

HUMN 2001 - Aesthetics

Week 1

What is Aesthetics?

Is it European?

Are there multiple aesthetics?

How can we use it?

What is Aesthetics?

“Aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience.”

- Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*

Origins: *Aisthesis*

From the ancient Greek, “ Sense perception; sensation”

Origins: 18th century Europe

- Interest in aesthetics—in both the sense in which it applies to certain forms of experience or judgement (e.g. sensibility, beauty, taste), and in the sense in which it was the theoretical study of art—exploded in 18th Europe.
- Figures such as Edmund Burke and David Hume in Britain, and Alexander Baumgarten (who invented the modern use of the term), and Immanuel Kant in Germany all took keen interest in describing its nature and trying to understand its place in human life.
- This trajectory only continued and intensified in the 19th century; esp. in Germany.

Aesthetics For Us

In this course, we will take account of its philosophical history in Europe. However people from many different times and places have thought long and hard about what we would today call 'art' and aesthetic experience, though they may have very different conceptual and cultural frames for these activities.

Despite the historical variety, and the attendant dangers of comparison, we will try to put some of these traditions in productive contact with our own world, and to try to make sense of our contemporary aesthetic practices. However, this course will be far from the last word on any of the subjects we take an interest in.