

PH9GQ-20 Work and Concept: Philosophy & Contemporary Art

22/23

Department

Philosophy

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Diarmuid Costello

Credit value

20

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Contemporary art challenges accepted understandings of art and tends to provoke sharply divided opinion. Examples include the restaging of a notoriously bloody confrontation between striking UK miners and police in riot gear as art, or touring the burnt out shell of a Baghdad car bomb that killed 38 people in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War around various provincial American cities (Jeremy Deller); a discreet business card, calling out various forms of micro-aggression, that was given out whenever a racist remark was made in the presence of the artist, who self-identified as a black woman but was often mistaken for white, or the legend “everything will be taken away” prominently inscribed, mirror reversed from left to right, on the foreheads of volunteers who then had to go about their daily lives so adorned (Adrian Piper); fragile and transitory works, such as a line scored in the desert scrub with the heel of a boot or by pouring water from a bottle, which last for only so long as they take to dry out or be blown away (Richard Long); or videos of members of the Ogoni people from the Niger Delta, a region now thoroughly despoiled environmentally by the polluting activities of major Western Oil multinationals, silently eating locally grown foods (Zina Saro-Wiwa).

Grant that these are works of art. This module asks whether, and if so why, they matter as such: wherein does their value as art reside? We will use challenging art of this kind as a way to put

pressure on established models in the philosophy of art, developing a new way of doing the philosophy of art that I call “philosophical criticism.” Each week will be closely focused on small set of works by a particular contemporary artist, and approach them via the writings of one or more philosophers on a particular topic, such as the idea of a ‘political’ work of art, conceptions of race, stereotyping and xenophobia, and the idea of the natural environment as something to be treated as more than a resource for human beings, or even as a kind of ‘moral habit.’ A key concern throughout will be whether, approached in the right spirit, individual works of art might serve as spurs to philosophical reflection in their own right.

Module aims

The principal aim is to suggest a new way of doing the philosophy of art that departs from currently dominant methodologies. After briefly sketching some of the characteristics of recent philosophy of art that we might want to avoid, most of the module will be given over to actively modelling an alternative method through a series of case studies, taken as a kind of ‘proof of concept.’ Students will be encouraged to hone not only their core philosophical skills of argument and interpretation, but also begin to develop new skills of attentive and sympathetic visual and critical analysis. We will focus throughout on art from the last 50 years, but with an emphasis on 21st Century works. Works will be chosen with a view to sampling as wide a range of media for contemporary visual art (including painting, sculpture, photography, film & video, conceptual art, installation art, site-specific art, performance, participatory and/or interactive art) as possible.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

The following syllabus is INDICATIVE. Specific week-by-week topics for weeks 3-5 and 7-9 in particular would vary change from year to year. This is intended as a guide to the KIND of works that might be considered in a given year:

METHODOLOGY

Week 1 – Existing Methodologies in the Philosophy of Art: Analytic vs Continental.

Week 2 – Proposal for a New Approach: Philosophical Criticism as Substantive Aesthetics.

EXAMPLE CASE STUDIES

Week 3 – Adrian Piper: xenophobia and the first person experience of racism "from the inside."
Works: Funk Lessons (1982-4), My Calling Card No.1 (1986), Everything Will be Taken Away (2007);

Readings: Maurice Berger, Diarmuid Costello, Kobena Mercer, Adrian Piper.

Week 4 – Martin Creed: Three Forms of Stupidity, or Can stupidity be a Virtue?

Works: Work No 100: On a Tiled Floor in an Awkward Place, a cubic stack of tiles built on top of one of the existing tiles (1994); (various) Door Stops positioned to obstruct the proper functioning of a door; (various) Curved Protuberances from a Wall.

Readings: Quassim Cassam, Diarmuid Costello, Kevin Mulligan, Robert Musil, Sacha Golub.

Week 5 - Richard Long: Treading lightly on the Surface of the Earth (techne vs. Technik as "modes of disclosure").

Works: Windstones (1985), Waterlines (18989), A Cloudless Walk (1995).

Readings: Diarmuid Costello, Hubert Dreyfus, Martin Heidegger, Richard Long, Ann Seymour.

Week 6 – Reading Week

Week 7 – Jeremy Deller: "delegated authorship" and the politics of collaboration and conversation.

Works: The Battle of Orgreave (2001), It is What it is: Conversations about Iraq (2009).

Readings: Dave Beech, Walter Benjamin, Claire Bishop, Diarmuid Costello, Jacques Ranciere.

Week 8 – Zina Saro-Wiwa: Moral Habitat and the Metaphysics of Environment, or "Decolonizing Environmentalism."

Works: (from Table Manners) Felix Easts Garri and Egusi Soup (2014); Dorsa Eats Roasted Snails and Drinks Maltina (2019).

Readings Diarmuid Costello, Katrin Flikschuh, Safro Kwame, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwasi Wiredu.

Week 9 – Lee Friedlander: Shame, First vs. Third Person Asymmetry and the Photographic Self Portrait.

Works: Lee Friedlander Self Portraits (1993-1999) and Stems (1994-9).

Readings: Diarmuid Costello, Deonna Rodogno & Terroni, JP Sartre, Krista K. Thomasson, David Velleman, Dan Zahavi.

CONCLUDING METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

week 10. Readings TBC

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- i. Demonstrate an understanding of the central arguments and substantive issues in the set texts and secondary literature.
- ii. Critically assess the key claims and arguments of the core texts, and the debates to which they have given rise.
- iii. Articulate their own view of the relative merits of different positions in the literature, and engage critically with other points of view
- iv. Demonstrate an understanding of what is at stake in competing methodological approaches to contemporary arts in philosophy.
- v. Explicate what is philosophically interesting about the arts as a way of encouraging reflection on concepts of philosophical significance
- Improve their grasp of a broad range of contemporary art, and develop a capacity to engage with it both philosophically and critically.

Indicative reading list

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEWS

Peg Zeglin Brand (ed.) *Beauty Matters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000)

Noël Carroll (ed.) *Theories of Art Today* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000)

Anne Eaton & Charles Peterson (eds), 'Aesthetics and Race,' special issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77: 4 (Fall 2019)

Janet Kourany (ed.) *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions* (Princeton:

Princeton UP, 1998)

Jerrold Levinson (ed) *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998)

Dominic McIver Lopes, *Aesthetics on the Edge: Where Philosophy Meets the Human Sciences* (Oxford: OUP 2018)

Jacques Ranciere, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009)

Monique Roelofs (ed.) 'Aesthetics and Race: New Philosophical Perspectives,' special issue of *Contemporary Aesthetics*, No. 2 (2009).

Paul C Taylor, *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016)

CASE STUDIES (NB THESE WILL VARY FROM YEAR TO YEAR)

ADRIAN PIPER

Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Selected Writings and Art Criticism 1967-1992*, (Cambridge: MIT, 1996).

Adrian Piper, *A Synthesis of Intuitions: 1965-2016* (New York: MoMa, 2018)

Butler and Platzker (eds.) *Adrian Piper: A Reader* (New York: MoMA, 2018)

MARTIN CREED

Robert Musil, 'On Stupidity' in *Musil, Precision and the Soul* (Chicago University Press, 1990).

Sacha Golub 'A New Theory of Stupidity' *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 27:4 (2019).

Kevin Mulligan, 'Foolishness, Stupidity and Cognitive Values,' *The Monist* 97:1 (2014).

RICHARD LONG

Dreyfus and Wrathall (eds) *A Companion to Heidegger* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002).

Richard Long, *Walking the Line* (London: Tate Britain / Thames & Hudson, 2002).

JEREMY DELLER

Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' in *Eiland*, Jennings & Smith (eds) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol 2, Part 2, 1931-1934* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999).

Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso, 2012).

Diarmuid Costello, 'On the Very Idea of a Political Work of Art,' *Journal of Political Philosophy* 29:1 (2020)

ZINA SARO-WIWA

Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Did You Know We Taught Them How to Dance?* (Blaffer Art Museum, 2016).

Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell 2005).

Lee M. Brown (ed.) *African Philosophy. New and Traditional Perspectives* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1996)

LEE FRIEDLANDER

Lee Friedlander, *In the Picture: Self Portraits 1958–2011* (New Haven: Yale, 2011).

Krista K. Thomasson, 'Shame, Violence and Morality.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 91:1 (2015).

David Velleman, 'The Genesis of Shame,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 30:1 (2001).

Dan Zahavi, *Self and Others: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy and Shame* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

Interdisciplinary

This module will enable students to further develop several of the core skills of philosophy (close reading, analysis, argument and so on) but to do so by bringing these skills to bear on a range of contemporary artworks from a wide variety of media, taking a very wide range of forms. Works of art will be central throughout and will be taken seriously as spurs to thought in their own right, and not merely, as is more common in philosophy, as illustrations of philosophical arguments that can be run independently. Students will be expected to develop skills of visual appreciation and critical insight in dealing with works, informed by reading first order art criticism. The range of works to be considered will be from the "contemporary" period (broadly construed to mean from the 1970s, when distinct artistic media ceased to be normative for artistic production, to the present day—but with an emphasis on works from the last 20-30 years). In addition to being analysed philosophically, works will be contextualised through the writings of artists, interviews and contemporaneous criticism. The goal is not merely to develop a richer appreciation of the works, but use these works in turn to reflect more deeply on the concepts mobilised to make sense of them.

Subject specific skills

- i. Demonstrate an understanding of competing methodological possibilities in the philosophy of art
- ii. Become familiar with a wide variety of philosophical approaches more generally
- iii. Develop an appreciation of contemporary art's wide variety of forms, media and genres.
- iv. Understand how reflecting philosophically on the arts can shed light on concepts of philosophical interest
- v. Develop a capacity for sustained critical attention to particular works informed by philosophical reflection.

Transferable skills

- i. begin to develop skills of close visual analysis, criticism and appreciation
- ii. appreciate how arguments can bear on artworks and how art works can bear on arguments
- iii. develop a capacity for close reading of complicated texts
- iv. further develop analytic and argumentative skills.
- v. develop a capacity to present and defend ideas clearly both verbally and in writing
- vi. enhance one's capacity for self-study and collaborating with others.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	18 sessions of 1 hour (9%)
Total	200 hours

Type	Required
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (4%)
Private study	174 hours (87%)
Total	200 hours

Private study description

Private study: reading the core readings, looking at the target works, perhaps attending exhibitions.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
5000 word essay	100%	

Feedback on assessment

Students will receive both peer feedback and module leader feedback on their class presentations, which will inform their 1000 word case studies. Written feedback on the latter will be provided, as will written feedback on their final essay.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 1 of TPHA-V7P2 Postgraduate Taught Continental Philosophy

This module is Option list B for:

- TPHA-V7PM Postgraduate Taught Philosophy
 - Year 1 of V7PM Philosophy

- Year 2 of V7PM Philosophy