

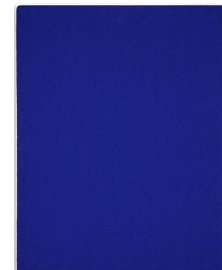
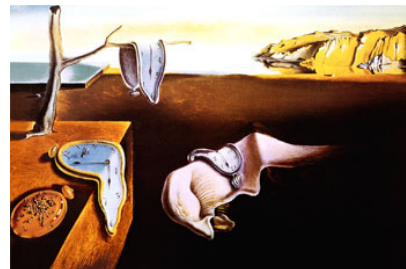
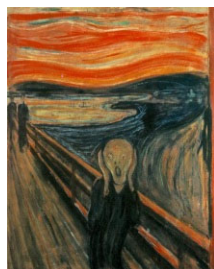


# **Knowledge and the Aesthetic**

What is Beauty?

# Recap: Questions

- Does art **contain** knowledge or truth?
- Can art be a **source** of knowledge?
- What kind of knowledge claims do/can we make with regard to aesthetics?
- How do we ***justify*** our beliefs about anything relating to aesthetics?





# WHAT IS BEAUTY?

A state of being that society labors towards?

Ideology of the ruling class?

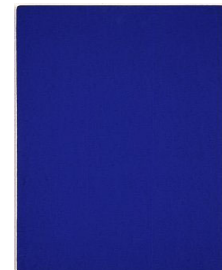
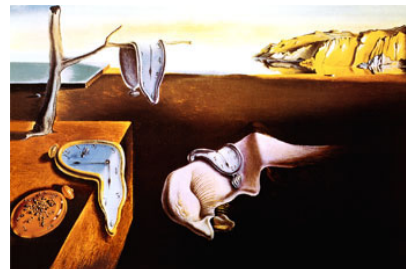
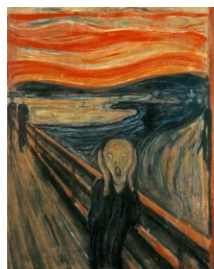
That which we yearn for?

Arising from the search for objects of talismanic properties?

Denis Donoghue, *Speaking of Beauty*

# A state of being that society labours towards

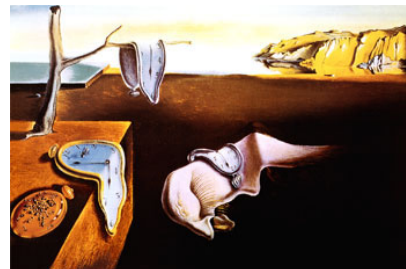
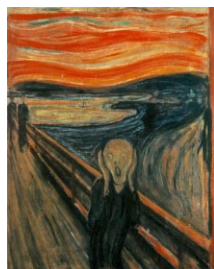
- Economic concerns at the forefront; basic necessities (food, water, shelter)
- Sanitation/sewage disposal, pure water, clean air, health services, insurance
- Then it cultivates roses, build parks and nice buildings, decorates the city
- If a society doesn't labour to be beautiful, it becomes indifferent to smog, litter, lurid communications, blatencies of noise and confusion.





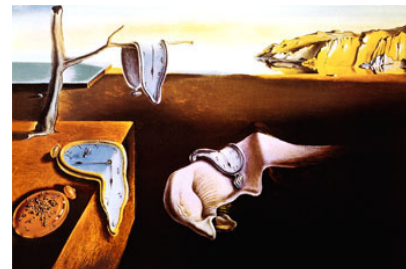
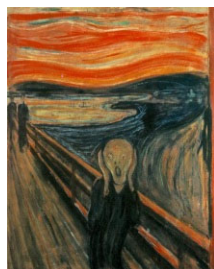
# Ideology of the Ruling Class

- Cultural achievements the tools of the ruling class
- The spoils of the victor are paraded along in the victory procession – the aestheticisation of politics:
  - Mussolini's march on Rome
  - The Nuremberg rallies
  - Leni Riefenstahl's documentaries
  - The Olympic Games
  - Communist art in China



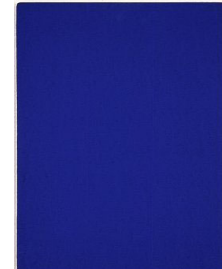
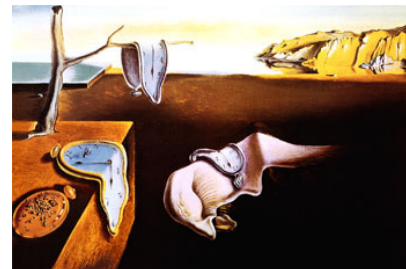
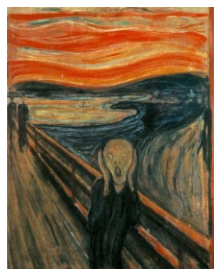
# That which we yearn for

- Kant: the judgment of taste is not based on concepts
  - i.e. No description, however detailed, could ever prove that something is beautiful
- Judgment doesn't come at the end of our interaction with beautiful things
- Not a report on their features or feelings they have provoked
- Not a conclusion that cannot be justified, but a guess that might be wrong
- Things that we still desire, in every sense, to possess and know better
- Nietzsche: remain fixed on what remains veiled, even after the unveiling



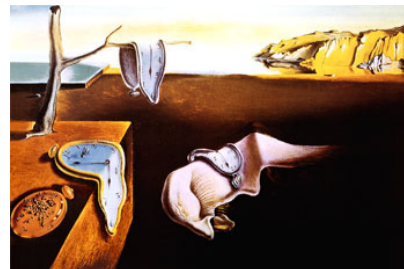
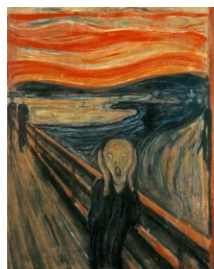
## Arising from the search for objects of talismanic properties

- The arts developed incidentally to the search for objects of talismanic properties
  - Egyptian: gold > cowrie shell
  - Cretan: octopus on pottery
  - Indian: bear's teeth on necklace
- Primary motive isn't decoration but invoking the assistance of life-giving amulets
- At what point in civilization does any conscious distinction between practical or magical utility and aesthetic beauty arise?



## Arising from the search for objects of talismanic properties

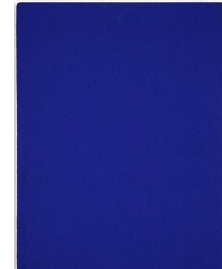
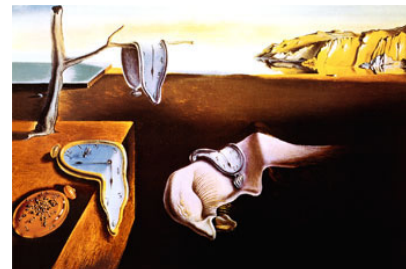
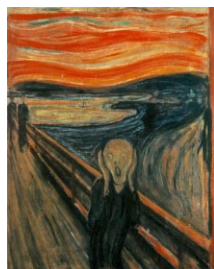
- Is it possible for the aesthetic object to be a direct object of attention?
- Surely!
- Is the production of beautiful objects which have no relation to "the search for objects of talismanic properties" axiomatically justifiable?
- Kant: beauty of an object is all the more precious for being free of social function
- Especially when art was seen as subordinate to the aesthetic value of the natural world





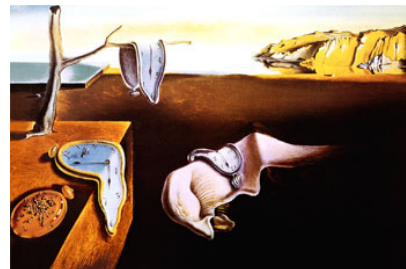
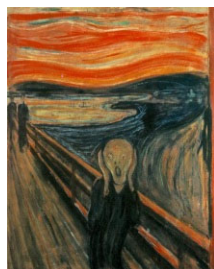
# As Sinister

- It is possible to disapprove of beauty in principle, and to think it a nuisance;
- because it impedes other practices we find more important;
- because talk of beauty is a distraction, confounding other vocabularies;
- because we take beauty seriously only in a particular context of discourse (e.g. academic)



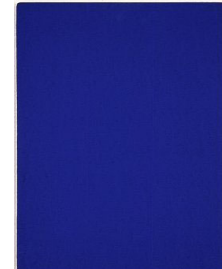
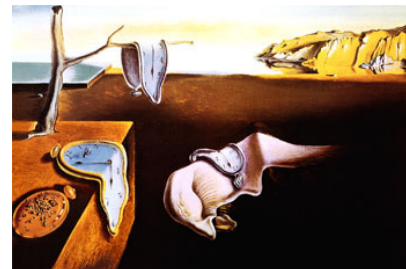
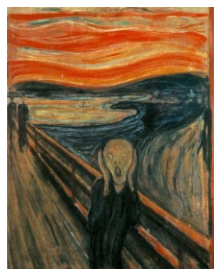
# As Sinister

- Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist*
- De Man: What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its intimate link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon of discourse
- The aesthetic claims to know nothing, but it also claims the wisdom of being beyond knowledge or on the far side of it, in full possession of the self-evidence of human feeling and therefore having unique access to the universal patterns of human life



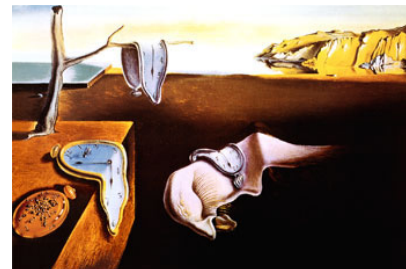
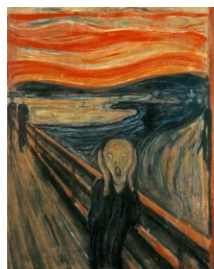
# As Independent of Nature and Perceived Intellectually

- Plato's Forms: the beautiful, the good, the true are ideals that are available to the soul not the senses
- Embodiment of these values were alike regarded as secondary to the eternal Form of each
  - If you started with one of them, you supposedly approached the other two, and without any feeling of discrepancy
- True for most of history until the modern era; no value was declared autonomous
- You could say that a flower, a woman, a sonnet, a mathematical formula, or a piece of legislation was beautiful, but you could not make any more specific claim for its quality



# Discussions on Beauty

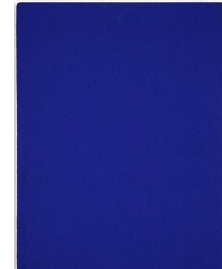
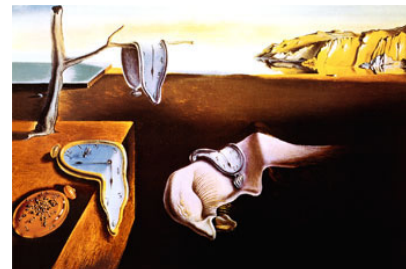
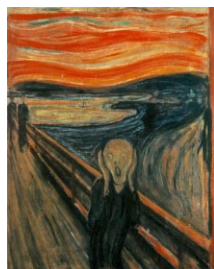
- Is beauty primarily about form?
- Pele described football as “the beautiful game” - can beauty be found in anything?
- Is there a difference between natural beauty and beauty in Art?
- How accurate is it to say that behind all beauty lies Mathematics?
- Is an objective notion of what is beautiful possible?





# Where's all this going...?

- Remember: Knowledge = JTB
  - Claim: “X is beautiful”
  - How is this claim justified?
- Theories on Beauty inform which position we can take regarding how we justify aesthetic claims, and how we look to substantiate the truth condition.



# Example

- Let's examine any literature / poetic text for meaning, truth, and knowledge.
- Can we say that it contains no truth?
- Meaningless? No merit?
- The conception of knowledge and truth is at the root of the analysis. Does truth = literal truth?
- If we try to reduce art to a series of truth statements, are we diminishing it?

