

GSAH | Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies
in collaboration with Studies in the Arts

Aesthetics

Prof. Dr. Sianne Ngai

English Language and Literature, Division of the Arts & Humanities,
University of Chicago

Public lecture: 28.05.2026, 4.15pm–5.45pm, Unitobler, room F 005
Colloquium: 29.05.2026, 10.15am – 5.00pm, Unitobler, room F -112



Public lecture

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Colloquium

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1.5 ECTS Lecture &
Colloquium
(Pflicht- oder
Wahlpflichtbereich
ICS, SINTA, /
Wahlpflicht-
bereich SLS, GS)

Registration

via KSL und E-Mail
to
michael.toggweiler@unibe.ch

Public lecture

Inhabiting Error: From “Last Christmas” to “Senior’s Last Hour”

Prof. Dr. Sianne Ngai

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Moderation: **Prof. Dr. Nicolas Detering**

German Literature, University of Bern

This talk uses a pop song by Wham! and a reading of Marx’s *Capital* to explore the stakes of recreating and lingering in wrong ways of thinking. To linger in error is to run the risk of affectively deepening error, expanding the reach of its domain. This is especially the case in a world where truths are hidden by the social forms in which they are expressed, making error an unavoidable part of everyday perception. Yet when contradiction is a part of the world (as Hegel saw it) and not a tendency in reason (as Kant saw it), error must be phenomenologically inhabited in order to be fully understood.

Colloquium

Part 1 of the colloquium is dedicated to the discussion of the lecture and the texts suggested by the guest. In Part 2, a core group present their PhD or postdoctoral projects, speaking for about 20 minutes (English) on how the concept of “Aesthetics” and related concepts/problems connect to their research questions and which aspects of the texts are of particular relevance to their own work. The presenters raise questions for the discussion with their peers, which should contribute to the development of their thesis. Finally, in Part 3, the conversation will open up again so that the other PhD or advanced MA-students have an opportunity to address issues related to their projects.

Readings colloquium:

Marx, K. (1990). *Capital: A critique of political economy*. Vol 1. Penguin Books. (Original work published 1867). – pp. 287-306, to be circulated
Ngai, S. (2012). *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, and Interesting*. Harvard University Press. – Excerpt, to be circulated
Ngai, S. (2020). *Theory of the Gimmick*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. – Introduction, to be circulated

Further reading:

Helsvig, S. J. (2016, September 20). “The Politics of Minor Judgements” [Interview]. *Kunstkritikk: Nordic Art Review*.
<https://kunstkritikk.com/the-politics-of-minor-judgments/>

Sianne Ngai



Sianne Ngai is George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor of English at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *Ugly Feelings* (2005), *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012), and *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (2020), all from Harvard University Press. She is currently working on a new book on the affective and aesthetic dimensions of dialectical thinking .

Recent publications:

- Ngai, Sianne (2022). *The Cute*. First edition. London, England: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Limited.
- (2020). *Theory of the Gimmick : Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
 - (2015). *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, and Interesting*. Harvard University Press; paperback edition.
 - "Merely Interesting." *Critical Inquiry* 34(Summer 2008): 777-817.
 - (2005). *Ugly Feelings*. 1st ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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