

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
SPRING 2011
PHIL 303 SPECIAL TOPICS: AESTHETICS & CRITICISM
TUES. & THURS. 15:30 – 16:45 NICELY 321

Instructor: Dr. Chris Johns
E-Mail: cj08@aub.edu.lb
Phone: Ext. 4259

Office: 139 Fisk Hall
Office Hours: Before class, and by appointment.

- *What is that beauty which the artist struggles to express from lumps of earth?* --Stephen Deadalus (James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.165).
- *Aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds.* --Barnett Newman

The above quotes contain a host of implications and assumptions. Among them, that the artist aims to express *beauty*; that it is the *artist* who expresses; that the *beauty expressed* stands in some mimetic relation to “truth”; that aesthetic theory contributes to aesthetic judgment, evaluation, and creativity; and that it doesn’t. The starting point for this course is that aesthetic theory contributes greatly to our understanding of these questions, and much more.

The course covers selected major figures and topics in philosophical Aesthetics, both historical and contemporary. We will examine the theory and art of various theorists, poets, musicians, sculptors and painters. Major topics include the source of artistic creation, the function of art (as representation in its relation to “truth”), the historical, emotional, and intellectual character of the work; and key concepts of aesthetic judgment and criticism (such as the beautiful, the sublime, and the tasteless). We will read primary texts, examine artworks, and learn how to analyze and clarify key concepts. The particular aims of the course are to introduce you to a wide variety of aesthetic problems and to enrich your capacity for aesthetic judgment and sensibility. The main thesis of the course is that the *history* of aesthetic theory reveals a fundamental shift, i.e., that the object’s traditional mimetic function gradually dissolves into pure contextuality. Well, let us see! Students will be expected to read *a lot*, to discern, analyze, and critique the philosophical arguments at stake. A lot of good philosophical ground will be covered—too lightly perhaps, but still engaging and useful. Classes will be discussion/participation driven. Grades will be based on two short papers, a presentation, and a longer term paper.

Essential Requirement: By taking this class, you agree to understand and comply with this syllabus.

Course materials (subject to change): All available at AUB Bookstore

- Course packet (CP)
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans., Martin Heath, Penguin Classics (1997) ISBN: 978-0140446364
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy from The Spirit of Music*. Ed., Tanner. Trans., Whiteside. Penguin Classics (1994) ISBN: 978-0140433395
- Pound, Ezra. *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*. New Directions Publishing Corporation (1970). ISBN: 978-0811205276
- Danto, Arthur, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Harvard UP, 1981 ISBN: 780674903463
- Selected poems, visuals, and music (Available on Moodle or in class).
- Note that some readings in the course packet are not assigned. However, they are recommended.

Course Requirements:

- Two midterm-ish papers: 1. 20%, 2. 30% of course grade.
- Presentation, 10%
- Final research paper, 40% of course grade

Papers—Details provided next week.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend every session. Please do not be late (I'll try not to be). I have three main rules: (1) Always bring the assigned text to class. (2) Do not use electronic devices in class. (3) Listen while others are talking and keep discussions respectful. (4) Acknowledge more than three rules.

Academic Integrity: The Gods of Academia—Pedagogia, Meticulous, and Areteos—oblige me to mention that the usual rules against academic dishonesty (namely plagiarism) are in force. Penalties are severe. But accidents do happen, so be careful. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to ask me (or, consult the gods directly).

Citation Mechanics: See Instructions posted on Moodle

Moodle: Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, possible some course readings, handouts, citation mechanics, Grade Calculation guide, and whatnot. I usually alert you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) of any important changes or announcements, so, check your e-mail regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

The Writing Center:

If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb

See course schedule, below.

Course Schedule: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1. Course Introduction	15/2 Prophet's Birthday, No class	17/2 Syllabus, Main Themes
2.	22/2 Plato, <i>Symposium</i> (excerpt) (CP)	24/2 Plato's <i>Ion</i> (CP)
3. (March)	1/3 Plato's <i>Republic</i> Books 2-3, 10 (CP)	3/3 Plato's <i>Cratylus</i> (CP)
4.	8/3 Aristotle's <i>Poetics</i>	10/3
5.	15/3 Hume (1757) On the Standard of Taste (CP)	17/3 Paper One Due
6.	22/3 Kant (1790) "Analytic of the Beautiful" (CP)	24/3
7.	29/3 Kant (1790) Analytic of the Sublime" (CP)	31/3
8. (April)	5/4 Nietzsche (1872) <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> Sec. 1 - 10	7/4
9.	12/4 Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> Sec. 10 - 25	14/4
10.	19/4 Tolstoy (1898) "What is Art?" (CP)	21/4 Easter Vacation No class
11.	26/4 Marx, Karl "The German Ideology" and "A Contribution" (1846 & 59). (CP)	28/4 Benjamin, Walter (1936) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." (CP) Paper Two Due
12. (May)	3/5 Pound (1914) <i>Gaudier-Bzerska: A Memoir</i>	5/5
13.	10/5 Bell, Clive (1914), "The Aesthetic Hypothesis." Greenberg, Clement (1960) "Modernist Painting" (CP)	12/5 Weitz (1956) "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," (CP). Mandelbaum (1954) "Family Resemblances and Generalizations Concerning the Arts." (CP)
14.	17/5 Danto, (1964) <i>Transfiguration of the Commonplace</i> . Chapter 1-3	19/5 Danto, <i>Transfiguration</i> , 4-5
15.	24/5 Danto, <i>Transfiguration</i> , 6-7	26/5 Jay-Z 'Decoded' (2010) (CP). Danto (1995). "Three Decades after the End of Art (CP) Last class
16. (June) FINALS	31/5	2/6
17.	7/6 Final Paper due?	9/6
18.	13/June, official end of semester	

Presentations:

	Date	Reading
Choghag	_____	Hume_____
Deanna	_____	Tolstoy__
Hiba	_____	
Leila	_____	Kant on Sublime
Maysar	_____	Greenberg or Bell
Nisreen	_____	Nietzsche