

## Course Overview

This course is aimed at philosophy graduate students and advanced undergraduate majors. The goal is to explore a number of issues that concern the interpretation and evaluation of artworks and artistic performances. Philosophy 2450 is not a prerequisite; but reasonable background in metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language is vital. Familiarity with certain metaethical theories (e.g., expressivism) would also be helpful. Our concern is with artworld objects and practices: familiarity with aspects of the visual arts, music, dance, sculpture, literature, photography, and/or other artistic domains is essential.

Here are the topics to be explored:

- 1) The “ontology of art”: What is it? What questions is it intended to answer? Is there any more to the ontology of art than idle (and useless) re-description of the artworld data? How does an ontology of art add to our explanatory and/or justificatory power?
- 2) Is testimony about aesthetic properties of artworks a sufficient condition for aesthetic knowledge? Or is “direct acquaintance” with the works themselves necessary for such knowledge? Is there an interesting disanalogy between the epistemic credentials of testimony in the sciences and testimony in the arts? Perhaps only expert testimony is relevant here: But who are the artworld experts? By virtue of what do they qualify as experts? We will look at some literature on “moral experts” to see whether it is relevant (and if not, why not); we will also look at Kant’s views about the “autonomy” of “judgments of taste” and ask whether he saw the situation clearly (Hint: he did not). We will also consider some of the linguistics literature on “predicates of personal taste” and ask whether aesthetic predicates fall into that domain (Hint: they don’t).
- 3) How, if at all, do the norms sustained within artworld practice (both creative and critical) compare and contrast with moral norms and/or linguistic norms? Here we will look carefully at the Kripke-Wittgenstein “rule following problem,” and ask whether it has important consequences for artworld practice (Hint: it does).
- 4) The interpretation of artistic objects appears similar to the interpretation of natural language constructions. In fact both activities appear to be governed by pretty much the same norms of success; moreover, skeptical challenges can be generated by the same sorts of considerations (e.g., Quinean indeterminacy of translation, Walton-inspired problems about indeterminacy of artistic category). We will explore the relation(s) between artistic genres and natural languages, examining syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. This can become very technical very quickly; but we will keep that to a minimum.

5) Aesthetic properties: Are they Subjective? Objective? Response-dependent? Heavily context-sensitive? Are they similar to moral properties? Semantic properties? Complex sociopolitical properties? Does it matter? Why? (Hints: Yes, it does matter; and yes, they are like semantic properties).

Above all, we will NOT lose sight of the artistic data during our explorations. A healthy dose of pragmatist insistence upon “primacy of practice” will animate our work. If some theory—epistemic, ontological, semantic, or whatever—sits poorly with observable properties of artworld practice, art-critical practice, etc., it is the practice rather than the theory that will be granted primacy. We are trying to make sense of the actual artworld, not of some theorist's (possibly misguided) conception of the artworld.

Requirements: Graduate students can earn graduate credit in LLS, Metaphysics, or Value Theory, depending upon their choice of term projects (two 10-15 page papers, submitted in draft and re-done in light of comments). Undergraduates' grades will be based upon two written exams. The course will be run as a seminar/discussion group: grades will depend, in part, upon engagement and participation. The instructor will set the agenda for the day and establish a trajectory for discussion; but he will not "lecture".

## **Readings**

Books:

NOTE: Portions of the following books will be required; in some cases the entire book is relevant, in others not. Wherever possible the instructor will make the relevant excerpts available on Carmen.

Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*  
 Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*  
 Robert Kraut, *Artworld Metaphysics*  
 Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria*  
 Gregory Currie, *An Ontology of Art*  
 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*  
 Robin Collingwood, *Principles of Art*  
 Arthur Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*  
 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

Articles:

NOTE: Choice (and order) of readings and topics will be determined, in part, by backgrounds, interests, and orientations of individual students. It is expected that some readings will be deleted from the following list; other readings might be added. Our class

is a collaborative working group, and thus flexibility is required. Too much advance orchestration will stifle our creativity. But it will always be made clear what the readings and topics for the following week will be. (cont.)

#### Articles (cont.):

- Amie Thomasson, "Debates About the Ontology of Art: What Are We Doing Here?"
- Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics"
- Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art"
- Brian Laetz, "Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art': A Critical Commentary"
- Aaron Ridley, "Against Musical Ontology"
- Guy Rohrbaugh, "The Ontology of Art"
- Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is"
- Errol Lord, "On the Rational Power of Aesthetic Testimony"
- Arnold Isenberg, "Critical Communication"
- Haig Khatchadourian, "The Expression Theory of Art: A Critical Evaluation"
- Hannah Ginsborg, "Primitive Normativity and Skepticism About Rules"
- Ginsborg, "The Significance of Signposts" (draft)
- Julian Dodd, "Defending Musical Platonism"
- John Grant, "On Reading Collingwood's *Principles of Art*"
- Diana Raffman, "Is Twelve-Tone Music Artistically Defective?"
- Robert Howell, "Ontology and the Nature of the Literary Work"
- Robert Hopkins, "How to be a Pessimist About Aesthetic Testimony"
- Hopkins, "What is Wrong with Aesthetic Testimony?" (draft)
- Aaron Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn from Others About Beauty and Art?"
- Moritz Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"
- Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts"
- Mary Sirridge, review of Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention*
- Rohrbaugh, "Must Ontological Pragmatism Be Self-Defeating?"
- Robert Kraut, "The Metaphysics of Artistic Expression"
- Kraut, "Ontology: Music and Art"
- Kraut, "Perceiving the Music Correctly"
- Kraut, "Why Does Jazz Matter to Aesthetic Theory?"
- Kraut and Massof, "Testimony and Objectivity in the Arts" (draft)

#### **Course Objectives**

The goal is to make explicit the ontological, epistemological, and normative assumptions sustained within artistic and art-critical practice. The artworld is an exceptionally complicated institutional framework: students will explore various theories which purport to clarify some aspect of its structure. The result is a heightened appreciation of the complexities involved in artworld performance, interpretation, and appreciation.