

CL48A.01: Aesthetic Encounters

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Boğaziçi University

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Course Schedule/Location: Wednesday 11:00-11:50 [[M2171](#)], Friday 11:00-12:50 [[M1170](#)]

Office Hours: by appointment

Aesthetics, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of beauty, is at the heart of what we do as students of art and literature. A traditional approach to structuring a course on aesthetics typically involves surveying the foundational texts of aesthetic philosophy, spanning from Classical Texts to the remarkable German Idealist tradition and the subsequent phenomenological developments in the early twentieth century. However, our approach will be somewhat different. While we will certainly draw upon the rich insights of aesthetic philosophy, our primary focus will be on engaging with readings that capture personal responses to aesthetic experiences. These readings will encompass essays on paintings and museums, contemplative reflections on art, poems inspired by the act of listening to music, philosophical essays discussing artworks, and literary works inspired by other literature and artworks. In a way, we will try to craft our own philosophical language around aesthetics by exploring these personal responses to art.

As we explore personal and literary reflections on aesthetics, our examination will encompass three central aspects of the aesthetic encounter: the aesthetic object that serves as the catalyst for aesthetic experiences, the moments when we find ourselves immersed (or sometimes struggling to immerse, or expertly faking our immersion) in an artwork, and the lasting impact of these encounters how they linger within us (their temporal duration, and the process of making sense of them when the artwork is no longer present). Additionally, we'll consider the compulsion to share our art-inspired emotions with others and contemplate whether there's a moral dimension underpinning our desire to communicate our appreciation of art.

Since we will be investigating narratives or lyrical accounts of people responding to artworks, it is only fair that our work in this course should entail a similar effort. To that end, most assignments in this course will ask you to do something similar, meditate and reflect on your own experiences of viewing and experiencing art. When we study art and literature in the academic path, sometimes the “academic” style of writing can get in the way. If you have been looking for a more personal and reflective ways of recording your aesthetic experience, this course might be a good platform for that. How might we fashion our reflective voices as writers to capture the intricacies of aesthetic experience? In that sense you should see your written work in this course as a way to uncover the complexities of aesthetics.

Our weekly meetings will have a clear structure. We'll mark our midweek sessions as "Poetry Wednesdays," dedicated to exploring poetry as a group. In these meetings, we'll collectively respond to poems, sharing our thoughts and insights. Our goal is twofold: to appreciate the beauty of language and form in poetry and to gauge our individual and collective aesthetic responses to these poetic texts. On Fridays, we'll shift our focus to the study and close reading of longer literary works. This approach not only lightens your reading load but also provides you with ample time to immerse yourself in these longer texts before our Friday classes. I expect you to come fully prepared and ready to tackle assigned works during our Friday sessions,

Class Policies:

- Your regular **attendance** and **participation** are expected. Skipping classes will obviously lower your contribution score.
- **Reading** the assigned texts carefully is fundamental. Our collective effort will help us unlock their richness and significance.
- You will complete four written assignments: two **pre-class close-reading assignments (50% each)** and two **aesthetic reflection essays (30%)** on your own experiences of art.
- **Contribution (20%)** Given the seminar format of the course, your participation is valued. Speaking up is encouraged, but I recognize that public speaking isn't everyone's comfort zone, and that's fine. Contribution to the course comes in various shapes - your effort won't go unnoticed, and I'll acknowledge it when you do make the effort.
- Plagiarism is **not acceptable**. You can review the department's website for more information. Every assignment that you submit should contain your work and your work only. It is fine, of course, to consult secondary sources or the internet but do this to formulate your own original ideas. If you ever want to use an idea that you encounter in another source, make sure to provide the appropriate citation so that we know you are bringing an idea other than your own. Copying or using someone else's words *or* ideas without giving them due credit is a form stealing: It is a breach of intellectual honesty and academic integrity. Please do not do it. If you have any questions or feel unsure about what counts as plagiarism, please talk to me.

Evaluation summary:

Contribution	20%
Pre-class close-reading responses	50%
Aesthetic reflection essays	30%

Assessment Types:

1. The close-reading response paper (Formal feedback: ✓)

Students will be divided into groups and each week one group will submit pre-class responses. The reading schedule below indicates which group submits when. Submit your response to the appropriate forums on Moodle **by 17:00 on Thursday**. For example, if you are writing about the text for the second week, namely, Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, you should submit your response by **17:00 on Thursday, Oct 5th**.

You know which week you are supposed to write. Start early, read in advance, and work through several drafts. You would do yourself a favor by generating your own essay prompt so that your paper addresses a particular problem. Please treat this **like an academic paper with rigorous close-reading and robust argumentative structure**. You should aim for **1,000 words**.

Before writing, make sure to read the assigned texts carefully and **understand** them. Students often analyze texts without a good comprehension of what they mean. Do not make this mistake. Can you advise a friend without really understanding their problem? The same with literature. You should not write about a text

without first understanding what it has to say. Responses that do not demonstrate sufficient comprehension of the text will not receive any points.

Close-reading (textual analysis) will make the bulk of your response. You should avoid generalizations and base your analysis on careful explications of the passages you provide. This means paying close attention to how authors choose their words, organize their sentences, use specific literary devices, and make particular demands on readers' attention. SparkNotes-like analyses which go through the poem in a summary or paraphrase mode will not receive points. Rather, build a central argument out of a deep appreciation of the unique literary style stemming from such aspects of language as diction, syntax, sound, meter, rhythm, rhyme, voice, poetic techniques (e.g., alliteration, line endings, enjambments, repetition). Obviously, do not go through the text like a shopping list: Identify those specific aspects of language and style which seem essential to the poem's ability to breathe. Why does the poet cultivate *this particular style* to tackle *this particular theme*?

Please aim to create **coherent argumentative threads** in your writing. The introductory paragraph should articulate a clear argument and describe the novelty of your approach. Each subsequent paragraph should begin with a clear claim.

The responses will be graded on the following:

- a) The quality and specificity of close reading (35 p)
- b) Argumentative specificity and the cohesion of your arguments (35 p)
- c) The demonstration of a strong understanding of the texts (30 p)

2. Reflective essays (Formal feedback: x)

As we delve into the realm of aesthetic encounters in this course, it's essential that you embark on your own personal journey of aesthetic experiences. Whether it involves a visit to a museum, attending a concert, immersing yourself in a painting, savoring a poem, or even relishing the architecture of a beloved building or urban structure, maintain a record of these moments. While you contemplate the artwork and the nature of your encounter with it, plan to craft a contemplative essay detailing your experience. In your essay, be sure to include a thoughtful exploration of one aesthetic category or concept that holds particular importance to your experience (e.g., authenticity, sincerity). Your chosen concept will play a pivotal role in our philosophical inquiry throughout the course. Your reflections should include rigorous "close-reading" of the artwork. This need not adhere to the traditional "academic" style of close-reading often expected in literature courses; instead, you can opt for a more personal and introspective approach, where you notice and interpret aspects of the artwork that resonate with you. Your responses will be assessed based on the quality of your close-reading (50 points), the depth of your engagement with the artwork (25 points), and the presence of a structured effort to develop your unique personal voice (25 points).

Reading Schedule (order of readings subject to change):

W-1	Sept 27	Introduction Emily Dickinson, I Died for Beauty
	Sept 30	Ben Lerner, <i>Leaving the Atocha Station</i>
W-2	Oct 4	Poetry
	Oct 6	Fyodor Dostoyevsky, <i>The Idiot</i>
W-3	Oct 11	Poetry
	Oct 13	Jan Zwicky, <i>Wisdom and Metaphor</i>
W-4	Oct 18	Poetry
	Oct 20	Zadie Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement" Zadie Smith, "Man versus Corpse"
W-5	Oct 25	Poetry
	Oct 27	Alice Oswald, <i>Memorial</i>
W-6	Nov 1	Poetry
	Nov 3	Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay"
W-7	Nov 8	Poetry
	Nov 10	Rachel Cusk, <i>The Last Supper</i>
W-8	Nov 15	Poetry
	Nov 17	Mark Doty, <i>Still Life with Lemons and Oysters</i>
W-9	Nov 22	Poetry
	Nov 24	Ciaran Carson, <i>Still Life</i>
W-10	Nov 29	Poetry
	Dec 1	Natasha Trethewey, <i>Bellocq's Ophelia</i>
W-11	Dec 6	Poetry
	Dec 8	Mary Jo Salter, Poems
W-12	Dec 13	Poetry
	Dec 15	Thomas Dumm, <i>My Father's House</i>
W-13	Dec 20	Poetry
	Dec 22	Sabina Murray, "The Sisters"