

SYLLABUS: PHILOSOPHY OF ART

TEXTS: Required: Van Laar & Diepeveen, Active Sights: Art as Social Interaction, Art With A Difference. Sheppard, Aesthetics. Gablik, The Reenchantment of Art. Forsberg, Supplement for Philosophy 255. Recommended: Maynard & Feagin, Aesthetics: A Reader.

DESCRIPTION:

What the course IS NOT: It is not just talking about art. It is not just talking about how you feel about a particular work of art. It is not an art history class. It is not an art class. It is not a slide show. It is not meant to be mere entertainment. In short, it is not going to be a loose or unguided class in which just expressing a feeling or opinion is all that you have to do. Furthermore, it is not a seminar class; nor is it a lecture class - though elements of both types of classes will be used.

What the course IS: It is a serious philosophical investigation of the nature and value of art and theories about it. It is a serious philosophical investigation of questions surrounding the history of art, questions of the obligations of artists to society or vice-versa, and issues surrounding the practice of art. It is a class in which there will be a lot of discussion, exchange of personal opinions, analysis of art itself, an analysis of individual artistic objects, and I hope it will be entertaining. However, all these activities will be carried on using philosophical tools like critical thinking, formal analysis of art works, informal logic and the like. It is a class in which you will be expected to defend and argue for your opinions and views, not merely state them. It is a class in which you can expect guest speakers and artists with whom you can interact. It is a class in which you can expect a good deal of group work and an atmosphere that is "freer" than the usual lecture course, though there will be some lectures. It is a class in which student responsibility for the success of the class will be high, but not to the same degree as in a seminar class.

Elements of the course and goals:

1. Definition, function and processes of art. Here we will examine the question of what art is and how one might distinguish the artistic enterprise from other sorts of human endeavors. In examining these questions, we will look primarily at the Sheppard book, which deals with the defining characteristics of the artistic object, the limitations we can justifiably put on the notion of art, the nature of artistic process, the aesthetic theories that attempt particular definitions of the artistic object, and the social conditions or context in which art is defined, functions, and is evaluated. The Van Laar books address some of these issues, as well.

Some specific issues include: Is there a single trait or set of traits that all artistic objects must possess in order to be called art? Is the definition of 'art' objective or subjective, absolute or contextual, and are there any objective criteria by which one can determine whether a work qualifies as art? These topics are found in Sheppard, some sections of Van Laar, and in the optional text by Maynard & Feagin.

We will also analyze a number of historically important philosophic or aesthetic theories that attempt to find and explain the essence of the artistic process and the nature of the artistic work. Included here are: art as emotion, art as imitation, art as intuition, art as well ordered form, and art as beauty. The philosophers we will discuss include: Plato, Aristotle, Kant,

Croce, Wittgenstein, Beardsley, Danto and Dewey. In addition, we will look at the theories of non-philosophers such as Tolstoy, Fry, Gablik, Bell and others as presented in various texts.

The goal is to allow you to understand, analyze and defend your analyses of philosophical questions about the definition, function and processes of art.

2. Aesthetic evaluation of art. In this section we will examine the notion, nature, objects, and techniques of art criticism. We will look at a number of theories that seek to define not 'art', but 'good art', and which set of criteria by which to judge this. This will involve us in the question of whether or not there is any difference in the criteria of art as relative to the medium. That is, is there one standard by which all artistic objects should be judged, or should there be different standards for painting, music, literature, sculpture, etc.? Some techniques or methods for analyzing art works will be explained and used in conjunction with these topics.

Some issues here include: the nature of the aesthetic object, aesthetic experience, aesthetic value, and the methods of applying these concepts when evaluating works of art. Also we will look at the critical process in terms of such as issues as: whether the critic should take the artist's biography or intentions into account, and whether there is such a thing as **THE** artistic object.

The question of whether or not different standards apply to different media is covered in the various of the books, Wittgenstein's remarks on appreciation and intentionality, and articles from outside sources.

The goal is to introduce you to the aesthetic evaluation of art, to allow you develop your own analyses of the philosophical questions about the notion, nature, objects and techniques of art criticism.

3. Does art perform a valuable social role beyond producing beauty or should it not even try to be anything more than the production of saleable works or the manipulation of the formal elements of an artistic medium? Here we will address the question of whether or not artists perform a valuable social function beyond producing artistic objects. Should artists act as social critics? Should they offer personal psychological insights or analysis for the public? Does the public, government or other agencies have the right to censor, limit funding or otherwise regulate art and artists? The Van Laar book will be the focus of this segment of the course, as well as some excerpts from Wittgenstein and other outside sources (xeroxed interviews with artists or guest artists that you can interact with on these questions, for example). Gablik and both VanLaar books cover these issues.

The goal here is help you raise, understand, learn how to analyze philosophical issues concerning the social function of art, and develop your own conclusions and defense of your own positions on these issues.

4. How to apply critical thinking generally and as specifically related to philosophical/aesthetic analysis, argumentation, discussion, writing, and justification. You will be given opportunities to apply different techniques of critical thinking to various important aesthetic issues and topics. The Supplement is the primary source for this part of the course. We will also raise the question of whether critical thinking and such detailed logical analysis is even appropriate to the evaluation and appreciation of art. The question of whether art can be logically analyzed at all, or whether it exists and operates on a non-rational level will also be discussed.

The aims are to develop your ability to apply classic theories to aesthetic issues, to be able to critically assess other people's analyses of art and aesthetics, and to be able to understand and analyze philosophical articles. The overall aim is to develop your critical thinking skills in defense of your own analyses and opinions about aesthetic issues and art

itself.

Throughout all the above tasks, we will examine works of art, hear from artists about their work and aesthetic attitudes, see some films and focus on various art forms that serve as the background and subject matter of course.

METHODS:

Since the material we are covering is of a number of different types we will use a number of different approaches in class. Primarily we will use a readings and discussion format in which the books/articles and works of art will be discussed, evaluated, and criticized. Of course, since aesthetics or criticism cannot proceed except in the presence of the artistic object, we will use slides, audio and video tapes, and other media to examine works of art in conjunction with the readings. I plan, also, to have guest lecturers and question/answer sessions with the guests. Finally, you may be asked to present opinions and arguments of your own to the class for their critique and discussion.

The discussion format entails that you read the assigned case studies and articles before class and come willing and able to present your analysis of each. The discussions may take the form of Socratic dialogue, open exchange of opinions and objections, or more formal debates that utilize a group study approach. There may be one or two such formal debates during the semester (instructions for these debates are covered in the **Supplement**). Some short introductions to issues or topics will be presented in lectures.

Emphasis will be placed on critical thinking and argument analysis. Some critical thinking/analysis assignments will be take home, others in class; some will be graded, others will serve as ungraded background for discussions or graded assignments. Throughout the semester we will use the techniques of critical thinking to assess our own arguments and those of the authors in the text.

The focus will be on a group approach to learning the basics of philosophical and aesthetic analysis. The reasons for this are: 1) philosophy is most effective as a group endeavor; 2) group discussion is good philosophy since a large group of informed people, who share a common problem and a familiarity with the issues can formulate more diverse and helpful approaches to an issue than can a single person working alone; 3) in-class discussions are very important since you are helping each other master philosophy and aesthetic analyses. The discussions train your mind in the techniques of sound critical analysis, while preparing you for the task of writing down your own opinions and justifications. The ungraded writing assignments help prepare you to discuss your views with others and serve as practice runs for graded papers. You have as much, if not more, to learn from each other as from me; I will assist you in learning together, but the primary job is yours as a group, so attendance and preparation are important.

EXAMS AND PAPERS:

The grade for the course is computed by averaging the grades earned for the following:

(80%) Papers, "Case" Analyses, Presentations, Exams, Article Analyses, Exercises:

These include standard analysis papers, in class or take home exams, a class report, critical analyses of articles, and other critical thinking exercises. The types and number of graded assignments will be determined during the semester (it depends on how quickly we move through the material). These will be weighted as appropriate.

(20%) Class participation and peer grades: Class participation is determined by my evaluation of your contributions to the discussions, attendance and the quality of your participation in other in-class activities. The peer grades are based on the evaluations of your group members during debate preparations and other group work. My evaluation of your participation will be added to the overall peer grade you receive. The two elements will each be half of your participation grade.

The grading scale is: A = 94+, A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82; C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72; D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62, E = -59.

The paper grades will be assigned in the following manner. I will read your paper twice, making comments and assigning the letter grade, then assign a numerical grade reflecting the letter grade. Suppose the letter grade is a B+. I would then assign a numerical grade that reflects the B+, the range of a B+ would be 87-89 (a B- = 80-82, a B = 83-86); if the paper is very close to the A- range, I would give it an 89, less close but still a high B would get an 88, a little less close would get an 87 (a solid B paper would get somewhere between 83-86, etc.). I will try to assign you the most points that I think the paper deserves. To compute your final grade you simply average the **numerical** scores (note: a B+ is still a B, e.g. an 89 average is not the same as a 90.1 average).

Grade Profiles

The Grade of E: E level work fails to display an understanding of the basic nature of philosophical thinking or of philosophical topics and issues. The work is vague, imprecise, and unreasoned - as much at the end of the course as at the beginning. There is little evidence that the student is genuinely engaged in the task of taking charge of his or her philosophical thinking. Many assignments seem to have been done with no thought or effort, the student simply going through the motions without putting any significant effort into thinking his or her way through the issues or assigned tasks. Consequently, the student is not analyzing philosophical issues clearly, not formulating philosophical information accurately, not distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information, not identifying key philosophical assumptions, not clarifying key philosophical concepts, not identifying relevant philosophically competing points of view (or arguments), not reasoning carefully from clearly stated premises, nor tracing philosophical implications and consequences. The student's work does not display recognizable philosophical reasoning and analytic skills.

The Grade of D: D level work shows only a minimal level of understanding of what philosophical thinking is, along with the development of some, but very limited, philosophical thinking skills or abilities. D work at the end of the course shows only occasional use of philosophical thinking skills, but frequent uncritical philosophical thinking. Most assignments are poorly done. There is some, but very little, evidence that the student is reasoning through the assignment. Often the student seems to have merely gone through the motions, carrying out the directions poorly or to a minimal level without getting into the spirit or depth of the assignment. D level work rarely shows any effort to take charge of ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. The student rarely analyzes philosophical issues clearly and precisely, almost never formulates philosophical information accurately, rarely distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, rarely recognizes key questionable assumptions,

almost never clarifies key philosophical concepts effectively, frequently fails to use philosophical language in keeping with established professional usage, only rarely identifies relevant competing philosophical points of view (or arguments), and almost never reasons carefully from clearly stated premises, or recognizes important implications and consequences. D level work does not show good philosophical reasoning or grasp of philosophical information and frequently displays poor reasoning or little grasp of philosophical information.

The Grade of C: C level work illustrates some but inconsistent achievement in grasping what philosophical thinking is, along with the development of modest or average philosophical reasoning skills and grasp of philosophical information. C level work at the end of the semester shows some emerging philosophical thinking skills, but also some obvious weaknesses as well. Though some assignments are reasonably well done, others are poorly done, or mediocre at best. There are more than occasional lapses in reasoning. Though philosophical terms and distinctions are sometimes used effectively, they are sometimes used very ineffectively. Thinking lacks depth, even when displaying moderate levels of understanding and reasoning. Only on occasion does C level work display a mind taking charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. Only occasionally does C level work display intellectual discipline and clarity. The level student only sometimes analyzes philosophical issues and arguments clearly and precisely, formulates philosophical information accurately, distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, recognizes key questionable assumptions, clarifies key philosophical concepts effectively, uses philosophical language in keeping with established professional usage, identifies relevant philosophical points of view (or arguments), and reasons carefully from clearly stated premises, or recognizes important philosophical implications and consequences. Sometimes the C student seems to simply go through the motions of the assignment, carrying out the instructions without depth or insight. On the whole, C level work shows modest or average philosophical reasoning and analytic skills, while sometimes displaying weak reasoning and analytic skills.

The Grade of B: B level work represents demonstrable achievement in grasping what philosophical thinking is, along with the clear demonstration of a range of specific philosophical thinking skills and abilities. B level work at the end of the semester is, on the whole, clear, precise, and well reasoned, though with occasional lapses into weak reasoning. Generally, philosophical terms and distinctions are used effectively. The work demonstrates a mind beginning to take charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. The student often analyzes philosophical issues clearly and precisely, often formulates philosophical information accurately, usually distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, often recognizes key questionable assumptions, usually clarifies key philosophical concepts effectively, typically uses philosophical language in keeping with established professional usage, frequently identifies relevant philosophically competing points of view (and arguments), and shows a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, as well as a noticeable sensitivity to important implications and consequences. B level work displays good philosophical reasoning and analytic skills. The weakness most often noted will be lack of great depth or breadth, though some of each may be shown.

The Grade of A: A level work demonstrates real achievement in grasping what philosophical thinking is, along with the clear development of a range of specific philosophical thinking skills or abilities. The work at the end of the course is, on the whole, clear, precise, and well reasoned, though with some lapses into weak reasoning. Philosophical terms and distinctions

are used effectively. The work demonstrates a mind well into the task of taking charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. The student often analyzes philosophical issues (and arguments) clearly and precisely, often formulates philosophical information accurately, usually distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, often recognizes key questionable assumptions, usually clarifies key philosophical concepts effectively, typically uses philosophical language in keeping with established professional usage, frequently identifies relevant competing philosophical points of view (and arguments), and shows a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, as well as a noticeable sensitivity to important implications and consequences. A level work displays excellent philosophical reasoning and analytic skills. The work is consistently at a high level of intellectual excellence. A level work also consistently displays great depth and breadth, as well as originality of thought.

EXPLANATION OF PLAGIARISM:

Due to the proliferation of Internet and computer data-base articles or resources, and the resultant temptation to misuse such resources, you should read the following policies concerning plagiarism carefully. Briefly defined, plagiarism is: ***Representing someone else's work as your own; this includes falsifying sources or quotations, purchasing of papers from outside suppliers, downloading papers from the Net, having someone else write your paper for you, or copying someone else's work without attribution.***

Some things that you should be aware of when deciding if you must cite a source or if a particular work of yours contains any plagiarized materials:

1. If you have either directly quoted or paraphrased an author or outside source, you must cite the source clearly, using an acceptable citation format. If there is any question in your mind that a source needs to be cited, **CITE IT!** There is no penalty for citing a source when unnecessary, but there is for not citing one when necessary. Take no chances.
2. Any material taken from or found on the Internet and used in your paper, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, must be cited according to the same rules outlined in #1 above. Material on the Internet is **NOT** there for public use without citation. The same rules that govern the use of printed or spoken material govern use of Internet material. When in doubt **CITE IT!**
3. Any paper that is completely copied from any source constitutes plagiarism and will result in a failing grade for the course. Even if this were not plagiarism, there is no paper for this class that is not supposed to be your own work and thought, therefore turning in someone else's work can never fulfill the assignment.
4. If you are quoting someone's spoken words (from an in class lecture, for example), be sure to cite this fact. Here you may simply write: "Oral lecture" or "Personal conversation" or some other appropriate description indicating that you are quoting someone's spoken words.

To be clear as to penalties for plagiarism: these are up to the discretion of the instructor and there may be mitigating circumstances involved. If the plagiarism is the result of a simple error (typing, forgetting to include a footnote citation, unclear citation, etc...) and is not deemed to be intentional, the penalty may be slight. If the plagiarism is determined to be extensive,

intentional, or the result of other forms of cheating, the penalty will be failure for the entire course. But be very clear that if an entire paper is copied, reproduced, downloaded, borrowed or otherwise taken from some outside source, this will mean an "E" for the class - there are no acceptable excuses for this action. Determination of the seriousness of the plagiarism is up to the instructor. Rulings are subject to the appeals process as outlined in the Delta Senate Handbook.

POLICIES OF NOTE:

Attendance will be taken and class participation will be noted. Both will be figured into your final average as explained in the section "Exams and Papers" above. The reason for this policy is simply that this is a discussion class in which you help each other learn, if you are not there or cannot participate when asked, you haven't helped anyone (least of all yourself). Philosophy in this class is a cooperative effort, to cooperate means you must be in class and prepared. Even if you feel you have mastered the material on your own, you do have an obligation to help others who may not have as easy a time learning on their own; share your abilities and knowledge and it will benefit you more than you might imagine.

Extensions will be given for good reasons, without penalty, only if you notify me ahead of the due date of the paper. If you simply turn in your paper late, without notifying me ahead of time, you will lose 5% up to 3 weeks; 10% after 3 weeks; papers not turned in will be averaged as a zero unless very special circumstances are involved. No penalty applies to those who ask for and receive an extension ahead of time and who turn their papers in on the extended due date.

All papers must be typed or produced on a computer. Handwritten papers or papers done on sheets torn from notebooks will not be accepted; this does not apply to take-home worksheets or in-class exams.

Ungraded assignments that are collected will be recorded. Missed assignments will count as an absence.

No exam scores will be dropped. No extra credit will be given. No rewrites will be allowed unless the assignment specifically included this option to begin with.

Courtesy in discussions and debate is expected. When someone is talking, do not interrupt. Raise your hand when you wish to comment and you will be called on as soon as possible, or else join the discussion when there is a pause. Listen to what others are saying before you try to respond. Do not talk privately to others while discussions or lectures are in progress. I may not correct you openly but I will take disruptive behavior into account when deciding class participation grades - being disruptive will count against you.

Incomplete grades will only be given if you have requested one, I will not simply turn in an incomplete if you have missing work; in such cases the missing work will be averaged as a zero and your grade, including the zeros as part of the average, will be turned in. If you request an incomplete ahead of time, one will be granted. Be aware, however, that the track record for completing incompletes is under 50%.

I reserve the right to alter anything in this syllabus, with reasonable notice, under appropriate and necessary circumstances.