

B03: Philosophy of Art

Instructor: Zachary Weinstein
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Summer 2019

Lectures: Monday in MW160 and Wednesday in MW170
12:00–1:30pm

Office hours: Monday 2–3:00pm and by appointment, P104

Grader: Katherine Crone (katherine.crone@mail.utoronto.ca)

1 Course description

This course is an introduction to the philosophy of art. We will read philosophers, critics, and artists to explore how and why art might matter to us now. We will read some historical figures early in the course, but our focus will be on the contemporary. We will be particularly concerned with how new technologies (photography, sound recording, the Internet, Instagram, streaming music, etc.) affect our engagement with and understanding of art.

2 Course objectives

You will become familiar with a number of philosophical debates about art, including about the value of art, the nature of taste, and the expressive capacities of different artistic media. You will also

become familiar with a number of philosophical and critical positions that will help you to both question and better understand our current cultural moment. For instance, we will explore the role of the museum as a repository of culture, the impact of technological reproduction on our experience of art, and art's ability (or inability) to enact social change. My hope is that students in this course will gain the ability to think and write about artistic and cultural issues with greater depth and precision.

3 Assignments and exam

There will be two short writing assignments, one longer writing assignment, and a final exam. All writing assignments will be submitted through Quercus.

First short assignment (roughly 300 words): You will describe a work of art. I'll distribute a list of artworks, and you can choose which one you want to describe. That's it, but it's harder than it sounds. This assignment has two purposes. First, it gives you an opportunity to practice descriptive writing about art, which is essential for philosophical writing about art. Second, paying close attention to a small number of works early in the semester will give us examples to which we can return throughout the course.

–This assignment is due Friday, May 31st, and is worth 10% of your grade.

Second short assignment (roughly 1,000 words): You will discuss an individual artwork of your choice (broadly construed: a painting, film, television series, play, album, etc.), in the context of one of the

readings. This assignment builds on the first; you will not only need to describe an artwork, but also briefly describe one of the theoretical frameworks we will explore, and say something about how the that framework illuminates the artwork, or doesn't.

-This assignment is due Friday, July 5th, and is worth 20% of your grade.

Longer assignment (roughly five pages): You will critically engage with a topic from the course. I will distribute a list of topics. If you prefer, you can choose your own topic, as long as you consult with me first. Though you are not required to do so, you can submit an outline or draft for comment, as long as you get it to me by Friday, July 19th.

-The paper is due Friday, August 2nd, and is worth 35% of your grade.

For help with the writing assignments, you have two main resources. For issues of content, you can come to my office hours. For writing style, organization, and grammar, I encourage you to visit the writing center (<https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/twc/writing-support>).

Final exam: There will be a final exam, held during the official exam period. This will be worth 35% of your grade.

4 Procedures

Readings will be available through Quercus. Please complete the readings before class. On weeks where there is a lot of assigned reading, or where the assigned reading is particularly difficult, I

will email you and suggest which parts of the reading you should focus on. I will often send you an email asking you to look at a work of art, or watch a scene from a movie, or listen to a song. Please do this before coming to class. Class will be divided between lecture and discussion. Sometimes we will break into smaller groups to facilitate discussion.

Please come to class with questions about the reading and examples of artworks you would like to discuss. Please also bring a pen or pencil and paper to class; we will sometimes engage in short in-class exercises where you will need them.

5 Policies

Email: Please only email me from your University of Toronto email account, and include "B03" in the subject line. During the week, I will do my best to respond within 24 hours. If you haven't heard from me within 24 hours, please send me a reminder email. Unfortunately, I cannot discuss substantive issues by email. If you'd like to discuss the course material, come to office hours. If you can't make it to my regularly scheduled office hours, email me and we can find a time that works for you.

Late assignments: If you submit an assignment after the due date, it will be penalized by 5% for each day it is late. If your paper is more than 7 days late, it will receive a zero.

Extensions: If you are having a serious issue and want to request an extension, you must email me *at least 48 hours before the assignment is due*. I understand that sometimes an emergency situation might

make this impossible, but if possible, you must email me 48 hours in advance if you want me to consider an extension.

Academic honesty: Plagiarism will not be tolerated. It is your responsibility to recognize what counts as plagiarism. If you have any questions about this, please ask me. For more information on plagiarism and academic honesty, see

- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>
- <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/>
- <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>

Recording: As a matter of university policy, you may not produce video or audio recordings of the class.

Accessibility: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Please feel free to approach me or Accessibility Services (<https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ability/>) if you have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom, or any course materials. We want to assist you in achieving academic success.

Religious accommodation: If you require an accommodation for religious reasons, please email me. For more information, see <https://www.vicereprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/policies-guidelines/accommodation-religious/>.

Devices: I encourage you to print out readings and take notes by

hand. However, you may use a computer in class to take notes and look at readings, if you choose. Please only use your computer to take notes or to look at course readings. The use of cell phones is prohibited.

Discussion: Please treat your fellow students (and me!) with respect during discussion.

6 Calendar

Readings are subject to change with notice.

Week 1: Introduction

Monday, May 6 Course introduction

Reading: Ellen Winner, "Can this be art?" (Ch. 2 of *How Art Works*)

Wednesday, May 8 Art's not real!

Reading: Plato, Selection from *Republic* 10; Paul Chan, "What art is and where it belongs"

Week 2: The value of art

Monday, May 13 Aristotle

Reading: Aristotle, Selections from *Poetics*.

Recommended: Richard Eldridge, "How can tragedy matter for us?"

Wednesday, May 15 Contemporary cognitivism

Reading: Jerrold Levinson, "Messages in art"

Recommended: John Gibson, "Cognitivism and the arts"

Week 3: What do we do with art?

Monday, May 20 NO CLASS

Wednesday, May 22 Uses of art

Reading: Joshua Landy, Introduction to *How to do Things with Fictions*

Week 4: Taste

Monday, May 27 Taste and judging taste

Reading: David Hume, "Of the standard of taste"; Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic problems of modern philosophy" (selection)

Wednesday, May 29 Beauty, taste, and community

Reading: Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness* (selection)

Recommended: Richard Moran, "Kant, Proust, and the appeal of beauty"

Week 5: Hegel

Monday, June 3 Hegel: Articulating what matters

Reading: Hegel, Introduction to *Lectures on the Philosophy of Fine Art* (selection)

Recommended: Stephen Houlgate, "Introduction" in *Hegel and the Arts*

Wednesday, June 5 The end of art?

Reading: We will continue to discuss the Hegel reading from Monday.

Week 6: Modernism, taste, and after

Monday, June 10 Modernism and medium-specificity

Reading: Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön"

Recommended: Michael Fried, "Art and objecthood"

Wednesday, June 12 High- and low-art in the 20th century (and beyond)

Reading: Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and kitsch"; Jed Perl, "The Cult of Jeff Koons"

Week 7: Popular music

Monday, June 17 Popular music

Reading: Theodore Adorno, "On Jazz"; Corban Goble, Review of Carly Rae Jepsen's *Emotion*; Josephine Livingston, "Grow Up"

Wednesday, June 19 NO CLASS

Week 8: TBD

Monday, June 24th Guest lecture, topic tbd

Wednesday, June 26th NO CLASS

Week 9: Music, performance, and recording

Monday, July 1 NO CLASS (Canada day)

Wednesday, July 3 Music ontology: performance and recording

Reading: Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel* (selections); Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise* (selections); Glenn Gould, "The prospects of recording"

Week 10: Photography and film

Monday, July 8 Photography and the real world

Reading: Andre Bazin, "The ontology of the photographic image"; Susan Sontag, "Photographic evangelists"

Recommended: Douglas Crimp, "The photographic activity of post-modernism"

Wednesday, July 10 Narrative and the pleasure of looking

Reading: Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema"; Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (selection)

Week 11: The art industrial complex: from photography and radio to Instagram and Spotify

Monday, July 15 Art and industry

Reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, "The culture industry"; Alex Ross, "The naysayers"

Wednesday, July 17 Mechanical reproduction

Reading: Walter Benjamin, "Art in the age of mechanical reproduction", OR Berger et al., *Ways of Seeing*, ch. 1 (or both)

Recommended: Adorno, Letters to Benjamin

Week 12: Modern art and the artworld

Monday, July 22 What is art now?

Reading: Arthur Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, ch. 1; Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art"

Recommended: Borges, "Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote"

Wednesday, July 24 The museum

Reading: Svetlana Alpers, "The museum as a way of seeing";

Alexander Provan, "Unknown makers"

Recommended: Douglas Crimp, "On the museum's ruins"

Week 13: Art outside the museum

Monday, July 29 Participatory art and activism

Reading: Claire Bishop, "Participation and spectacle: where are we now?"; various, "Occupy Wall Street: a questionnaire" (in *October*)

Wednesday, July 31 The Internet and digital distribution

Reading: Hito Steyerl, "In defense of the poor image"; Seth Price, "Dispersion"; Jon Ippolito, "Ten myths of internet art"

Week 14: Talking about art, conclusion

TUESDAY, August 6 Artspeak

Reading: Alix Rule and David Levine, "International art English"; Arnold Isenberg, "Critical communication"

THURSDAY, August 8th Make-up class and exam review