HONORS COLLEGE
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2018

HONORS SEMINAR IN CREATIVE ARTS

Thinking Through Art

HONR 204-01

Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:40-2:55 pm

Dr. Daniel Selcer (Philosophy)
selcerd@duq.edu

J.W. von Goethe, Farbenkreis (1809)

What is art, and what does it do to or for us? A philosophical approach to these questions offers a useful battery of concepts for thinking them through: aisthesis (sensation or feeling), mimesis (representation or imitation), catharsis (release or purification), agon (struggle or contest), and krisis (distinction, judgment). We’ll use these tools to ask theoretical questions about art in relation to sensation, thought, judgment, and criticism, as well as image, sound, and concept. We’ll consider traditional aesthetic questions such as the nature of beauty, the meaning of aesthetic judgment, and the definition of art. We will also engage more recent critiques or complications of traditional aesthetic theory: challenges associated with the cultural specificity of aesthetic traditions and definitions of art; the fraught relationship between art and money; the explosion of possibilities for aesthetic communication offered by new media technologies and platforms; the intensification of issues connected to borrowing, imitation, and originality.

Those of you who are practitioners may find our study useful for thinking about your own approaches to art-making. You are welcome in this class!

The texts and works of art we examine will be both historical and contemporary, and include or address images, sound, mixed media, site-specific installation, and performance. In addition to engaging texts and classroom-projectable or playable art, students will visit and write about works in local museums, galleries, theaters, performance venues, and similar spaces. We will read work by some of the following authors: Plato, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, László Moholy-Nagy, Elizabeth Otto, Frantz Fanon, Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman, Michel Foucault, Angela Davis, Lucy Lippard, Noé Carroll, Rosalind Krauss, Stuart Hall, Annelies Monseré, Jean-Luc Nancy, Laura Mulvey, Paul Gilroy, James Elkins, Okwui Enwezor, Yuriko Saito, Boris Groys, and Robin James. In addition to a critical reflection journal, students will write two papers: first, a theoretical engagement with an issue in aesthetic theory, and second, a scaffolded project using the theoretical tools developed in the class to critically engage a work of art (or a cluster of works) in a Pittsburgh-area art space.