Syllabus: Aesthetics: History and Contemporary Continental Theory
(appropriate for a 300 or 400-level course)

Prof. Jacob Rump

Course Description
What is the relationship between art and reality? Is there such a thing as objective judgment regarding what is beautiful, or is all artistic appreciation a matter of individual, subjective taste? Are some art forms better or more important than others? How has technology affected our relationship to art? How does our interaction with the world through our bodies, senses and feelings differ from our interaction by means of cognition and concepts? What counts as art at all? Does it have to be beautiful? Does it have to represent something about reality? This course will examine these and related questions through the study of philosophical texts in the field of aesthetics. In the first half of the course, we will survey some classic texts in the history of Western aesthetic theory, focusing especially on ancient mimetic theory and the birth of modern aesthetics in the 18th and 19th Centuries. In the second half of the course, we turn to 20th and 21st century work in aesthetic theory, focusing on works in the Continental (German and French) tradition. Throughout the course, we will make reference to specific works of art—including works chosen by students—to enrich our discussions and illustrate central ideas.

Texts
The following books are required for the course:


All readings not from these texts will be made available online as PDFs.

Assessment
Attendance, participation, and VoiceThread response posts: 10%
3 short papers (5-6 pages) each 25%
VoiceThread Facilitation 15%

Grades will be posted via Blackboard. Students will receive letter grades for each form of assessment, weighed according to the percentages above to reach the final course grade according to the following scale:

- 93-100 = A
- 83-86 = B
- 73-76 = C
- 63-66 = D
- 90-92 = A-
- 80-82 = B-
- 70-72 = C-
- 60-62 = D-
- 87-89 = B+
- 77-79 = C+
- 67-69 = D+
- 0.59 = F

Class Participation and Discussion
The class will be conducted primarily as a group discussion. After some short remarks to introduce the material and to situate it in context, I will begin by posing a few general questions, or by calling on someone to summarize the issues and arguments he or she found most interesting in that day’s reading. While questions for clarification of the text are always welcome, students are also expected
to raise issues to be discussed, and to respond to and constructively build off of the comments of one another. Reasoned disagreement and rigorous (but courteous) debate are encouraged. The ideal participant in class discussion will further the dialogue by offering his or her own views, with reference to the text, and listening to others with an open mind, in order to help us all arrive at a more nuanced and thoughtful understanding of the topics under discussion.

Papers
Three times during the semester, for each unit of the course except the one for which you will be the VoiceThread facilitator, you will write a short paper of approximately 5-6 pages investigating and reflecting upon a specific issue of your choosing relevant to our discussions from that section of the course. The papers should evidence philosophical reflection and original thought, not mere textual summary, but should incorporate ideas from at least two texts from the corresponding section. Each paper should be submitted no later than one week after the last day of discussion of material from the corresponding section of the course. Note that all three papers will be given equal weight, and there will be no final paper or exam (though students submitting a paper for section four may submit it during the final exam period, in accord with the deadline as stated above). I am happy to read drafts of thesis statements, or to discuss other questions related to your papers during office hours or by email, but I will not respond to such requests sent less than 48 hours before the paper is due.

VoiceThread
We will be continuing our conversations outside of class through a course VoiceThread. VoiceThread is a web-based discussion board (linked through Blackboard) that allows you to post typed responses or recorded video or audio comments and to engage with the posts of your colleagues. Postings will serve as another form of engagement with the texts and ideas from the course and with each other, and as a record of our out-of-class conversations.

A) Facilitation Post
Each student will be required to record a facilitation post (4-5 minutes) in video format once during the semester, in accordance with the sign-up sheet posted on Blackboard. These video posts will include discussion of the day’s reading as well as 2-3 examples of works of art (images of paintings and sculptures, short excerpts from poetry, films or musical works, etc.) selected by you, to help illustrate ideas from the readings. Since they will also help to set the stage for our class discussions, facilitations must be posted at least 24 hours prior to the class in which we will be discussing the reading covered in the post.

B) Response Posts
In addition, each student is required to make at least one response post (1-2 minutes or 100-250 words; video, audio, or text, as preferred) per week, including the week in which she/he is providing the original post. Additional details of the project, specific procedures for posting, sign-up sheet for presentation posts, grading rubric, etc. will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class at the beginning of the semester. We will begin using the VoiceThread the week of xx/xx.

A Note on Philosophical Reading and Using Texts in Class
Your task in this course will not be “cramming” or memorization of material. Reading, thinking about, and discussing philosophical issues (both in class and in your VoiceThreads and papers) will be your main task, and you are expected to devote a significant amount of time to carefully reading
the assigned material, and to come to class with the issues in mind and the text(s) in hand. The reading of philosophical texts is a skill that must be developed. The texts we will study are extremely challenging, and should be read slowly and carefully, pencil in hand. It will benefit you both in this class and in your future studies to get in the habit of taking notes as you read, either in the margins, in a notebook, or on a computer. Always remember that these are primary texts in philosophy, not textbooks: the main goal of this course (and of philosophical work in general) is thinking about the issues, not memorizing and regurgitating course material. A large part of philosophy—and especially aesthetics—is the thought and reflection which the readings evoke, so leave yourself some time after reading to think about what you’ve read before our discussion (i.e. don’t attempt to finish the reading as you walk into class), and don’t be afraid to discuss these issues with friends and colleagues outside of class.

**Disability Assistance**

[substitute alternate disability policy] It is the policy of Emory University to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have or think you may have a condition or disability such that the requirements of this course present a problem, please contact the Office of Disability Services (110 Administration building; 404.727.6016; http://www.ods.emory.edu) and make this known to your instructor in person as soon as possible.

**Plagiarism**

Presenting the ideas or words of someone else as your own—intentionally or not—constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism on assignments, and cheating in any form, will result in an F on the assignment, and repeated offenses will result in an F in the course. We will discuss basic citation practices in class early in the semester.
Reading Schedule:

I. Origins of Aesthetics in Ancient Mimetic Theory and Medieval Thought
Suggested overview reading: Kristeller, “The Modern System of the Arts (I)"

meeting 1 course introduction; syllabus;
meeting 2 Plato, selections from Phaedrus (reserves) and Symposium
meeting 3 Plato, selections from The Republic
meeting 4 Aristotle, Poetics
meeting 5 Aristotle, Poetics, continued
meeting 6 Medieval Thought on Art: selections from Augustine, Aquinas (reserves), Bonaventure

II. Origins of Modern Aesthetics: Taste, Aesthetic Judgment, and Romanticism
Suggested overview reading: Kristeller, “The Modern System of the Arts (II)"

meeting 7 Hume, Of the Standard of Taste
meeting 8 Burke, selections from A Philosophical Inquiry into our Ideas on the Beautiful and the Sublime
meeting 9 Kant, selections from The Critique of the Power of Judgment (I)
meeting 10 Kant, selections from The Critique of the Power of Judgment (II)
meeting 11 Kant, selections from The Critique of the Power of Judgment (III)
meeting 12 Schiller, Aesthetic Letters (selected letters)
meeting 13 Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics
meeting 14 Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics, continued
meeting 15 Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics, continued
meeting 16 Discussion/catch-up/ review day

III. 20th Century Continental Aesthetics: Modernism, Phenomenology, and Hermeneutics
Required film screening/ viewing party: Fritz Lang, Metropolis

meeting 17 Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
meeting 18 Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art
meeting 19 Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art, continued
meeting 20 Gadamer, selections from Truth and Method
meeting 21 Merleau-Ponty, Eye and Mind
meeting 22 Merleau-Ponty, Eye and Mind, continued

IV. Later 20th Century and Contemporary Continental Aesthetics: Poststructuralism, Feminist Theory, and Affect
Optional film screening/ viewing party: Ridley Scott, Blade Runner

meeting 23 Barthes, The Death of the Author
meeting 24 Derrida, The Parergon
meeting 25 Derrida, The Parergon, continued
meeting 26 Lyotard, The Sublime and the Avant-Garde
meeting 27 Kristeva, Approaching Abjection
meeting 28 Deleuze and Guattari, Percept, Affect, and Concept
meeting 29 Ahmed, “Happy Objects”