

SINN UND SINNLICHKEIT: USES AND ABUSES OF AESTHETICS TODAY

Graduate Student Conference in German Studies at Cornell University

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art

February 18-19, 2011

Keynote Speaker: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Stanford University

Plenary Speaker: Peter Gilgen, Cornell University

Recent years have seen several attempts to redefine aesthetics as a discipline and rehabilitate it as a mode of inquiry in literary studies. Sometimes pronounced a movement, these attempts found their common credo in the title of Jonathan Loesberg's book *A Return to Aesthetics* (2005). The justificatory rhetoric of calls for such a return reflects the poor standing aesthetics had in literary theory for some years. Charged with supporting ideological constructs by theorists as divergent as Terry Eagleton and Paul de Man, aesthetics came under criticism for its claim to autonomy as well as for the metaphysical presuppositions associated with its mediating function between the sensible and the intelligible in the systems of classical German philosophy. Conversely, it is precisely this 'impurity' or 'confusion' of aesthetics as a field between sense (as meaning) and the senses that has attracted recent reflections on its political, ethical, and experiential import. Other aesthetic returns have called for renewed inquiry into the perennial topics of connections between art, truth, and knowledge.

Questions we hope to address include: What are the (political, ethical, cognitive) uses and abuses of aesthetics? Can aesthetic approaches provide a framework for thinking about the experiences art affords us or do we have to move 'beyond aesthetics' to theorize relations between art and thought today? Have returns to aesthetics given satisfactory answers to the charges directed against it? What becomes of aesthetics once it is stripped of its function in the philosophical systems to which it owes its constitution as a discipline? What is the status of aesthetics in literary studies, and how should we understand the relations between aesthetics and cultural studies in contemporary approaches to the humanities? What is the potential for critical aesthetics across the disciplines today? And what can disciplines in which aesthetics has not been configured in constellations of crisis contribute to the discussion?

Suggested topics:

Aesthetics as a mode of perception	Aesthetics and/vs. aestheticism and 'new formalism'
The materiality of aesthetic experience, and aesthetics of materialism	Aesthetic and cultural studies approaches to literature and art
The literary absolute	Global aesthetics
Aesthetic sensibility and theorizations of the body	Aesthetics and popular culture
Phenomenological approaches to aesthetic experience	Aesthetics and digital arts
Art, truth, and power	Art and technology
Aesthetics and ideology	Aesthetics and related fields: stylistics, poetics, sound studies, cognitive studies
Autonomy and heteronomy of/through aesthetics	The classical German tradition of aesthetics: Kant, Schiller, Schelling, Hegel and beyond
Ethics and politics of aesthetics	Adornian and Post-Adornian Aesthetics
Taste, aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties	Aesthetics 'beyond aesthetics': inaesthetics, para-aesthetics, anti-aesthetics
The content of aesthetic judgments	
The beautiful and the sublime	

Please submit an abstract of 250 words or less no later than **January 5, 2011** to conference organizers Ana-Maria Andrei and Johannes Wankhammer at aesthetics.cornell2011@gmail.com. Abstracts must include a cover letter with the author's name, paper title, affiliation, telephone number and email address, and be in the form of *.doc or *.docx files. Presentations are to last 20 minutes and must be in English. Submissions are accepted from graduate students only. Submissions from all fields relevant to the topic are welcome.