

Critical Theory Since 1900: Theory and the Art of Failure

T/TH

2:00-3:15

EN 4353/6353

Dr. Spain

Every violent acting out

is a part of a very specific social constellation, where big ideology
disintegrates.

-- Slavoj Žižek



This course will provide the backgrounds for understanding the 20th Century and contemporary theoretical critiques of humanism and the “grand narratives” that might, in the words of Lauren Berlant, be making us sick.

In addition to analyzing violence in relationship to failures of the social, we will read postcolonial, critical race, and gender, feminist and queer theory that might be said to cultivate “an art of failure.” If protest, social upheaval, revolution, and resistance explicitly attempt to usher in alternative futures, they also do so in proximity to failure. Protest, like “low” theory, as Judith Halberstam states, “runs the risk of not be taken seriously. It entails a willingness to fail and to lose one’s way, to pursue difficult questions about complicity, and to find counterintuitive forms of resistance.”

We’ll try to cultivate these risks in theory. As we read, write and engage with theoretical texts, we will wager: that “losing one’s way” might be central to cultivating a more “creative, cooperative, and surprising ways of being in the world.”

Questions about the course? Ads506@msstate.edu or andrea.d.spain@gmail.com.