

INTRODUCTION TO ASSIGNMENT FOR INSTRUCTORS: THIS IS AN ASSIGNMENT I GIVE IN MY "INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY" COURSE. IN ADDITION TO THIS ASSIGNMENT, I SHOW THE VIDEOS IN CLASS TO GET THE STUDENTS' INITIAL REACTIONS AND ASK THEM TO NOTE THEIR INITIAL REACTIONS TO TURN IN WITH THIS ASSIGNMENT LATER. SINCE THIS IS AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY COURSE, WE DO NOT DELVE DEEPLY INTO ANY AREAS SUCH AS AESTHETICS. THE AIM OF THE ASSIGNMENT IS TO GET THEM TO LOOK AT ART THAT IS OUTSIDE THEIR COMFORT ZONES, TO LOOK AT ART THAT IS CULTURALLY RELEVANT (NOT JUST BEAUTIFUL) AND TO THINK CRITICALLY, ALL WHILE USING NEW PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS AND TERMINOLOGY. IN ADDITION, THEY GET PRACTICE IN WRITING AND COMMUNICATION.

I want you to write a 5-page double spaced paper on the two videos we watched in class. The first is "The Artist is Present." The work is partially depicted in this video on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS0Tg0ljCp4>

Marina Abramović e Ulay - MoMA 2010

The second is this video:

<https://vimeo.com/55563208>

Tress of Hair by Doa Aly

First, identify the cultural, social and/or aesthetic issue. The best way to do this is to check your own initial reaction. Would YOU have sat down across from Ms. Abramovic? If not, what in your cultural or social conditioning would have prevented you? As far as what she is doing aesthetically (artistically), what was your reaction? What was your reaction to the silent women in Doa Aly's video? Did you first assume that the man in the video was the artist? Perhaps your reaction was "This is not art!" or "This is really weird!" Whatever your reactions, what in your background and knowledge brought out this reaction?

Second, you also should analyze the cultural, social and/or aesthetic issue from more than one cultural perspective, noting the broader influence (local, national and/or global) of each perspective. (Remember that Abramovic is European and Aly is Egyptian.) For example, many people in the USA believe it is disrespectful to refuse to look a person in the eyes, but in many Native American and Asian cultures, staring people directly in the eyes is considered disrespectful. Now that you know that Doa Aly is one of the women in the video, do you interpret the male actor's performance differently? What in your cultural background caused you to make such assumptions?

Finally, analyze the cultural, social and/or aesthetic issue from your own cultural perspective, noting whether your own biases or prejudices affected your perspective. Include whether you think this qualifies as art, whether you think it is good art, and what the artists were trying to express about others. (See attached grading

rubric for Social Responsibility.) This should include how quickly you connected with/related to each video and whether your cultural perspective had something to with that.

Please proofread the paper carefully and insure it is clear and well-organized. Also check to be sure you are using exactly the correct word for what you are trying to express and that you use a variety of sentence structures. (See attached grading rubric for Communication.)

Please be sure to organize your response with support for the points you make. You don't need to do any further research, unless you wish to, but should use the sources that follow. This assignment is tied to the course learning outcomes (see syllabus) about applying philosophy to everyday life and about critically analyzing and evaluating philosophical ideas.

SOURCE 1:

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM WIKIPEDIA ABOUT ABRAMOVIC:

Marina Abramović (**Serbian Cyrillic:** Марина Абрамовић, Serbo-Croatian pronunciation: [ma ɾiːna ab'raːmou̯iʨ]; born November 30, 1946) is a **Yugoslavia-born performance artist**.^[1] Her work explores the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind. Active for over three decades, Abramović has been described as the "grandmother of performance art." She pioneered a new notion of identity by bringing in the participation of observers, focusing on "confronting pain, blood, and physical limits of the body."^[2]

[HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/MARINA_ABRAMOVI%C4%87](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina_Abramovi%C4%87)

SOURCE 2:

Aestheticians also question what the **value** of art is. Is art a means of gaining some kind of **knowledge**? Is it a tool of **education** or **indoctrination** or **enculturation**? Is it perhaps just **politics** by other means? Does art give us an insight into the **human condition**? Does it make us more **moral**? Can it uplift us **spiritually**? Might the value of art for the **artist** be quite different than its value for the **audience**? Might the value of art to **society** be different than its value to **individuals**?

Aesthetic Universals

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The contemporary American philosopher **Denis Dutton** (1944 -) has identified seven **universal signatures** in human aesthetics. Although there are possible exceptions and objections to many of them, they represent a useful **starting point** for the consideration of aesthetics:

- **Expertise or Virtuosity** (technical artistic skills are cultivated, recognized and admired)

- **Non-Utilitarian Pleasure** (people enjoy art for art's sake, and don't demand practical value of it)
- **Style** (artistic objects and performances satisfy rules of composition that place them in recognizable styles)
- **Criticism** (people make a point of judging, appreciating and interpreting works of art)
- **Imitation** (with a few important exceptions (e.g. music, abstract painting), works of art simulate experiences of the world)
- **Special Focus** (art is set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of experience)
- **Imagination** (artists and their audiences entertain hypothetical worlds in the theatre of the imagination)

History of Aesthetics

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The **Ancient Greek** philosophers initially felt that aesthetically appealing objects were beautiful **in and of themselves**. Plato felt that beautiful objects incorporated **proportion**, **harmony** and **unity** among their parts. Aristotle found that the universal elements of beauty were **order**, **symmetry** and **definiteness**.

According to **Islam**, human works of art are **inherently flawed** compared to the work of **Allah**, and to attempt to depict in a realistic form any animal or person is insolence to Allah. This has had the effect of narrowing the field of Muslim artistic possibility to such forms as **mosaics**, **calligraphy**, **architecture** and **geometric** and **floral** patterns.

Indian art evolved with an emphasis on inducing special **spiritual** or philosophical states in the audience, or with representing them **symbolically**.

As long as go as the 5th Century B.C., **Chinese** philosophers were already arguing about aesthetics. **Confucius** (551 - 479 B.C.) emphasized the role of the arts and humanities (especially music and poetry) in broadening human nature. His near contemporary **Mozzi** (470 - 391 B.C.), however, argued that music and fine arts were classist and wasteful, benefiting the rich but not the common people.

Western **Medieval** art (at least until the revival of classical ideals during the **Renaissance**) was highly **religious** in focus, and was typically funded by the **Church**, powerful ecclesiastical individuals, or wealthy secular patrons. A religiously uplifting message was considered more important than figurative accuracy or inspired composition. The skills of the artisan were considered **gifts from God** for the sole purpose of disclosing God to mankind.

With the shift in Western philosophy from the late 17th Century onwards, **German** and **British** thinkers in particular emphasized **beauty** as the key component of art and of the aesthetic experience, and saw art as necessarily aiming at beauty. For **Friedrich Schiller** (1759 - 1805), aesthetic appreciation of beauty is the most perfect **reconciliation** of the **sensual** and **rational** parts of human

nature. Hegel held that art is the first stage in which the **absolute spirit** is immediately manifest to sense-perception, and is thus an **objective** rather than a subjective revelation of beauty. For Schopenhauer, aesthetic contemplation of beauty is the most free that the pure intellect can be from the dictates of **will**.

British Intuitionists like the **3rd Earl of Shaftesbury** (1671 - 1713) claimed that beauty is just the sensory equivalent of **moral goodness**. More analytic theorists like **Lord Kames** (1696 - 1782), **William Hogarth** (1697 - 1764) and Edmund Burke hoped to reduce beauty to some **list of attributes**, while others like **James Mill** (1773 - 1836) and **Herbert Spencer** (1820 - 1903) strove to link beauty to some **scientific theory** of psychology or biology.

http://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_aesthetics.html

SOURCE 3:

Art and aesthetics during the 20th century questioned the historical ties between morality or religion, beauty and art. Before the 1900s, art was intended to simply record the world in a realistic way. Now, art has other purposes besides inspiring the viewer to be good or making the viewer believe that what was depicted was beautiful. Art is currently seen as having many other purposes: revealing hidden cultural truths, helping us to see the world in a new way, and giving visual form to ideas or philosophies or emotions.

Doa Aly spent some of her young adulthood in Italy, but returned home to Egypt to become an artist. She had stated she was immediately struck by the "constraints on her body" that existed in Egypt and then became fascinated with depicting those in her work. She often used dance and movement as her way of depicting constraints on the body. She later became fascinated with how medical literature described how mental illnesses manifested themselves in bodily movements.

Performance art became popular in the late 20th century as "alt-art." It is an art form with a topical theme that usually includes a live presentation to onlookers and may include acting, dance, music, or painting. Performance art emphasizes the experience for both artist and viewer.

Rena B. Denham, lecture in PHIL 1301

SOURCE 4:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/41397353?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

See below:

Henry M. Sayre

*The Object of Performance:
Aesthetics in the Seventies*

"A modernist would have to rewrite Pater's dictum that all art aspires to the condition of music," Susan Sontag announced in her series of essays *On Photography*. "Now all art aspires to the condition of photography."¹ In fact, one of the most important aesthetic developments of the seventies will probably turn out to be the art establishment's embracing of photography, epitomized by the popular success of Sontag's book itself. And at least part of the 1970's affair with photography is directly attributable to the medium's insistence on complicating—and accommodating—Pater's dictum. That is, Pater defined the art object as something we know only through "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them." He was never interested in anything of "solidity," but only in "experience itself . . . that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves."² For him, the art object was the mere token, the trace, of an aesthetic experience forever lost, a thing always announcing absence.

For Sontag, photography gives Pater's dictum the modernist turn. A photograph is, of course, an object in its own right, irrefutably present. To borrow Murray Krieger's phrase, it can be "plucked out of all discourse as its own closed system," just like any poem or painting.³ From this sort of formalist perspective, aesthetic experience is never absent; it

¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), p. 149. Subsequent page references are to this text.

² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 235-36.

³ Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 212.