HTP 1102: THE ARTISTIC & LITERARY IMAGINATION: EXPRESSIONS OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Syllabus

Friday, 13:30 to 16:30
Room G 102

Course Description

This course addresses the following themes: the notion of aesthetics and its application in art; the study of important works of art and literature with emphasis on the understanding of ‘Self’ in relation to the ‘Other’; the power of symbolic expression in the quest for meaning in a globalized and interconnected world.

SECTION 1: PHILOSOPHY

Week 1 to 4
January 15th, 22nd, 29th and February 5th

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Description of First Module:

What does it mean to be human? A standard answer is that to be human is to be “a person” or “a self”. But this doesn’t really answer the question, since one could ask “what is a person?” Moreover, is being a human being identical to being a person? A human being changes dramatically over the course of a life. When does it all start? Even that is controversial. Consider that one’s body is constantly changing and that memories and ideas, thoughts and feelings—they come and go. In what sense then, are you the same person over time? What makes you the same person as that baby in the family photos? Finally, are humans all that unique? It seems that humans are the only creatures that ponder their own identities. Electrons, office towers, cells, trees, dogs and so on up to dolphins and higher primates do not appear to puzzle over their own existence. But can we be sure? Could an advanced computer, eventually, be regarded as a person? Perhaps human beings are only one kind of person?

We will first read and discuss philosopher John Locke’s reflections on personhood and identity. Locke’s reflections have been analyzed, criticized and developed for several hundred years. We will then consider novelist Philip K. Dick’s reflections on personhood and identity. PKD’s reflections have inspired numerous works on the question of being human. Finally, we will consider director Ridley Scott’s adaptation of PKD’s work. Scott’s film, Blade Runner, has been debated and discussed for some 30 years. In sum, we will study how the experience of being human, identity and personhood has been represented in three different modes: the philosophical text, the literary text and film.

Learning Outcomes:
The student will be able to:

- Identify and explain the problems and solutions to identity and self-identity
- Relate these problems to his or her own experiences
- Analyze how a problem changes and develops as it is expressed in different media

Evaluation Plan

1 Take-Home Exam—Short Answers/Essay Questions (Worth 33% of the course grade)

- Posted Friday, February 5th to BBLearn
- Submit to BBLearn by Sunday, February 7, 10 pm.

NOTE—This is a take-home EXAM—extensions are not granted unless a doctor’s note is produced. No exceptions.
Course Materials:

Online Readings:
Locke—see BBLearn

Novel by Philip K. Dick:
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Vintage Books/Random House Canada
My references will be to the above edition of Sheep, which is available from a variety of sources. The book will be available as well at the MultiService Centre.

Movie:
Blade Runner – The Final Cut (2007: Ridley Scott, Director)
This movie is inexpensive and DVD versions are readily available from a variety of sources, such as Amazon as well as a number of box-stores, like Walmart and Target. You can stream it for very little or purchase it for slightly more from places like YouTube and Google Play Store. However, keep in mind that I will be referring to the scenes as numbered on the DVD version of The Final Cut, which a streamed or downloaded version may not have. I have placed a number of clips of the film on my YouTube channel. I have also posted a number of other videos there that I will assign during the course.

SECTION 2: PSYCHOLOGY

Week 5 to 8
Feb 12 & 26, March 4 & 11

Dr. Manal Guirguis-Younger
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Meetings: By appointment

Description of Second Module:
We will continue to look at concepts of the self from both a psychological and philosophical viewpoints. We start by considering how the early notions of the self actually develop and what it means to be self-aware. In the next two sessions we will look at the concept of self-respect in depth and analyze how it has been treated in the various works in contemporary cultures. Our analysis will include popular literature and film, as well as works by psychologists and philosophers. In the last session we will look specifically at the work of Victor Frankel and how his analysis extends our understanding of the self as subjected to adversity and loss and the essence of sustaining respecting attitude of the self and others.
Learning Outcomes:

The student will be able to:
- Conceptualize how notions of self have developed and evolved in our culture
- Understand the problems and issues surrounding the notion of self and self-respect, and apply these to broader relational and existential questions
- Gain insights applicable to your own self-growth

Evaluation Plan:

Take home quiz in the form of a reflection (800 words – or 3 double-spaced pages). Quiz handed in the last class of this series.

Late work is penalized by 10% per day. The only acceptable reasons for extending the deadline are documented medical condition or bereavement.

Texts: All texts are on reserve at the SPU library


SECTION 3: THEOLOGY

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General Description

This section adopts a theological perspective and highlights the relationship between art and the Sacred and its impact on spiritual/religious life. How and why human beings have always represented their experience of an invisible world and, more fundamentally, their experience of the ultimate reality considered to be the origin and the heart of everything? How does art facilitate the contact with the divine reality? In which way, on the contrary, does it become an obstacle?

Context

This course addresses the following themes: the notion of aesthetics and its application in art; the study of important works of art and literature with emphasis on the understanding of ‘Self’ in relation to the ‘Other’; the power of symbolic expression in the quest for meaning in a globalized and interconnected world.

Goals

1. To describe the approach to images in today’s society and the presence of Sacred in visual arts.
2. To understand the ramifications stemming from the conflicts involving iconoclasts and their opponents throughout the history of Christianity.
3. To analyse the role of art in the way human beings connect themselves to the Sacred.
4. To highlight several aspects of the role of art in the connection between human beings and the Sacred in reference to representations stemming from different cultures, religions and eras.
**Pedagogic Strategies**

In the four sessions that I will participate in I will refer to art representations and works stemming from Christianity as well as from other religious traditions (in reference to diverse periods and cultures). This will be the occasion to make remarks from a comparative art perspective. From a didactical perspective, the content will be delivered so that students may refer to their own cultural and religious context as well as their own artistic practices.

**Plan and Courses Description**

- **March 18**
  
  **Theo 1 : Context and Issues**
  How do we consider the link between the art and the Sacred in today’s society?

- **April 1**
  
  **Theo 2 : Definitions and Methods**
  What is the meaning of major terms as art, Sacred, religious experience? How are these terms interconnected?

- **April 8**
  
  **Theo 3 : The Role of Art in the Approach to the Sacred (I)**
  Sessions 3 and 4 adopts a systematic perspective and develops several aspects of the role of art in its effort to connect human beings to the Sacred.

- **April 12* (see below)**
  
  **Theo 4 : The Role of Art in the Approach to the Sacred (II) and Conclusion**
  This session concludes this course with synthetical and interdisciplinary remarks.

**Teaching and Learning Activities**

1. Group discussions
2. Study of art works
3. Research on internet

* **UNIVERSITY CALENDAR**

April 12, 2016: Classes on March 25, Good Friday (a statutory holiday), are cancelled. They will take place on Tuesday, April 12, when the usual Friday course schedule will apply.
The students will be invited to choose one among the three following works:


2. Answer to the question: Why Christian icons are considered to be Sacred images?

3. Answer to the question: What is the role of art in the effort to connect human beings to the Sacred?

All works should not be any longer than 5 pages (double space, Times New Roman 12). All papers are due on April 8. Hard copies only.

Bibliography

Religion and Art


**Icons**


