Course Description

Philosophical aesthetics is naturally concerned with problems pertaining to the arts in general, but there are issues that must also be examined within the context of the particular arts. This course will begin with an examination of broad issues in aesthetics: What is art? What is beauty? What is expression and emotion in the arts? Is there such a thing as “good taste?” We will then consider particular issues within the context of painting, photography, film, and music.

What does it mean for a painting to be “about” or to “express” something? How should we think of photography— as a means by which we can actually see things and people in situations that no longer exist or as simply a means of registering the world? What is it about film that gives the medium its peculiar illusion-making power? What exactly is music? Does it represent and express in the same way as other art forms? Readings will be drawn from Benjamin, Danto, Gombrich, Greenberg, Heidegger, Kant, Kivy, Plato, Scruton, and others.

Required Course Material

CD-ROM containing all course readings as PDFs available from instructor free of charge

Grading Breakdown:

Active Class Contribution 20%
Online Responses and Reflections 20%
Writing Assignments 25%
Final (8-10 page) Research Paper 35%
**Active Class Contribution (20%)**
Always come to class prepared, having critically read and taken notes on the reading material. Regular attendance and lively participation – whether it be during regular class discussions or during specific class activities (such as group work, free-writing, etc.) – is absolutely necessary. Missing one or two classes is understandable. However, if you are excessively absent (i.e. more than four times) this semester, your course grade will certainly suffer and, in extreme cases, you may even fail. **If illness or other urgent matters require you to be absent more than twice, speak to your advisor and to me immediately.** Perpetual lateness is also basis for penalty. I will count every three times late as one absence (perpetually coming late to class is very disruptive to the group dynamic). In the event that you are absent, you should email someone in the class to find out exactly what you missed in order that you do not fall too far behind. However, I cannot overemphasize the importance of being on time, present, alert, and active in class – both for your sake and for that of your classmates.

**Online Responses and Reflections (20%)**
Students are required to regularly post responses and reflections to various prompts on our “NYU CLASSES” discussion forums – sometimes before discussing readings in class, sometimes afterwards, and sometimes both. These postings are meant to give you the opportunity to reflect on, process, and expand on the content of class discussions and readings. You will be encouraged to raise issues and problems that you might like to pursue in one of the more formal writing assignments. Ideally, along with the writing assignments, these postings will help you to formulate a research problem that you can then pursue as your final project.

**Writing Assignments (25%)**
There are five short (two page maximum) writing assignments due this semester – one following each part of the course. Each writing assignment will give students the chance to choose from one of several prompts. The writing assignments will be useful in developing the research topic. Of the five assignments, three may be rewritten for a higher grade.

**Research Paper (35%)**
An 8-10 page research paper is required. The paper will utilize at least five secondary sources and be based on a research problem you develop in conjunction with the class and instructor. The research paper will go through a series of workshops in which you will receive pointed feedback from the instructor as well as your peers. As part of the process of writing the research paper, you will also be required to make several short presentations to the class. More specific information about both the requirements of the research proposal and the research paper will be given later in the term. [Note: Your research proposal presentation grades will be incorporated into your overall research paper grade.] The deadline for submission of the research paper is 11pm, Friday, May 16.

**Additional Assistance**
In addition to the assistance offered by the instructor, the Gallatin Writing Center (located in Room 423) is a superb resource. Upper-level Gallatin students are employed as Peer Writing Assistants and are trained to help other students at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming about a subject to clarifying a thesis to organizing the structure of an essay. For more information and to make an appointment, see:
http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html
**Plagiarism**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the Student Discipline Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Plagiarism includes the following: using a phrase, sentence, passage, image, graph, table, sound recording, art work, or any other type of creative or intellectual material from another work without proper citation; paraphrasing words or ideas from another work without attribution; reporting as your own research or knowledge any data or idea gathered, reported, or developed by another person; submitting as your own work anything produced by another. Plagiarism does not only apply to written or recorded work, but also to intellectual property such as computer programs, oral presentations, and artistic work including choreography, stage blocking, and music. Note that plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity are matters of fact and not intention, and apply to all material submitted as a Gallatin student. In other words, regardless of whether they are deliberate or accidental, all violations are subject to potential disciplinary action. In all cases and when in doubt, students should consult with their instructor regarding acceptable forms of documentation and citation, collaboration, and exam preparation. In accordance with the University Policy on Student Conduct, Gallatin reserves the right to review and act upon violations of rules of conduct or non-academic policies of the University and/or to refer such matters to NYU’s Office of Community Standards. Where a student’s conduct on campus constitutes violations of both University rules and public law, he may be subject to both University discipline and public sanctions.

**Course Schedule**

1/28  Welcome and Course Introduction

**PART ONE: TASTE, BEAUTY, AND THE SUBLIME**

**Core Questions:**
- Is there such a thing as “good taste?” If so, who is qualified to judge?
- What is the sublime?
- What is beauty and what does it mean to make a judgment about beauty?

1/30  Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste” (399-404)

2/4   Burke, “The Sublime” and Kant, “Judgments About the Beautiful” (404-410)
PART TWO: PAINTING

Core Questions:
• Is painting a species of imitation, a mere representation of reality?
• What is “truth” in a painting?
• Is being “beautiful” definitive of an artwork?
• What is the difference between an artwork as a mere thing and as a work of art?

2/6  Plato, “Against Imitation”; Gombrich, “The Limits of Likeness”; Goodman, “Reality Remade” (4-13)


2/13  Danto, “Works of Art and Mere Real Things” (33-36)

2/18  Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (37-42)

Writing Assignment 1 Due

PART THREE: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

Core Questions:
• Is photography an art or simply a means of seeing?
• Can photographs by their very nature ever express something about their subjects?
• What is the peculiar power of movies?
• To what degree is film a matter of male voyeurism?
• To what degree do ethics impact aesthetics in film?

2/20  Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (66-69)


3/4  Devereaux, “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl” (102-106)

3/6  Taylor, “The Last King of Scotland – The Ethics of Race in Film” (106-111)

Writing Assignment 2 Due

3/11  Screening: “The Last King of Scotland”
PART FOUR: MUSIC

Core questions:
  • What is music?
  • Is it possible to characterize music in general, no matter where and when it is heard?
  • How has recording technology impacted our experience and theorizing about music?
  • What does it mean to say that music expresses emotion?
  • Can music depict objects/processes/events as paintings and photographs can?


Writing Assignment 3 Due

PART FIVE: LITERATURE

Core questions:
  • What is literature?
  • How, if at all, can literature express emotion?
  • Is an appeal to the intention of the writer conclusive evidence of meaning?
  • What does it mean to interpret literature?
  • Are Western ways of interpreting literature suitable for literature of other cultures?


4/8  Wollheim, “Criticism as Retrieval”; Shusterman, “Beneath Interpretation” (231-240)

4/10 Chi, “The Art of Writing”; Bodman, “How to Eat a Chinese Poem” (240-249)

Writing Assignment 4 Due
PART SIX: POPULAR ART AND EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

Core questions:
• How does popular culture update Plato's problem with the arts?
• Should we necessarily dismiss the popular arts as lesser than "high" art?
• Is television dependent on meaningless repetition of simple elements at the expense of the original and innovative?
• What is "kitsch" and is it in bad taste?
• Can we find aesthetic value in unlikely places (like junkyards)?
• How might we judge a pop music song or performance as authentic or inauthentic?


4/17 Eco, “Television and Aesthetics” (332-336)


Writing Assignment 5 Due

PART SEVEN: THE RESEARCH PAPER

4/29 RESEARCH WORKSHOP 1

5/1 RESEARCH WORKSHOP 2

5/6 RESEARCH WORKSHOP 3

5/8 RESEARCH WORKSHOP 4

5/13 RESEARCH PAPER INDIVIDUAL APPOINTMENTS