Module description

This module introduces and examines a number of the key thinkers and the central debates within Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art.

The first half of the course looks in detail at four influential, historical analyses of art - by Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. Central questions addressed include the nature of beauty, whether all artistic preferences are equally valid, the relationship between art and art theory, and the role of artworks in enshrining, sustaining, or undermining, social institutions.

The second half of the course focuses on contemporary treatments of some of the core questions in aesthetics. The main topics considered include:
- Can a work of art be immoral? If so, would it be bad art?
- Can I make something a work of art simply by saying so?
- How do pictures represent, and to what degree is pictorial representation conventional?
- Can pornography be art? What, if anything, is wrong with kitsch?
- Does a work of art have a single ‘correct’ meaning? If so, what determines it?

Learning outcomes
Students completing this module should:

- Understand the nature of some central problems in aesthetics.
- Encounter and evaluate a number of attempts to solve the philosophical problems under discussion.
- Acquire a knowledge of some of the outstanding contributions to the history of aesthetic thought.
- Acquire an ability to relate the questions discussed to the work of philosophers studied on other papers.
- Be encouraged to read with great care and reflect upon some difficult texts, as well as introductory and secondary material

Assessment methods and deadlines

- **Formative assessment**: two x 1,500-word essays.
  - Deadlines: essay 1 by Fri 8th Nov, essay 2 by Fri 20th Dec 2013

- **Summative assessment**: two x 2,500-word essays (100%)
  - Deadline: 12 noon on 16th May, 2014
Outline of lecture topics (plus suggested readings)

Readings marked ‘*’ are available online – either via Library E-Resources or Keats.

(1) Introduction to Aesthetics – Some Central Problems

(2) Hume – Empiricism and the ‘Standard of Taste’
Hume, ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ in his *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (Liberty Classics, 1987); reprinted in Neill and Ridley (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art* (McGraw, 1995); and in many other anthologies.

(3) Kant – The Nature of Beauty
Kant, *Critique of Judgment* – Analytic of the Beautiful (§§1-9, 19-21). The recommended translation is by Pluhar (Hackett, 1987) but Guyer and Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000) is also fine.

(4) Hegel – The End of Art?

(5) Heidegger – Art, Truth, and World

(6) What is Art? Definition After Dada

(7) Intention and Interpretation – The Death of the Author?
Barthes, R., ‘The Death of the Author’ in Neill and Ridley (eds.) *The Philosophy of Art* (McGraw, 1995), and widely available online.

(8) Pictorial Representation – How do Pictures Represent?

(9) Kitsch and Porn – Kinkade, Koons, and Schiele

(10) Art and Ethics – De Sade and Tolstoy
Suggested essay questions

(1) To what extent does Hume succeed in establishing a ‘standard of taste’? Why does the answer matter?

(2) Why, according to Kant, are judgments of beauty able to claim universal assent?

(3) Critically assess the relation between Hegel’s vision of philosophy and his vision of art.
   OR
   What would be Hegel’s view of either Warhol’s *Brillo Box* OR Picasso’s *Three Musicians*?
   Would he be right?

(4) What, if anything, can Heidegger’s ‘Origin…’ contribute to our understanding of art?

(5) Is something art if I say it is? If not, why not?

(6) To what extent does the artist have authority over the meaning of a work?
   OR
   ‘The best interpretation of a novel is whichever one yields the most interesting reading’. Discuss.

(7) What makes something a picture of something else?
   OR
   ‘Pictorial representation is as conventional as linguistic representation’. Discuss.

(8) What is so wrong with kitsch?
   OR
   ‘The phrase ‘pornographic art’ is an oxymoron’. Discuss.

(9) ‘A moral defect in a work of art is always an aesthetic defect’. Discuss.
Suggested additional readings by lecture topic

Readings marked ‘*’ are available online - either via Library E-Resources or Keats..

(2) Hume – Empiricism and the ‘Standard of Taste’


(3) Kant – The Nature of Beauty

Wenzel, C., An Introduction to Kant’s Aesthetics (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), Intro and chs.1-4.*
Wicks, R., Kant on Judgment (Routledge, 2004), ch.1.*

(4) Hegel – The End of Art?

Wicks, R., ‘Hegel’s Aesthetics’ in Cambridge Companion to Hegel, Beiser (ed.), (Cambridge University Press, 2006).*
Rutter, Hegel on the Modern Arts, (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), ch.1

(5) Heidegger – Art and World


(6) What is Art? Definition After Dada

Suggested additional readings by lecture topic (Cont.)

(7) Intention and Interpretation - The Death of the Author?


(8) Pictorial Representation


(9) Kitsch and Porn – Kinkade, Koons, and Schiele


(10) Art and Ethics – De Sade and Tolstoy