Spring 2015  
New York University  
Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
First-Year Research Seminar: Aesthetics in Context  
Bobst Library LL148  
Tuesdays & Thursdays 620PM-735PM

Christopher R. Trogan, Ph.D.  
Email: trogan@nyu.edu  
Office: Room 505, 1 Washington Place  
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 5pm-6pm; 735pm-830pm; by appt.

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

A USB flash drive containing all readings preloaded in PDF format will be made available by the instructor.

Grading Breakdown:

Active Class Contribution 20%

Online Responses and Reflections 20%

Writing Assignments 20%

Research Paper Proposal and Presentation 10%

Final (8-10 page) Research Paper 30%
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. Each student will be required to post a “weekly reflection” at least once this semester. The weekly reflection must be posted by Friday night, and students must then respond to the reflection through a reflection of their own (i.e. a reflection of a reflection). 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 (20%)
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 provided that the rewritten version is emailed to the instructor by 11pm, Sunday, May 17.

Research Paper Proposal and Presentation (10%)
A two-page research proposal will be due on April 23 and a five-minute research presentation is due in class on May 7.

Research Paper (30%)
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 email submission of the research paper is 11pm, Sunday, May 17.
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, s/he may be subject to both University discipline and public sanctions.

WARNING!

THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES (INCLUDING LAPTOPS, READERS, CELL PHONES, ETC.) IS NOT PERMITTED IN OUR CLASSROOM. PLEASE POWER DOWN AND PUT AWAY ALL ELECTRONICS BEFORE CLASS BEGINS!

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS RULE WILL RESULT IN A SIGNIFICANT GRADE REDUCTION AND CAN RESULT IN COURSE FAILURE. PLEASE TAKE THIS VERY, VERY SERIOUSLY.
COURSE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE!)

1/27 Welcome! Course Introduction

PART ONE: TASTE, THE SUBLIME/BEAUTIFUL, AND THE NATURE OF ART

1/29 Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste” (Reading 1)
2/3 Burke, “The Sublime”; Kant, “Judgments About the Beautiful” (Readings 2 & 3)
2/5 Hegel, “The Philosophy of Fine Art”; Dewey, “Art as Experience” (Readings 4 & 5)

Writing Assignment 1 Due

PART TWO: PAINTING

2/10 Plato, “Against Imitation”; Gombrich, “The Limits of Likeness”; Goodman, “Reality Remade” (Readings 6-8)
2/12 No Class.
2/19 Bell, “Form in Modern Painting”; Feldman, “A Formal Analysis” (Readings 11 & 12)
2/26 Danto, “Works of Art and Mere Real Things” (Reading 15)
3/3 Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (Reading 16)

Writing Assignment 2 Due
3/5 No Class.
3/10 Eaton, “Painting and Ethics”; Siqueiros, “Art and Corruption” (Readings 17-18)

PART THREE: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

3/12 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Reading 19)
3/17 No Class. Spring Break.
3/19 No Class. Spring Break.

3/26  Cohen, “What’s Special About Photography?” (Reading 22)


4/2  Devereaux, “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefensthl’s Triumph of the Will” (Reading 27)  
**Writing Assignment 3 Due**

**PART FOUR: MUSIC**


4/14  Scruton, “Representation in Music”; Kivy, “Sound and Semblance” (Readings 32-33)  
**Writing Assignment 4 Due**

**PART FIVE: POPULAR ART AND EVERYDAY AESTHETICS**


**Research Proposal Due**

**Writing Assignment 5 Due**
PART SIX: THE RESEARCH PAPER

4/30  Research Workshop 1: Pages 1-3 Due (2 Hard Copies)

5/5   Research Workshop 2: Pages 1-10 Due (2 Hard Copies)

5/7   Research Paper Presentations

RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Length: 10 pages, inclusive of Works Cited

Format: MLA protocol, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, 1” margins, etc.

Due: Final Draft due via email by 11pm, Sunday May 17

The Assignment:

Choose one of the issues raised in any one the readings assigned in the course this semester. Use the reading(s) as a point of departure for formulating an argumentative research paper. In other words, you are taking a position on the issue and will do original research to support your position.

The most difficult part of writing a successful research paper is often identifying a research topic, formulating a question about that topic and, finally, posing a research “problem.” In other words, the hardest part is often what comes before the research begins. In order to assist you with these initial stages, please read the chapters that I will make available to you from a very excellent book called The Craft of Research. These chapters will help you write your two page research proposal (due in class April 23) and to begin your paper.

The Research Proposal:

A two-page (double-spaced) research proposal is due in class on April 23. Your research proposal should do the following (in this order):

- Explain your topic, the question(s) you have about that topic, and the problem you will research.
  o Note: You do not yet have to state an “argument” i.e. the stance you will take on the problem if you are unprepared to do so

- Explain the significance of your research problem (the “so what?”)

- Describe at least three research sources you will use to investigate your research problem
  o Give full titles, authors, publication details (MLA) and state the main focus and thesis of the source
Dear Student:

Why, you might ask, don’t I allow laptop use (or the use of electronic devices in general) in my classes? I’ve decided to include an addendum to the syllabus to explain this important matter.

First, if you have your laptop open, it is almost impossible NOT to check email or briefly surf the Internet, even if you don’t mean to or have told yourself that you won’t. I have the same impulse if I have my laptop open in a meeting. The problem is that studies indicate that this kind of multitasking impairs learning; once we are on email/the web, we are no longer paying very good attention to what is happening in class.

Now, I know that one could argue that it is your choice about whether you want to use this class time to engage actively with the material at hand, or whether you would like to multitask. You’re not bothering anyone (one could argue) as you quietly do your email or check Facebook and Instagram. Here’s the problem with that theory: From what we can tell, you are actually damaging the learning environment for others, even if you’re being quiet about it. A study published in 2013 found that not only did the multitasking student in a classroom do worse on a post-class test on the material, so did the peers who could see the computer. In other words, the off-task laptop use distracted not just the laptop user but also the group of students behind the laptop user.

In addition, I have found students multitasking on laptops a bit distracting as an instructor because sometimes they are not typing at the right times; in other words, I am not saying anything noteworthy, yet they are engrossed in typing, which suggests that they are doing something other than being fully engaged in our class. And that distracts my attention.

There’s also the issue of the classroom environment. I like to foster a sense of conversation in my classroom. If you are on a laptop, I and your peers are often looking at the back of your computer screen and the top of your head, rather than all of us making eye contact with each other. Learning happens best in a classroom when everyone is actively engaged with one another in the exchange of information. This can mean looking up from your notes to listen and to talk with others, which means you may need to make strategic decisions about what to write down. Note taking is designed to support the learning and retention of material we talk about in class; note-taking itself is not learning. And speaking of what you choose to write down.

A study that came out in June—and which got a lot of buzz in the mainstream press—suggests that taking notes by hand rather than typing them on a laptop improves comprehension of the material. While students taking notes on a laptop (and only taking notes—they were not allowed to multitask) wrote down more of the material covered in class, they were often typing what the instructor said verbatim, which seems to have led to less processing of the material. The students taking notes by hand had to do more synthesizing and condensing as they wrote because they could not get everything down. As a result, they learned the material better.

I figure it is also good for all of us to break addictive patterns with email, texting, Facebook, etc. and this is a good place to start. 😊

Chris Trogan