

PHIL5308: CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY—THE AESTHETICS OF POP CULTURE

Fall 2016

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00–3:20

Eng-Phil 150

Instructor

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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-11:00

Course Description

Analytic philosophy has long held a prejudice against popular culture and the “low” arts in particular: Hollywood movies, rock music, comic books, video games, popular novels, television. The more popular they became, it seems, the less philosophers wanted to acknowledge them. But a growing number of philosophers are spending more and more of their time looking at the popular and mass arts, and finding unique philosophical insights and challenges therein. In this course, we will look at some of the philosophical work from the last quarter century focused on the popular culture and arts—the arts that most people (including most of us) spend most of their time with. About the first half of the course will be spent analyzing the nature of popular art, its particular value, the distinction between art and entertainment, and between “high” and “low” art. The second half of the course will look at current philosophical issues in some particular forms of popular art including television, “junk fiction,” detective stories, and rock music.

Course Requirements

<i>Assessment Method</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Reflection Papers	25 x 1% = 25%
Research Papers	2 x 25% = 50%
Participation	25%

Reflection Papers

For each class, you are required to write a short (one- to two-page, double-spaced) summary of and reflection on the reading(s) for the day. This does not need to be an exhaustive analysis, but should focus on the key argument(s) or debate, and lay out any questions or insights you have about it. After our first class, we meet 25 times during the course of the semester. Each reflection paper is worth 1% of your final grade (for a total of 25%).

Research Papers

You are required to write two longer research papers: the first on the nature of mass and popular art (due Thursday, October 20); the second on some particular form of popular art, either a form covered in the course, or another form which presents interesting philosophical problems (due Tuesday, December 13). Each of these papers should be 18-22 pages in length. Although not a requirement, I strongly recommend you meet with me more than once while you are developing your ideas and writing drafts. Each research paper is worth 25% of your final grade.

Participation

The final 25% of your grade is your participation grade. Participation includes attendance, doing the assigned readings *before* the class in which the reading shall be discussed, taking active part in class discussion, and meeting with me about your work in progress. For each class you miss without authorized excuse, your participation grade will be deducted 1%.

Special Accommodations

Students with disabilities that require special class or exam accommodations must present a form from AccessTECH Disability Support Program specifying the details during the first week of classes. Their offices are located in 335 West Hall. See www.accesstech.dsa.ttu.edu.

You will not be penalized for any absences due to religious observances. However, it is your responsibility to inform me in advance of any intended absences for religious observance *as soon as possible* so that we can make other arrangements. As well, it remains your responsibility to have read the material assigned for that day, to turn in any assignments on time, and to obtain any notes from one of your classmates for classes missed.

Classroom Courtesy

Please be courteous to your fellow students and avoid unnecessary disruptions. Arrive on time, leave on time, and *turn off your cell phone during class*. Note that if your cell phone rings during class, *I will answer it*. Laptops are permitted in class, but please do not abuse this privilege. Text-messaging is *not* permitted during my class. If you are seen text-messaging during class-time, your participation grade will be deducted 1 point. This is your only warning.

Academic Integrity and Irresponsibility

I take incidents of academic misconduct *very seriously*. These include but are not restricted to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and fabrication. Penalties are dependent on the nature of the misconduct, and may involve disciplinary proceedings with the Student Judicial Programs. Knowing what constitutes academic misconduct is *your responsibility*. If you have a concern about what constitutes academic dishonesty *prior to turning in an assignment*, please see me, and I will be happy to help you. For more information, see <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentjudicialprograms/academicinteg.php>.

Readings & Schedule

All readings for the course will be made available as PDFs.

Topic	Date	Readings
Introduction	Tu 08/30	<i>No Readings</i>
The Nature of Mass & Popular Art	Th 09/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”• Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered”
	Tu 09/06	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theodor W. Adorno, “The Schema of Mass Culture”
	Th 09/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marshall McLuhan, <i>Understanding Media</i>, Chapters 1 and 2
	Tu 09/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abraham Kaplan, “The Aesthetics of the Popular Arts”• David Novitz, “Ways of Artmaking: The High and the Popular in Art”
	Th 09/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ted Cohen: “High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art”• Ted Cohen: “High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences”

	Tu 09/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noël Carroll, “The Nature of Mass Art” • David Novitz, “Noël Carroll’s Theory of Mass Art”
	Th 09/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noël Carroll, “Mass Art, High Art, and the Avant-Garde: A Response to David Novitz” • Noël Carroll, “The Ontology of Mass Art”
	Tu 09/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Andrew Fisher, “On Carroll’s Enfranchisement of Mass Art as Art” • Noël Carroll, “Mass Art as Art: A Response to John Fisher”
	Th 09/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richard Shusterman, “Popular Art and Entertainment Value” • Richard Shusterman, “Entertainment: A Question for Aesthetics”
	Tu 10/04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • William Irwin, “Philosophy as/and/of Popular Culture” • Ted Cohen, “Liking What’s Good: Why Should We?”
	Th 10/06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roger Scruton, <i>An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture</i>, Chapters 9 and 10 • Andy Hamilton, “Scruton’s Philosophy of Culture: Elitism, Populism, and Classic Art”
Television	Tu 10/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanley Cavell, “The Fact of Television” • Alexander Nehamas, “Plato and the Mass Media”
	Th 10/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umberto Eco, “Chance and Plot: Television and Aesthetics”
Popular Film	Tu 10/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanley Cavell, “Pursuits of Happiness: A Reading of <i>The Lady Eve</i>” • Stanley Cavell, “North by Northwest”
	Th 10/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richard Allen, “Hitchcock and Cavell”
Comics	Tu 10/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greg Hayman and Henry John Pratt, “What Are Comics?” • Aaron Meskin, “Defining Comics?”
	Th 10/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roy T. Cook, “Do Comics Require Pictures? Or Why <i>Batman #663</i> is a Comic”
Junk Fiction	Tu 11/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas J. Roberts, <i>An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction</i>, Chapters 1 and 8
	Th 11/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noël Carroll, “The Paradox of Junk Fiction”
Serial Fictions	Tu 11/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christy Mag Uidhir, “How to Frame Serial Art” • Henry John Pratt, “Why Serials Are Killer”
	Th 11/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roy T. Cook, “Canonicity and Normativity in Massive, Serialized, Collaborative Fiction”

11/15, 11/17: No Class

Murder Mysteries	Tu 11/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geoffrey Hartman, “Literature High and Low” • Alan H. Goldman, “The Appeal of the Mystery”
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11/23-11/27: No Class

Pop Music	Tu 11/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richard Shusterman, “Form and Funk: The Aesthetic Challenge of Popular Art” • Stephen Davies, “Rock versus Classical Music”
	Th 12/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theodore Gracyk, “Valuing and Evaluating Popular Music”
Fandom	Tu 12/06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darren Hudson Hick & Craig Derksen (2012): “Righteous Art Anger”