
Syllabus

**Course Syllabus for Philosophy 150931102 - Aesthetics WI
Spring 2006 - Rowan University
Bunce 104 - Tuesday and Thursday, 4:45 - 6:00 pm
Professor David Clowney**

Course Methods: The course will consist of readings, some looking and listening assignments, class discussion and presentations, visits to various exhibits, concerts, and performances, and regular writing assignments, both graded and ungraded. Graded assignments include two short essays in criticism, a short class presentation on an artist, philosopher, or critic, and the preparation of a term project in philosophical aesthetics, to be designed in consultation with the instructor. Ungraded assignments include five event reports, a reading response paper every week, and various in-class writing exercises. Your grade will be based on the quality of your critical essays (36%), the quality and regularity of your class participation and reading response (20%), your attendance at five events, each documented by a one page response (10%), and the quality of your final project (35%).

Course Policies: In my ideal educational world, there would be no grades. Teacher student relationships would be voluntary, and they would be individually negotiated according to the interests of the student and the professor. We don't live in that world. I have come to the reluctant conclusion that in the world we do live in, good education requires the following policies, to which I will expect you to adhere.

You must meet all deadlines and complete all assignments.

Missed deadlines may be penalized by as much as a letter grade. That goes for proposals and rough drafts as well as for final drafts and oral presentations. Papers more than a week late will not be accepted. Final projects will not be accepted without prior review of a rough draft.

I expect regular attendance, both at class sessions and at our museum visit, first Friday excursion, and other such events.* The class needs your contribution, and you need the discussions and experiences that happen when we meet. You are allowed three absences; after that your participation grade will suffer. Meanwhile, please make every effort to submit your work on time even if you must be absent (all work must be submitted electronically through WebCT, and in hard copy).

* I am flexible about **Scheduled activities outside of normal class time**, since you were not aware of them when you signed up for this class and made your schedule for the semester. If you can't make an outing, let me know, and we'll make other arrangements.

Stay in touch! If you can't make class or are having trouble with an assignment, e-mail me, or make an appointment and come see me.

Class starts promptly at 4:45, and ends at 6:00. Come on time and stay till class is over.

Online Component: The course syllabus, a list of concerts, exhibits, and other events, sample critical essays, course lecture notes, images, sounds, and as much else as I am able to prepare, will be available on line. Start at my home page (<http://www.rowan.edu/philosop/clowney>), and click on Aesthetics. You may communicate with me by e-mail (clowney@rowan.edu). I will communicate with you using your Rowan e-mail account. It is your responsibility to check this regularly, whether or not it is the account you normally use. If you like, you can set it up to forward your mail to the account you do use.

We will be using WebCT as an instructional tool in certain parts of the course. Your Rowan username and password will give you access to MyWebCT, and from there you will have access to this class. Assignments and (some) handouts will be posted there. You will submit all your assignments there; I will only collect hard copies of assignments if there are problems with WebCT. You may also use the WebCT Discussion tool to discuss certain of your assignments with each other and help each other to improve them before handing your rough drafts to me. I'll give further instructions for this in class.

Course Outline: The course will develop along several axes simultaneously. We will pay attention to several arts, namely painting and sculpture (about four weeks worth); music (also four weeks); and a mixture of theater and dance, photography and film, and fiction and poetry during

the remaining weeks of the semester. We will view, read, or listen to particular works (including student works), and we will discuss issues in philosophical aesthetics raised by the works or the media they represent. We will also read and discuss essays by several philosophers and critics about the arts. We will discuss a number of topics in aesthetics, including those raised by the list of questions on the last page. We will visit some museums and galleries, and go to some concerts and other arts events. We will also have some in-class concerts, and some guests.

Course Texts:

S.D. Ross, Art and Its Significance (NY: SUNY Press, 1994); an anthology of readings by philosophers and artists.

Honore de Balzac, "*The Unknown Masterpiece*" and "*Gambara*", Introduction by Arthur Danto. (NY, 2001, New York Review of Books Classics). We will read of these two novellas, "The Unknown Masterpiece", by this great nineteenth century novelist, and the introduction to it by philosopher of art and art critic for *The Nation* magazine Arthur Danto.

Also, some photocopied essays, to be handed out from time to time.

Reading, Viewing, and Listening Assignments will be made week by week. Other assignments will be due periodically. See Week by Week below for a list of these assignments with their due dates. They will also be posted on WebCT. **You are responsible to know what they are, and to keep up with them, whether or not I announce them in class.** For January 19th, familiarize yourself with the course web-page. Read the introduction to Larry Shiner's *The Invention of Art.*, and do the viewing assignment on African Art listed in the syllabus. Write about a page summarizing these readings and exhibitions, submit it to WebCT before class begins, and come to class prepared to discuss.

Our topic for the introductory sessions (1/17 & 1/19) is the distinction between "fine art" and craft, popular art, commercial art, etc. Next week, we will discuss the topics of art as representation and of art and morality.

Course Instructional Staff: You and I! I mean this seriously. Many of you are working artists, and you have more expertise in your artistic field than I have. I have more expertise in philosophy than you do. By sharing our knowledge, our experiences, and our questions, we will produce an exciting and worthwhile course. You are as essential to this result as I am.

My office is on the third floor of Bunce Hall, in the Philosophy and Religion

Department's part of the building (Bunce 315). My office hours are Tuesday and Wednesday, 2:00 til 3:00 pm. I am available at other times also if necessary. Please come see me! You are welcome to drop by any time; but if you want to be sure we connect, please make an appointment.

Deadlines for Written Assignments:

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| First critical essay | 2/9 (rough draft), 2/16 (final draft) |
| Project proposal | 2/23 |
| Second critical essay | 3/2, 3/9 |
| Project rough draft | 3/30 |
| Project presentations | 4/25, 4/27 |
| Project final draft | 4/27 |

Preparing for class: Each class session, we will be discussing a topic for which you will prepare by doing an assigned set of readings, as well as some looking and listening. You will also look for additional examples from various arts that will illustrate the topic, or confirm or refute or expand one of the claims made by an author, or otherwise contribute to the semester's conversation about philosophy and the arts. **Please take the looking and listening part of preparation as seriously as you take the reading part, and vice versa.**

Doing the reading, viewing and listening assignments: The readings, the virtual gallery tours, and all listening and viewing assignments are an essential basis for class discussion. You are expected to come to class having done them, and prepared to participate in class discussion on the basis of them. You are expected to refer to them in your two critical essays and your term project when they prove relevant. In order to ensure these results, **you will prepare reading, looking and listening responses. These are short summaries (a paragraph to a page) of each required reading, viewing or listening assignment, together with your reactions to it. You must post these to WebCT each Thursday before you come to class (so include your Tuesday responses with your Thursday one; but please don't wait til Thursday to do the Tuesday part).** These are ungraded writing assignments; the only way you can lose credit is by not doing them. I will check WebCT to make sure that you are keeping up. Completing these responses makes up 13% of your grade.

You will find some of the readings difficult to understand. That's because this is a course in the philosophy of art and art criticism, and philosophical writing and thinking is hard intellectual work. Sometimes philosophers make it harder than it needs to be. But even the best and clearest writers will still give your brain a workout. The views expressed in the assigned selections are an essential part of the cultural context within which the arts have their meaning. I have found the workout worth it; I hope you will too! I will take time in class to clear up the murky parts (but this will not work if you have not first struggled to understand them for yourself). I will not usually assign more than 50 pages a week; often I will assign much less than this amount. I will not assign more than an hour's worth of listening or viewing assignments for any one class. Reading guides for most of the readings will be posted in the "Reading Guides" folder in WebCT. Most authors also have an entry about them on the course web-site. Make things easy on yourself; use these aids before tackling the readings.

Writing Criticism:

There are many ways to write criticism well, depending on the audience, the purpose of the criticism, and the vision and goals of the critic. Some of these ways include: telling readers enough about a work to help them decide whether it would interest them; drawing readers' attention to particular aesthetic aspects of a work that they might otherwise miss; placing a work in relation to the other works of the artist or of other artists, or in relation to historical or cultural trends; seeking to answer questions of philosophical aesthetics like those listed below in connection with examination of the work in question.

You may do any of these things in your two critical essays; however, you must also use your essay as a springboard to address some question of philosophical aesthetics. Where appropriate, you should interact in some way with the readings.

The following formula will usually help you produce a good and readable piece of criticism. After that, it's practice, familiarity and insight!

- Give specific details about where or in what venue the work was seen or heard or performed, and say how readers can have access to it.
- Describe the work well enough that your reader can understand the rest of what you say, and can tell whether he or she is interested in hearing/seeing more.
- Describe any unique features of the work. Say what general

categories the work fits into, if it seems to you to fit any such categories, and indicate how it compares with other work in this category. Tell us anything else important about where the work comes from, who made it, and its place in the world.

- Comment briefly on the strengths and weaknesses of the work.
- Discuss any aesthetic issues that the work raises for you.

Preparing your project: Your project may be an extended essay in criticism, in which you develop some point in philosophical aesthetics. It may be a piece of straight philosophical aesthetics, like some of the readings. It may be the presentation of a piece or a body of your own work, with comments on how that work relates to themes we have read about and discussed in class. Other options are also allowable; check them with me. If the project allows for classroom presentation, you may present it to the class, as well as giving me the written portion of it. Please note that I will not be grading your project as **art**, but rather as **aesthetics** (philosophy of art). **Make sure you do the rough draft**; this is the only way that you will be sure we are on the same wavelength about the expectations you must meet. The following list of topic questions should give you some ideas. Check the web-site for a list of specific projects you might do, plus some examples of successful past projects.

Topic Questions (a partial list - for the course and for your project):

- Do criticism and theory make any contribution to art? Why not just experience the art?
 - The word 'art' originally meant 'skill', and sometimes it still does (the art of cooking, of massage, etc.) Does fine art have to show skill?
 - What makes art different from non-art? Why do people care about this question? Would the question be easier to answer if 'art' meant 'skill'?
 - If you were trying to decide how to define 'art', how would you go about doing it? (P.S. When a word has a use in a language, its meaning cannot simply be 'up to you'. But just repeating the dictionary doesn't help much, either. What other options might you have?)
 - Should we recognize a sharp distinction between fine art, commercial art, popular art, and craftwork, such that what belongs in one of the last three categories is excluded from the first? Are these distinctions made in every time and culture? And if not, how did they develop in our culture?
- What (if anything) do the (fine) arts have in common?
- Why does (fine) art matter?

- What is a symbol?
- How does art mean? How does the answer to this question differ with the different arts? (e.g., painting, music, dance, poetry).
- What's the status of aesthetic standards? Do they simply express individual or cultural tastes? Is there anything objective about them?
 - What's the nature of aesthetic properties? (E.g., beauty, integrity, unity, mood, etc.) Are they in any sense "objective"? Or are they simply "in the eye (or ear) of the beholder"?
 - How do the arts relate to: Spirituality? Morality? Emotions? Economic power and class structure? Philosophy? Culture and cultural development?
 - What's the nature of aesthetic intelligence, and how does it relate to other sorts of intelligence?
 - Can animals be artists?
 - Is there any special connection between art and gender, or between art and sex or the erotic?
 - How important is performance to art?
 - Why aren't natural objects works of art? Or are they?

Course Schedule with Assignments, Week by Week

1/17: *Introduction:* Orientation, handouts, class policies and assignments, website, Discussion of Art and craft, commercial art, popular art, traditional art, etc. Where did we get these distinctions, and what should we make of them?

1/19: *Introduction (cont.)* Read Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, Introduction (handout). Viewing assignment: National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian) <http://africa.si.edu/collections/index.htm> , focus on "The Diversity of African Art" and "The Uses of African Art" Student report on Shiner.

1/24: *Art as representation.* Read Plato, *Republic* (selections from book X, in Ross, pp. 32-44, also from Book VII, "The Allegory of the Cave", (handout) and a bit from Aristotle's *Poetics*, in Ross, pp. 70 - 74. Student report.

1/26: *Representation and the power of Image: Art and Morality.* Read Plato, *Ion* and *Symposium* (selections) in Ross, pp. 45-63; Aristotle, *Poetics*, pp. 66-74. **Viewing assignment: Michelangelo (on Artchive) or Giorgio Vasari** <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/giorgio.vasari/> or another Renaissance artist of your choice. See the "Arts on Line"

section of the course web-page to find your way to these artists on line. And don't forget the library; art books have much better images than your computer does! Student report.

1/31: Visit to the Dance Studio: Art and Experience, embodiment, expression

2/2: *Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?* Read Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste* (in Ross, but there's an annotated edition on the web site, linked to the entry on Hume). Student report (and every period hereafter).

2/3: *First Friday*: (see Events page and WebCT for details)

2/7: *From Taste to Aesthetic Judgment: The creation of fine art* in the eighteenth century. Read web-site entry on Kant, read "From Taste to the Aesthetic" in Shiner, *The Invention of Art* (Warning: not for the fainthearted!) Viewing assignment: TBA. **Critical essay 1, first draft due**

2/9: *Art as Expression/Art as Experience*. Read Tolstoy, pp. 177-181 in Ross, and Nietzsche, selection from *the Birth of Tragedy*, in Ross, pp. 161-167.

2/14: *Art as Experience*: Read Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in Ross, pp. 204 – 220. Viewing Assignment: Works by Munch, Schiele, Klimt, Bacon, Frankenthaler, DeKooning, Pollack (or other Expressionists and Abstract Expressionists of your choosing)

2/16: *Where do we go from here? Western Art History: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the "End of Art"*. Read Hegel, "Philosophy of Fine Art", in Ross, pp. 143-161 or Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*

2/21: *Where do we go from here? Continued* Read Danto, "The End of Art", Gablik, "Has Modernism Failed?" (Class handouts) Use the course guides for help with these essays! Viewing assignments: Dia website <http://www.diacenter.org/> or InLiquid.com <http://www.inliquid.com/> - Spend an hour looking around and thinking about what you see.

2/23: Art and art education

2/26: Art museum visit

2/28: *Musical taste and Western music history*: from medieval & renaissance to classic: the invention of fine art (or "absolute") music.

Listening Assignments (on web site).

3/2: *Western music history part two:* the modern revolution and post-modern pluralism. Where do we go from here? Listening assignments (on web site) & reading (Schoenberg, Glass, who else?) **Critical essay 2: rough draft due.**

3/7: *Musical expression and musical meaning.* Does music mean anything? And if so, how? Readings: Langer, "Feeling and Form", pp. 221-237 in Ross.

3/9: *Musical Expression and musical meaning (cont.)* Stravinsky entry on web-site. Listening assignments: Debussy, *La Mer* or Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring*; Bach *Tocatta and Fugue in C major*. **Critical essay 2: final draft due**

3/13 - 3/17 Spring break - enjoy!

3/21: *Performance and improvisation: the case of jazz.* Live jazz concert with question and answer.

3/23: *Performance and improvisation, cont.* Reading assignment: TBA. Listening assignment TBA.

3/28: *Commercialism and the arts: the case of popular music.* Reading Assignment: Adorno, "On the Fetish-character in Music and the Regression of Listening", in Ross, 539-548

3/30: *Popular music (cont.)* In class experiment: Play and tell, with discussion. Listening Assignment - your choice.

4/4: *Literature and theories of interpretation, part I.* Reading assignments: Balzac short story "The Unknown Masterpiece", & Danto introduction **Project rough draft due.**

4/6: *Literature and theories of interpretation, part II.* Reading assignments: Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation, in Ross, pp. 331-349, Gadamer, selection from *Truth and Method*, in Ross, pp. 349-383

4/11: Philosophy and poetry The art of poetry.

4/13: Poetry Day Readings and discussion. Bring your favorites!

4/18, 4/20: Philosophy at the movies: discussion of the art of film.

Reading assignment: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction" Viewing assignment: *The Age of Innocence* (film by Martin Scorsese).

4/25, 4/27: Project presentations

[back to top](#)