

Worlds Apart:

the Legacy of Dualism in Western Thinking

CHID 390

Autumn 2013 | Instructor: Stacey Moran | CHID Majors/Minors only | Junior Colloquium

The CHID Junior Colloquium focuses on theoretical and practical problems involved in knowledge production. Traditional western thought is grounded in a two-world view that presumes, on the one hand, that there is a world 'out there,' and on the other hand, that there is human knowledge and experience of that world. This class examines the western presupposition that reality and human knowledge, meaning, and experience of reality are 'worlds apart,' that is, that they are defined in terms of a primordial separation. Myriad cultural commonplaces, such as 'objectivity in science,' 'media representation,' 'body image,' and 'personal experience,' are derived from this dualism. Unfortunately, many undesirable effects have also emerged - most notably, the brute forces of Imperialism: against other humans, against animals, and against the environment. The ability of humans to distance themselves from the world, as we will see, is both miraculous and dangerous.

This first half of this course is, in effect, a genealogical project, that is, an examination of the ways in which these distancing logics and territories of thought have emerged. We turn to texts from a variety of disciplines - including post colonialism, feminism, philosophy, history, and textual studies - in order to examine our peculiarly western penchant for separating words from things, subjects from culture, and the knower from the known. The second half of the course examines some alternatives to distancing. Texts from philosophy, feminism, quantum physics, and sociology provide theorizations of new proximities for human-world interactions.