]

Robert Crease: Dance and the Lived Body (PHI 508)

If painting, as Merleau-Ponty writes, is the art that shows us how things become things and world becomes world, dance may be said to be the art that shows us how bodies become bodies. It is the art that, as Merce Cunningham writes, gives you no objects, nor things to hang on the wall to look at, nor texts to read, but only “that single fleeting moment when you feel alive”. Dance explores and exposes the body in its temporality, finitude, and mortality. Its medium is the ecstatic body, always already beyond itself in the world and with the world in us. This course examines the origin and nature of dancing, and explores it as a medium in which to rethink embodiment. The course also examines why philosophers’ evasion of dancing as a topic is at once a scandal, mystery, and opportunity. Topics entwined with dancing include improvisation, play, rhythm, style, bipedality, and apprenticeship learning. Required texts include Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, The Corporeal Turn.
Megan Craig: *Philosophical Art Criticism (PHI 509)*  
Tuesday, 12 – 3 PM

This is a practice-based seminar focused on the interpretation and writing of original art criticism. We will investigate a variety of texts in the history of aesthetics, with a focus on those that substantially engage with a specific work of art or body of work. We will also read contemporary art criticism and texts that complicate the (supposed) distinction between philosophy and art. Along the way we will discuss what makes criticism philosophical as well as why some works are more or less amenable to particular forms of philosophical engagement and critique. Authors include Kristeva, Danto, Berger, Nancy, Deleuze, Serres, and Krauss. We will also be reading articles from *Art Forum*, *The New Yorker*, and *October*. Students will be reviewing contemporary exhibits in New York City as part of their writing for this course.

Glen Mazis: *Merleau-Ponty’s Artist of Depth, Flesh and the Imaginal (PHI 506) (Visiting Professor)*

Mondays 6 – 9 PM

This course will introduce students to Merleau-Ponty’s basic ideas of embodiment, perception and his indirect ontology of the flesh, and then use this basis to explore in detail his philosophy of art. As the course moves from the Phenomenology of Perception and the early essays on art, Cézanne and film to examining the course lectures, later essays and parts of The Visible and Invisible, the leitmotif of depth in art, and ideas such as radiance, reversibility, and the increasing emphasis on the imaginal in art will be explored. In addition to the visual arts, Merleau-Ponty’s increasing affinity with Proust, Bachelard, the Surrealists and their interest in poetic language will be studied. Secondary sources such as Johnson’s Retrieval of the Beautiful: Thinking through Merleau-Ponty’s Aesthetics, Wiskus’ Rhythm of Thought: Art, Literature and Music after Merleau-Ponty and other essays will also be consulted. Discussion emphasized, examples of various artworks studied in class, two shorter papers and a final paper.