

Working Man's Dead -- or, All This Useless Beauty: Labor and the Visual Tradition in Germany

German 8400 – SP 2014 – Davidson

This seminar examines the relationship between workers, conceptions of labor, and the visual tradition in Germany since the middle of the nineteenth century. It is spurred equally by: the recognizable difficulty of using the expertise of artists and intellectuals invested in progressive solidarity to build the bridges that further it, on the one hand; and, the firm conviction that just such labor is necessary to envision it, on the other. We will explore this tension by investigating questions such as: How has “labor” been represented? What does it mean to “represent” workers? Why do workers seem to disappear from mainstream representations? Does self-representation answer that challenge? Is there a contradiction –necessary or productive or both – between aesthetic projects and the material realities determining and determined by work? What do new technical possibilities do to regimes of beauty, enjoyment, entertainment, and livelihood? What is the role of the history of art and thought in this?



Beyond graduate standing there are no pre-requisites for this course, which will be taught in English; it is conceived to offer students who recently completed courses on “The Frankfurt School” and/or “Vision and Power in Modernity” to explore areas of interest further. Potential readings include works by Adorno, Apadurai, Bal, Balázs, Beck, Benjamin, Brecht, Crary, Elsaesser, Engels, Harvey, Jameson, Kracauer, Luhmann, Manovich, Marx, Negt/Kluge, Rancière, Simmel, Thompson, Till, Ward, and Weber. Visual works by Connor, Becker, Beyer, Bitomsky, Dudow/Brecht, Farocki, Fassbinder, Gilbreth, Jutzi, Kluge, Lang, Lumière, Méliès, Richter, Sander, Sitte, Tübke, Tykwer, Ziewer...

Requirements: Preparation and participation (20%); Presentation on secondary material (15%); Research Paper (65%) OR Exam (designed by student & instructor -- 35%) plus selected annotated bibliography (five titles, topic determined by student with instructor -- 30%).