

Philosophy of Art

Philosophy 211
Fall 2020

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Course Description

This course examines the nature of art and its significance.

Weeks 1–3 consider the value of art and the value of thinking about art with others. Weeks 4 & 5 consider the relationship between reproductions and originals, and the question of when an artwork is actually finished. Weeks 6–8 consider the natures of ruins, monuments, and street art, and how we respond to them. We approach these questions through a careful examination of key texts and arguments in contemporary aesthetics.



Street Art & Graffiti in Vilnius, Lithuania | Photo credit: Brandon Polite

By the end of the term, you should be able to

- **Articulate** some important theories in the philosophy of art.
- **Articulate** salient objections to some important theories in the philosophy of art.
- **Defend** your own view on a significant issue in the philosophy of art.

COURSE details

Website: Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

Readings: All readings are available as PDF's on Google Classroom. Ancillary materials will be posted on Google Classroom occasionally, as needed.

Asynchronous Learning: The research I have done on teaching online, as well as my experience in the Spring, strongly suggests that asynchronous courses are the most effective way to promote student learning. As such, there will be **no** point during the term when you will be **required** to meet online via Zoom. Instead, you will be responsible for completing each week's readings and assignments *on your own time* and for contributing to the online discussion forum on our Google Classroom page *regularly*. The latter will be the primary means through which this somewhat scattered collection of individuals will function collectively as a class. However, I strongly encourage you to talk to one another, one-on-one or in small or even large groups, via whatever electronic means works best for you—whatever the kids these days use, as it were—and will gladly help you find classmates to connect if you request it.

Weekly Zoom Meetings: Although you are **not required** to attend, for the first eight weeks of the term I will host a Zoom meeting each Friday at our regularly scheduled class time: 1:20–2:30. (No meeting will be held during Week 9, as I will be participating in a virtual conference.) You will not be penalized for not attending these meetings; however, you are encouraged to join them, as we will discuss whatever questions you may have about our readings during them. If you do not attend, the meetings will be recorded and posted on Classroom for you to watch at your own convenience.

Office Hours: Due to difficulties with work/life balance created by the pandemic, specifically having my children at home with me all day every day, I will not be holding regular online office hours. Instead, if you would like to speak with me about any matter that wouldn't work well over email, please contact me and we will set up a time to talk over Zoom. But feel free to email about any matter whenever you like, and I'll try my best to respond within 24 hours.

Course Requirements

Online Discussion Forum (70 pts)

Each week, you will select **one** significant passage from **one** of that week's readings, and write a 300–400 word response to it. A passage may be chosen because it rings true or seems wrong, it is illuminating or confusing, it resonates or conflicts with another philosopher's view, etc. Whatever the nature of your response, it should reflect your familiarity with the entire reading, not just the first few pages.

You must (i) post your response on Google Classroom as a prompt for discussion in that week's "question" assignment; (ii) reply to at least two of your classmates' prompts; and (iii) reply to at least two of your classmates' replies, either to your own prompt or to one or two of your classmate(s)'s prompts.

Each **Prompt** is worth 6 pts, and each **Reply** is worth 1 pt. So, your contributions to the online discussion forum each week is worth 10 pts total.

You are allowed to take one week off from the discussion forum (out of our eight weeks) without penalty.

Term Paper (30 pts) You will develop some of the ideas you have been working through on the online discussion forum into a 2000–2400-word (or 7–8-page) term paper. This paper will follow the traditional philosophical format of interpreting one or more philosophical positions and developing your own argument in response to them.

Further information on all assignments can be found on Google Classroom.

Late Assignments and Extensions

Due to the unprecedented nature of contemporary life, my policy on late work is lax. You can turn in online discussion prompts and replies up to a week late without penalty (no explanation needed). Any prompts turned in after a week will be accepted for 2/3 credit and replies for 3/4 credit. If you want to negotiate alternate deadlines for *any assignment for any reason*, get in touch with me as soon as you can.

Due by each Friday at 11:59 p.m.

- Online Discussion Prompts

Due by each Sunday at 11:59 p.m.

- Online Discussion Replies

Syllabus

Week 1 (Sep. 14–20) | *Disagreeing About Art*

Elizabeth Cantalamessa, "Is This Really Art? Aesthetic Disagreement and Conceptual Negotiation" | [link](#)
Brandon Polite & Matthew Strohl, "Arguing About Art on the Internet, Part 1" | [link](#)

Week 2 (Sep. 21–27) | *Appreciating Flawed Art and Bad Art*

Eileen John, "Learning from Aesthetic Disagreement and Flawed Artworks"
John Dyck & Matt Johnson, "Appreciating Bad Art"

Week 3 (Sep. 28–Oct. 4) | *Aesthetic Value*

Alex King, "The Virtue of Subtlety and the Vice of a Heavy Hand"
Dominic McIver Lopes, "Aesthetic Experts, Guides to Value"

Week 4 (Oct. 5–11) | *Copies and Forgeries*

Sherri Irvin, "Appropriation and Authorship in Contemporary Art"
Byung-Chul Han, "The Copy Is the Original" | [link](#)

Look at Art!!!



(Image source: [Medium](#))

Our readings are full of examples. Try your best to track down online the ones you think are most important or interesting and spend some time with them, as this will give you a better sense of what our authors are discussing. Moreover, in these troubled times, regularly experiencing **beautiful**, **cool**, and **amazing** things is a great idea!

Week 5 (Oct. 12–18) | *When Is a Work of Art Finished?*

Darren Hudson Hick, "When Is a Work of Art Finished?"
Paisley Livingston & Darren Hudson Hick, Discussion

Week 6 (Oct. 19–25) | *The Aesthetics of Ruins and Absence*

Carolyn Korsmeyer, "The Triumph of Time: Romanticism Redux"
Jeanette Bicknell, "Architectural Ghosts"
Jennifer Judkins, "On Things That Are Not There Anymore"
Elizabeth Scarbrough, "Unimagined Beauty"

Week 7 (Oct. 26–Nov. 1) | *Monuments*

C. Thi Nguyen, "Monuments as Commitments: How Art Speaks to Groups and How Groups Think in Art"
Elizabeth Scarbrough, "Burying the Dead Monuments" | [link](#)

Week 8 (Nov. 2–8) | *Street Art*

Nicholas Alden Riggle, "Street Art: The Transformation of Common Places"
Sondra Bacharach, "Street Art and Consent"

Honor Code

This course operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your prompts and term paper. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

Week 9 (Nov. 9–15) | Term Paper

No readings | No meeting | **Work on your term paper!!!**

Week 10 (Nov. 16–22) | Term Paper

No readings | No meeting | **Work on your term paper!!!**

Term Paper

Due by no later than 10 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 22: the end of the final exam period.

Summary

- An Online Discussion Prompt & 4 Replies are due 7 out of 8 weeks | **10 pts/week**
- 7–8-page Term Paper | **30 pts**
- Weekly Zoom meetings (Fridays, 1:20–2:30) are encouraged | **not required**



Cildo Meireles, *Babel* (2001): detail
Tate Modern
London, UK
Photo credit: Brandon Polite

Final Note

Several of our authors have agreed to interact with us throughout the term. I will select one of the most helpful or challenging comments from the Online Discussion Forum most weeks and send it to the relevant author. I will then record a brief video with them in which we discuss their response to the comment. Finally, I will post the video on Classroom as a prompt for further reflection. So, make your contributions to the discussion forum (your prompts *and* replies) as thoughtful as you can!

grading scale

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|----|-------------|----|-------------|
| A+ | 100 – 97.7 | C+ | 79.9 – 77.7 |
| A | 97.6 – 93 | C | 77.6 – 73.4 |
| A- | 93.3 – 90 | C- | 73.3 – 70 |
| B+ | 89.9 – 87.7 | D+ | 69.9 – 67.7 |
| B | 87.6 – 83.4 | D | 67.6 – 63.4 |
| B- | 83.3 – 80 | D- | 63.3 – 60 |