Aesthetics: Proposed Syllabus

This module provides an introduction to some key issues in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. It includes historical and contemporary discussions of aesthetic experience, concepts, and judgment; definitions of art and the nature of fine art production; the nature of pictorial and photographic depiction; emotion in music; literature and literary interpretation; and it looks at alternate views in aesthetics, questioning the possibility of gender and political neutrality in art objects and aesthetic judgment.

General sources for course:


General Reference:


British Journal of Aesthetics https://academic.oup.com/bjaesthetics


Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy https://plato.stanford.edu/
Week 1: What is the Aesthetic?

Discussion of the history of the concept of the aesthetic and the nature of aesthetic experience.

Listen

Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art lecture series, University of Oxford Podcast.
https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/aesthetics-and-philosophy-art-lectures

Required reading


Optional Reading


Further Reading

History of the concept of aesthetics


Contemporary accounts of aesthetic experience (also see What is Art? below)


**Week 2: Beauty**

What is beauty? What is the nature of an aesthetic concept?

**Listen**

In Our Time, Radio 4, Beauty

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p003k9hf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p003k9hf)

**Required reading**


**Optional Reading**


Mothersill in full.

**Further Reading**


Week 3: Sublime and the experience of nature
Discussion of the experience of physical nature in terms of the sublime.

Listen
The Partially Examined Life, Podcast, Edmund Burke on the sublime
http://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2014/12/19/episode-107-edmund-burke-on-the-sublime/

Required reading


Optional Reading

Further Reading


Week 4: Taste and Aesthetic Judgment
Explore the classic paradox of taste and consider the possibility of objective aesthetic judgments.

Listen
Philosophy Bites Podcast, Mike Martin On Hume On Taste
http://philosophybites.com/2013/08/michael-martin-on-hume-on-taste.html

Required reading

Optional Reading


Further Reading


Week 5: What is Art?
Discussion of the history and nature of the fine arts and the production of art. Asking — can art be defined?

Listen
Philosophy Bites Podcast, Aaron Meskin On the Definition of Art
http://philosophybites.com/2017/05/aaron-meskin-on-the-definition-of-art.html
Required Reading


Optional Reading


Further Reading

Bell, C. (1914) Art. London: Chatto & Windus


Week 6: Depiction, Pictures, Photographs
Discus depiction and the nature of representation in pictures and photographs.

Listen
Philosophy Bites Podcast, Kendal Walton on photography
http://philosophybites.com/2012/12/kendall-walton-on-photography.html

Required Reading


**Optional Reading**


**Further Reading**


**Week 7: Music and emotional expression**

Discuss how music expresses emotion.

**Listen**

History of Philosophy Podcast, Strings Attached: Music and Philosophy

[https://www.historyofphilosophy.net/music](https://www.historyofphilosophy.net/music)

**Required Reading**


**Optional Reading**

Langer and Kivy in full.
Further Reading


Week 8: Literature and Literary Interpretation

Discus the production and interpretation of literature and the role of the author in literary interpretation.

Listen

Philosophy Bites Podcast, Peter Lamarque on Literature and truth

Required Reading


Optional Reading


Further Reading


**Week 9: Feminist Aesthetics**

How art and aesthetic judgment might not be gender neutral — ‘the gaze’.

**Watch**

Guerrilla Girls images and projects 1985-2017, Guerrilla Girls, YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6na5rSurXPE

https://www.guerrillagirls.com/

**Required Reading**

Nochlin, L. *Why have there been no great women artists?*
http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/


**Optional Reading**

Further Reading


Week 10: Black Aesthetics

Explore the relationship between politics and black art.

Listen

Unmute Podcast, Paul C. Taylor on Black Aesthetics

Required Reading


Optional Reading

Taylor — *Black is Beautiful* in full.


Further Reading


Week 11: An Aesthetic Adventure
During this session/week I hope to take students to an exhibition/gallery to connect the theory with the practice of art.

Sample Essay Questions:
What distinguishes aesthetic experience from other perceptual experience?
Is there a plausible characterisation of beauty as a concept?
Is there are distinct sublime experience of nature?
Are objective aesthetic judgments possible?
Can art be defined?
What do we see in a picture?
How does music express emotion?
Is the author relevant to literary interpretation?
What impact does the (masculine) ‘gaze’ have on art?
Is black art inherently political?