

Aesthetics

PHIL 175

I. Course Content

Broadly speaking, the philosophical study of art breaks into three distinct areas:

(i) *definitional* questions about what makes art art, questions, that is, concerning whether art, as a general category, can be defined; (ii) questions of *interpretation*, concerning the canons and protocols for understanding artworks, whether, e.g., an artist's intentions are relevant to the meaning of an artwork produced by that artist; and (iii) questions of *value*, concerning the nature of aesthetic experience, the character of beauty, and the general question of the objectivity or subjectivity of value in the domain of art.

These three questions divide into many subquestions, some overlapping with one another and some not; further, they play out differently across different media of art: drama, music, opera, painting, sculpture, literature, film, photography, architecture, and so on.

We will pursue these questions and others like them by reflecting on a new case study each week. Additionally, students will be required to visit galleries, performances, buildings, or art installations of one sort or another, and to write a critical response to their experiences as they relate to the dominant themes of the class, namely, again, definition, interpretation, and evaluation. (I will detail the precise character of this assignment during an early class meeting.)

More fully, we will aim:

- To explore the question of whether it is possible or desirable to define art;
- To reflect on the methods available for discerning aesthetic value;
- To reflect upon the role of beauty in nature as well as in art;
- To identify, recover, and assess arguments concerning interpretation and evaluation;
- To develop a facility for arguing cogently about such matters;
- To come to appreciate the abiding force of philosophical methodologies for adjudicating disputes in all areas of aesthetic theory;
- To speak and think clearly about the nature of beauty and our experiences of it. How, in short, is such a thing possible?

II. Office Hours and Contact Information:

Office: Arts & Humanities Building 447

Office hours: Th 14.00-15.00 and by appt.

e-mail: CJShields@ucsd.edu

website: cjshields.com

N.b. I prefer e-mail to telephone as a manner of student contact. I make an effort to answer student e-mails promptly, but please be aware that I measure promptness in this domain in days rather than hours or minutes.

III. Required Text

Hick, Darren Hudson, *Introducing Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* 2nd. edition (Bloomsbury: 2017)

This edition is available in our campus bookstore and also [online](#).

Please note that since accepting our order for this edition, Bloomsbury have published 3rd edition, which one will see on their website. Buy the 2nd edition, so that we may all work from the same text.

You may use any format you wish.

Requirements and Protocol:

Students will sit two examinations, one at mid-term and at the end of term, and write two essays, of approximately 1,000 words each, one of which will involve a critical engagement with a work of art.

Dates for the examinations:

First Examination: **Thursday 2 May at 8.00**, in our regularly scheduled classroom.

Second Examination: **Thursday 6 June at 8.00**, in our regularly scheduled classroom.

Due Dates for the Essay and Critical Engagement:

Essay: **Friday 3 May**

Critical Engagement: **Friday 7 June**

I will offer prompts for the essay. You are, however, welcome to ignore these suggestions and write on a pertinent topic of your own choosing, but only if that topic is approved by me at least one week in advance of the due date.

The essay and critical engagement are to be submitted electronically in a main-stream word-processing format or (if you use something non-standard) as .pdf documents, to our Canvas site. Assignments will be accepted until 17.00 on their due dates.

Due to the extreme compression of the term, late assignments cannot be accepted; exceptions to this policy will be made only in cases of documented emergencies.

Attendance is required at all class meetings: you will lose one letter grade for each three unexcused absences.

IV. Topics and Reading Schedule

Week One:

Reading: *IA* Introduction and Chapter One, Defining Art

Week Two:

Reading: *IA* Chapter Two, Interpretation and Intention

Week Three:

Reading: *IA*, Chapter Three, Aesthetic Properties and Evaluation

Week Four:

Reading: *IA* Chapter Four, The Ontology of Art

Week Five:

Reading: N/A: Quodlibetal and Review

Week Six:

Reading: *IA* Chapter Five, Emotions and the Arts

Week Seven:

Reading: *IA* Chapter Six, Art and Morality

Week Eight:

Reading: *IA* Chapter Seven, Arts, Aesthetics, and Identity

Week Nine:

Reading: *IA* Chapter Eight, Aesthetics Without Art

Week Ten:

Reading: N/A: Quodlibetal and Review