

PHIL 3013  
Spring 2022  
Tu/Th 1:15–2:30  
Classroom: Buttrick 304

Dr. Matthew Congdon  
matthew.congdon@vanderbilt.edu  
Office Hours: Tu 2:40 – 4:40pm  
Office: Furman 016

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# History of Aesthetics

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an upper-level survey of aesthetics, the branch of philosophy concerned with art, beauty, aesthetic experience, and related matters. We will read philosophies of art and beauty from Plato to contemporary theory. Topics will include the nature of aesthetic judgment, creativity, artistic inspiration, the relation between art and philosophy, the problem of defining art, the relation between art and truth, and the value of art in human life. As part of the course, we will take a guided tour of an exhibition at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Participation (15%):** Come to class having read the assignment and ready to ask questions and participate in discussion. Always bring the assigned text to class with you.
2. **Commentaries (25%):** Over the course of the semester you will write six short (one- to two-page) papers. Four of these will be on assigned readings, one will be on a piece of art from our guided tour of the Frist, and one will be on an artistic performance of your choosing. Details are as follows:
  - a. **Commentaries on Readings:** Four of your six commentaries will respond to an assigned reading for a particular session. You will be given a specific task for each commentary (explained in detail on Brightspace under “Assignments”):
    - i. Commentary #1: Unpack a Quote
    - ii. Commentary #2: Reconstruct the Author’s Argument
    - iii. Commentary #3: Raise an Objection
    - iv. Commentary #4: Raise an Objection & Respond to It

- b. **Deadlines for Commentaries on Readings:** Sometime after our first class meeting, you will be assigned a group letter (A, B, C, D, E, or F). You will find your group letter on four dates on the Reading Schedule below. You must post your commentary to Brightspace under "Assignments" (found in the "Activities & Assessments" section) before class that day.
  - c. **Commentary on Frist Exhibition:** One of the six commentaries will be in response to a piece of artwork from the Frist exhibitions we will tour as a class (subject to change pending the pandemic conditions/university policy regarding off-campus trips). The due date for this commentary will be announced in class.
  - d. **Commentary on a Performance of Your Choice:** One of the six commentaries will be in response to an artistic performance that you will attend. For example, you may attend a concert at Blair, a film in the International Lens Film Series, a Vanderbilt Theatre Main Stage Production, or a performance off-campus. Given the ongoing pandemic, you may choose to watch a film, TV show, or other recorded media at home, instead. Your commentary should link the performance to a reading we have discussed in class. This commentary may be turned in at any time before the last day of classes.
  - e. **Grading for Commentaries:** My grading system for the commentaries is very simple: you get one check mark simply for doing the assignment satisfactorily, and two check marks for an especially thoughtful response. If you hand in all the response papers and get single check marks on them all, you get a B for this portion of the final grade. For every response paper you fail to hand in, your grade is lowered one increment; for every response paper on which you get two check marks, your grade is raised one increment.
3. **Midterm Paper (30%):** A 5- to 7-page midterm paper (approx. 1,250 to 1,750 words), uploaded to Brightspace under "Assignments." A grading rubric will be provided. Paper topics may include any of the readings covered during the first half of the course.
  4. **Final Paper (30%):** A 6- to 8-page final paper (approx. 1,500 to 2,000 words), uploaded to Brightspace under "Assignments." A grading rubric will be provided. Paper topics may include any of the readings covered during the second half of the course.

When working on papers, I highly recommend making use of the **Vanderbilt Writing Studio**. Appointments can be made online here: [vanderbilt.edu/writing](http://vanderbilt.edu/writing).

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students are allowed four unexcused absences over the course of the semester. Students' final grades will be reduced by one increment (A to A–, A– to B+, B+ to B, etc.) for each unexcused absence over four. If you have a legitimate reason for missing a class, contact me via email as soon as possible.

## **HONOR SYSTEM AND PLAGIARISM**

All students are expected to complete the course requirements while fulfilling the Vanderbilt Honor System. Information on the Honor System can be found here: [www.vanderbilt.edu/student\\_handbook/the-honor-system/](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/). All cases of plagiarism or cheating will be handled through the Undergraduate Honor Council, and depending on severity may result in failure of the assignment, failure of the course, suspension, or expulsion.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the University Bookstore)**

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).
2. *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. D.A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
3. Sophocles, *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, ed. David Grene, Richmond Lattimore, Mark Griffith, and Glenn W. Most, Third Edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013).
4. Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1997).
5. C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

## READING SCHEDULE

| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Topic</b>   | <b>Readings and Assignments Due</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| T 1/18  | No Class   |   |
| R 1/20  | Introductory Remarks   | Watch: "A Guided Tour of the Syllabus" (video on Brightspace)                           |
| <b>PART 1. BEAUTY &amp; THE SUBLIME: AESTHETICS IN 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY EUROPE</b> |  |   |
| T 1/25  | <b>Susanne Langer (1895-1985)</b><br>What is art? What is philosophy of art? | Langer, "The Dynamic Image: Some Philosophical Reflections on Dance" (PDF)              |
| R 1/27  | <b>David Hume (1711-1776)</b><br>Hume's Puzzle about Taste                   | Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (PDF)<br><b>Group A</b>                                |
| T 2/1   | <b>Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)</b><br>First Moment of the Judgment of Taste    | Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i> , §§1-5, pp. 43-53<br><b>Group B</b>                  |
| R 2/3   | Second Moment of the Judgment of Taste                                       | Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i> , §§6-9, pp. 53-64<br><b>Group C</b>                  |
| T 2/8   | Third Moment of the Judgment of Taste  | Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i> , §§10-17, pp. 64-84<br><b>Group D</b>                |
| R 2/10  | Fourth Moment of the Judgment of Taste                                       | Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i> , §§18-22, pp. 85-95<br><b>Group E</b>                |
| <b>PART 2. TRAGIC ART IN ANCIENT GREECE</b>   |  |   |
| T 2/15  | <b>Plato (c. 429-347 BCE)</b><br>Poetic Inspiration and Knowledge            | Plato, <i>Ion</i> , in <i>Classical Literary Criticism</i> , pp. 1-13<br><b>Group A</b> |
| R 2/17  | <b>Sophocles (c. 495-406 BCE)</b><br>Blindness and Tragic Fate               | Sophocles, <i>Oedipus the King</i> , in <i>Sophocles I</i> , pp. 71-142                 |

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|--|---|---|
| T 2/22   | <b>Plato (cont'd)</b><br>The "Ancient Quarrel"<br>Between Philosophy and Poetry | Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books 2 and 3, in <i>Classical Literary Criticism</i> , pp. 14–35<br><b>Group B</b>  |
| R 2/24   | Poetry as Imitation   | Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book 10, in <i>Classical Literary Criticism</i> , pp. 36-50<br><b>Group C</b>  |
| T 3/1  | <b>Aristotle (384-322 BCE)</b><br>Fear, Pity, and Catharsis                     | Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i> , in <i>Classical Literary Criticism</i> (focus on lines 1447a8–1452b27)<br><b>Group D &amp; E</b>  |
| R 3/3  | The Structure of Tragic Plot  | Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i> , in <i>Classical Literary Criticism</i> (focus on lines 1452b28 to the end)<br><b>Midterm Paper Due on Friday, 3/4 by 5pm</b>  |
| 3/5–3/13   | SPRING BREAK  |   |
| <b>PART 3. ON THE HORIZON: AN EXHIBIT AT THE FRIST</b> |   |   |
| T 3/15   | Visit to the Frist Art Museum   | <b>Instead of our usual class meeting, we will meet in the front lobby of the Frist at 1:15pm for a guided tour with Chief Curator, Mark Scala.</b>   |
| R 3/17   | Class Discussion of <i>On the Horizon</i>                                       | Anelys Álvarez, "Internal Landscapes: Cuban Art in the Liminal Space" (PDF)<br>Rachel Price, "Sandú Darié and Afterlives of Abstraction in Cuba" (PDF)<br>Jorge Duany, "From Burning Paintings to Domestic Anxieties Shifting Cultural Relations between the United States and Cuba and between Cubans on and off the Island" (PDF) |

| PART 4. AESTHETICS AND POLITICS |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| T 3/22                          | <b>Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)</b><br>Aura and the Reproducible Image | Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (PDF) (focus on first half of the essay)<br><b>Group A</b>  |
| R 3/24                          | Humanity in the Face of the Apparatus                                 | Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (PDF) (focus on second half of the essay)<br><b>Group B</b> |
| T 3/29                          | <b>Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969)</b><br>Culture and Practical Life    | Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," (PDF) (focus on first half of the essay, up to around p. 78)<br><b>Group C</b>                    |
| R 3/31                          | A Critical Theory of Mass Culture                                     | Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," (PDF) (focus on the latter half of the essay)<br><b>Group D</b>                                   |
| PART 5. AESTHETICS AND MORALITY |   |   |
| T 4/5                           | <b>Iris Murdoch (1919–1999)</b><br>Literature and Philosophy          | Murdoch, "Literature and Philosophy," in <i>Existentialists and Mystics</i> , pp. 3–30<br><b>Group E</b>                                |
| R 4/7                           | Love as the Essence of Art and Morals                                 | Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in <i>Existentialists and Mystics</i> , pp. 205–220<br><b>Group A</b>                              |
| T 4/12                          | The Sublime and the Beautiful   | Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," in <i>Existentialists and Mystics</i> , pp. 261–286<br><b>Group B</b>               |

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| R 4/14                              | A Play About Art  | Murdoch, "Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art," in <i>Existentialists and Mystics</i> , pp. 464–495<br><b>Group C</b> |
| <b>PART 6. AESTHETICS AND GAMES</b> |   |  |
| T 4/19                              | <b>C. Thi Nguyen</b><br>Games as a Distinctive Art Form | Nguyen, <i>Games: Agency as Art</i> , Chap. 1<br><b>Group D</b>  |
| R 4/21                              | Stiving Play  | Nguyen, <i>Games: Agency as Art</i> , Chap. 2<br><b>Group E</b>  |
| T 4/26                              | Layers of Agency  | Nguyen, <i>Games: Agency as Art</i> , Chap. 3  |
| R 4/28                              | Games and Autonomy                                      | Nguyen, <i>Games: Agency as Art</i> , Chap. 4  |

**Final Paper Due On: Thursday, May 5 at 11:59pm**