2013

333-W1S Philosophy of Art and Beauty

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What is beauty? Is it objective or subjective? What is its relation to art? Does art have to be beautiful? What is the function of art? Has art lost or changed its meaning in our age? We will read two British and two German thinkers and reflect on their approaches to questions such as these as we experience the work of prominent British artists.

Required texts

David Hume, “On the Standard of Taste” (PDF)
Roger Scruton, Beauty: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford)
Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought (Harper Perennial)
Walter Benjamin, Illuminations (Schocken)

Course requirements

Essay #1: 20%
Essay #2: 20%
Reading journal: 25%
Final exam: 20%
Class participation: 15%

The essays (5 or more pages each) will involve applying some philosophical ideas to your experience of art in London.

Your reading journal will develop your own interpretations and questions about the texts before we discuss them in class. Each entry should include a concise summary of the reading and at least one question about the text that you would like to discuss in class. Approximately one double-spaced page per journal entry is appropriate; there is no upper length limit, and an occasional short entry is fine. We have 13 reading assignments, so you must have 13 entries by the end of the course. I may sometimes ask you without advance warning to turn in the journal as it stands, but the final grade will be determined at the end of the course. The grade will be based on the effort and care shown in your writing—in other words, the journal should show that you are reading the assigned texts attentively and working to formulate your thoughts about them. But this is not formal writing as in an essay, and it is all right to make errors in interpretation as long as you are making an effort. You may consult any sources you like as you write your journal, but they cannot substitute for the assigned text; they can only supplement it. Any sources must also be cited.

The final exam will ask you to write about all four texts. It will be due after we return to the US, on August 14.

The class participation grade is a judgment I make at the end of the course about the quality of your effort and your contributions to the class. The judgment is based on your participation in discussions, any extra writing you may do, and any communication with me outside class.

On the four “artist focus” days, we will consider some artworks via PowerPoint in class and visit a museum or gallery in the afternoon. No reading or writing is due on these days, but be ready to use all your powers of perception and thought to experience the art, and take notes in preparation for your essays, which will ask you to apply the philosophy to the art.
Policies

Your work may be turned in on paper (typed or very legibly handwritten) or as a .docx or .doc file sent by e-mail to polt@xavier.edu.

You may use a laptop in class if you need to, but only for class purposes.

Absence policy: If you miss class due to illness or another emergency, turn in a double-length reading journal entry (about 2 pages) for the day you missed when you return, and explain why you had to miss class. If you do not turn in acceptable makeup work promptly, I may subtract up to 0.5 grade point from your course grade for each day you missed.

Late assignments will be penalized by up to one letter grade for each day they are late.

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas, even if you rephrase them, without giving credit to the source (such as a Web site, book, article, or another student’s writing). Whenever you use sources other than the assigned text, you must cite them in footnotes or by some other standard method. Plagiarism may lead to an F for the assignment or the course, and your dean will be notified of the incident. See http://xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism.

All course requirements must be completed in order to pass the course.

Calculating your grade

I give each element a letter grade, then convert it to a number on a 4-point scale (like the scale for your GPA), with pluses and minuses counting as 0.33 point: A = 4.0, A– = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, etc. I multiply this number by the percentage the element is worth, and add all the results to get your raw grade. This raw grade is adjusted to account for absences and then rounded to the nearest letter grade to yield the course grade.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Raw Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.33 x 20% = 0.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00 x 20% = 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading journal</td>
<td>B–</td>
<td>2.67 x 25% = 0.6675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.33 x 20% = 0.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>A–</td>
<td>3.67 x 15% = 0.5505</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Raw grade 2.75
One missed day with no makeup work -0.5
Course grade 2.25 = C+
Schedule

Reading assignments are numbered to help you keep track of your journal entries.

July 1   M       Combined orientation class
                Write your first journal entry before today’s class.
July 3   W       Artist focus: J. M. W. Turner
                **National Gallery visit 2-4 pm** (leave QMUL at 1:30)
                Essay #1 assignment distributed today
July 4   Th      2. Finish Hume

July 9   Tu      Artist focus: the Pre-Raphaelites
                **Tate Britain visit 2-4**
July 10  W       4. Scruton, *Beauty*, Chapters 3 and 4

                Essay #1 due
July 16  Tu      7. Scruton, *Beauty*, Chapters 8 and 9
July 17  W       Artist focus: Francis Bacon
                **Tate Modern visit 2-4**
July 18  Th      Essay #2 assignment distributed today

July 23  Tu      10. Finish Heidegger
July 24  W       Artist focus: Damien Hirst
                **Saatchi Gallery “British Art Today” visit 2-4**
                Essay #2 due

July 29  M       12. Benjamin, pp. 225-232 and excerpts from *The Arcades Project* (will be e-mailed as a PDF)
July 30  Tu      13. Finish Benjamin
July 31  W       **Reading journal due**
                Concluding activities to be determined
                Final exam distributed today

**Final exam** due by the end of August 14 by e-mail to polt@xavier.edu. I will acknowledge receipt when I get the exam; if you don’t hear from me within a day, I probably haven’t gotten it. I recommend submitting the exam before August 14 to avoid technical difficulties.