

Tacky, *Trashy*, Campy, Kitsch

Preceptorial 161
Fall 2022



Image credit: [Smithsonian Magazine](#)



Image credit: [GQ](#)

Meeting Time & Locations

MWF 12–1:10 p.m. | OM 201

Tu 12:45–3:50 p.m. | GDH 304

Office Hours

MWF 2:40–3:30 | OM 304

Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite

email: bpolite@knox.edu

Co-leader:

Website

[Google Classroom](#)

Course Key

Course Description

This course will explore what makes low culture “low” and why it’s more than merely “okay” to prefer low culture items to their high culture counterparts: trashy movies instead of cinematic masterpieces; country music instead of opera; cheesy puns instead of charming witticisms; Cheesy Gordita Crunches instead of haute cuisine; and the like. In doing so, we will also consider whether you should ever feel guilt about your “guilty pleasures,” whether liking something “ironically” actually involves liking it, and whether snobbery is ever okay.

Objectives

In this course we will focus on writing and strategies that you might use to move from informal writing to more advanced stages of academic writing. This course also serves as an introduction to a liberal arts education that will help you make connections between the different areas of study at the college level while you also develop the fundamental skills of **careful reading, precise writing, engaged listening, considered discussion, & critical thinking**. By these means, you will cultivate habits of mind central to the value of **academic integrity**, such as proper attribution & correct citation.

course details

Masks: Masks are required in class at all times. Your mask should be at least surgical quality: e.g., KN95, KF94, & N-95. Cloth and paper masks are ineffective at preventing the spread of Covid-19.

Required Texts: Rax King, [Tacky: A Love Letter to the Worst Culture We Have to Offer](#)
Matt Strohl, [Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies](#)
All other readings are available as PDF's on Google Classroom.

Interviews: I have interviewed some philosophers about work of theirs that relates to our class topics as part of my YouTube series, [Polite Conversations: Philosophers Discuss the Arts \(PC:PDA\)](#). These videos are assigned throughout the term (see the schedule below). Watch them at normal speed.

Course Requirements

Grades

Engagement	25%
Weekly Writing Prompts	30%
Essay 1	5%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	20%

grading scale

A+	100 – 97.7	C+	79.9 – 77.7
A	97.6 – 93.4	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

Engagement | 25%

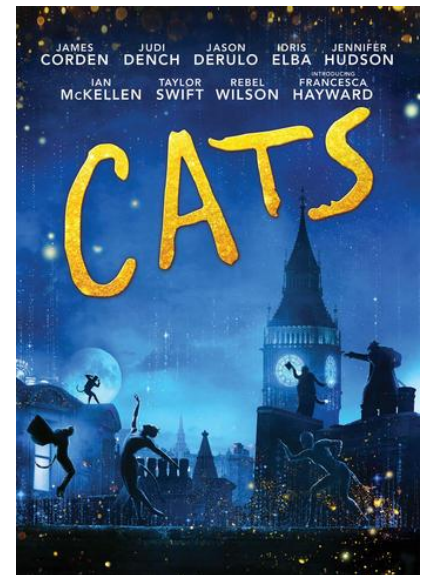
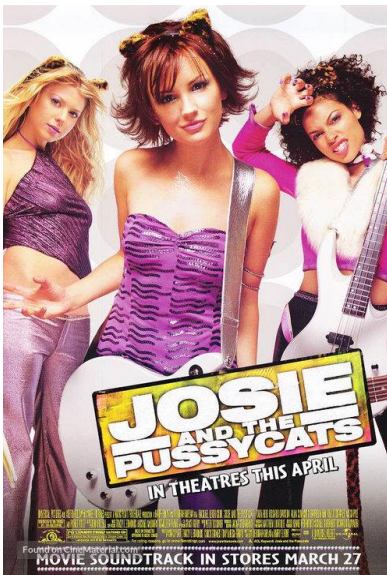
Engagement comes in many forms, not just attendance. Taken holistically, engagement includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- Preparation:** reviewing readings and materials before class
- Focus:** avoiding distractions during in-class activities
- Presence:** engaged and responsive during in-class activities
- Asking Questions:** in class, out of class, online, offline
- Listening:** hearing what others say, and also what they're not saying
- Specificity:** referring to specific ideas from readings and discussions
- Synthesizing:** making connections between readings and discussions

Essays | 45%

Essay 1 (5%) There will be one short essay of 500–600 words (2 pgs) in which you will articulate and defend a thesis.

Essays 2 & 3 (20% each) There will also be two longer essays of 1500–1850 words (5–6 pgs) each. These will go through a draft and revision process.



Weekly Writing Prompts | 30%

Each week where you don't have an essay to write, you have the opportunity to select **one** significant passage from **one** of that week's readings or a significant quote from one of that week's videos or movies, and write a **300–350 word** response to it. A passage or quote may be chosen because it rings true or seems wrong, it is illuminating or confusing, it resonates or conflicts with another author's view, etc. Whatever the nature of your response, it should reflect your familiarity with the reading/video/movie as a whole. You will post your response on Google Classroom as that week's "Writing Prompt" assignment.

Grading: Prompts will all be graded as either **Satisfactory (S)** or **Needs Work (N)**. Here are the number of S's needed to earn a particular grade: **A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2**.

These are low-stakes assignments the goal of which is to help you begin developing ideas to turn into your essays.

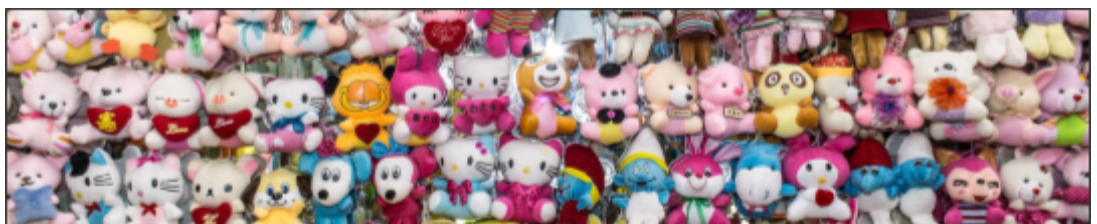
Schedule

Week 1 (Sep. 12–16) <i>Cheesiness & Country</i>	
9/12	M Elizabeth Cantalamessa, "Debating Bon Jovi's Cheesiness Will Enrich Your Conceptual Life" link PC: PDA, Ep. 11: " Disagreeing About Art A Discussion with Elizabeth Cantalamessa "
9/13	Tu *** No Meeting ***
9/14	W Nadine Hubbs, "Anything But Country"
9/16	F Further discussion Essay 1 due by no later than 11:59 p.m.
Recommended reading: Bethany Bryson, "'Anything but Heavy Metal': Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes"	
Week 2 (Sep. 19–23) <i>Consuming Culture</i>	
9/19	M Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture"
9/20	Tu *** No Meeting ***
9/21	W Andrew B. Trigg, "Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption"
9/23	F PC: PDA, Ep. 16: " Bad Art, Aesthetic Value, & the Mere Exposure Effect A Discussion with Aaron Meskin "
Recommended reading: Aaron Meskin et al., "Mere Exposure to Bad Art"	
Week 3 (Sep. 26–30) <i>Valuing & Evaluating Culture</i>	
9/26	M Alex King, "The Taco Bell Beef Crunchy Taco" PC: PDA, Ep. 05: " Aesthetic Subtlety and Heavy-Handedness A Discussion with Alex King "
9/27	Tu *** No Meeting ***
9/28	W Rax King, <i>Tacky</i> , pp. 9–42
9/30	F Rax King, <i>Tacky</i> , pp. 43–57 & 58–72
Recommended reading: Ted Cohen, "High & Low Thinking about High & Low Art"	
Week 4 (Oct. 3–7) <i>Embracing Low Culture</i>	
10/3	M Rax King, <i>Tacky</i> , pp. 85–101 & 180–193
10/6	Tu Movie screening: <i>Josie and the Pussy Cats</i> (2001)
10/5	W Discuss <i>Josie and the Pussy Cats</i>
10/7	F How to Write a Preceptorial Paper + Essay 2 Thesis Workshop
Recommended reading: Ting Cho Lau, "Rethinking Low, Middle, & High Art"	
Week 5 (Oct. 10–14) <i>Essay 2</i>	
10/10	M Writing Conferences
10/11	Tu Writing Conferences
10/12	W *** No Meeting ***
10/14	F Essay 2 is due by no later than 11:59 p.m.

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Image Credit: [Taco Bell Wiki](#)



Tchotchkes in a market in Yiwu, China. Image credit: [NYT](#)

Late Assignments

There is enough flexibility built into both the assignments and the structure of the course that you shouldn't find it too difficult to turn the work in on time. However, if you feel like you need some additional time and would like to negotiate reasonable, alternative deadlines for any assignment for any reason, including if you have academic accommodations, get in touch with me as soon as you can—preferably before it's due.

Writing Resources

, the class's co-leader, will be available to help you prepare your writing tasks before you turn them in and help you understand the revisions you need to make afterward.

Writing Tutors are available (often on a first-come, first-served basis) in the **Center for Teaching and Learning**, M-F, 10:30 a.m.– 4 p.m.; and in **Seymour Library**, Su-M, 7–9 p.m. (Learning Commons, 1st floor), and Tu-Th, 7–9 p.m. (Red Room, 2nd floor).

Week 6 (Oct. 17–21) | *Guilty Pleasures & Camp*

10/17 M Melinda Reid, "Guilty Pleasures Revisited"
10/18 Tu *** No Meeting ***
10/19 W No Class (Fall Institute)
10/21 F Jack Babuscio, "The Cinema of Camp (aka Camp & the Gay Sensibility)"

Recommended reading: Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp"

Week 7 (Oct. 24–28) | *The Avant-Garde & Loving Bad Movies*

10/24 M Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde"
10/25 Tu **Movie screening:** *Cats* (2019)
10/26 W Discuss *Cats*
10/28 F Matt Strohl, *Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies*, Ch. 1

Recommended reading: Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"

Week 8 (Oct. 31–Nov.4) | *Loving Bad Movies, continued*

10/31 M Matt Strohl, *Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies*, Ch. 2
11/1 Tu **Movie screening:** *Troll 2* (1990)
11/2 W Matt Strohl, *Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies*, Ch. 3
11/4 F Matt Strohl, *Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies*, Ch. 4

Recommended reading: Matt Strohl, *Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies*, Ch. 5

Week 9 (Nov. 7–11) | *Loving Bad Movies, continued*

11/7 M Matt Strohl, *Why It's OK to Love Bad Movies*, Ch. 6
11/8 Tu *** No Meeting ***
11/9 W Nicholas Whittaker, "How to Love: Matthew Strohl and Rax King on Bad Movies" | [link](#)
PC: PDA, Ep. 24: [Loving Bad Movies | A Discussion with Matt Strohl](#)
11/11 F **Essay 3 Thesis Workshop**

Recommended podcast: *Cows in the Field*, Ep. 57: [Twilight](#) (w Matt Strohl)

Week 10 (Nov. 14–15) | *Essay 3*

11/14 M Writing Conferences
10/15 Tu Writing Conferences
10/12 W No Meeting: Work on Your Essays!
10/14 F **Essay 2 is due by no later than 11:59 p.m.**

Finals (Nov. 18–20) | *Essay 3*

11/20 Su **Essay 3 is due by no later than 10:00 p.m.**

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 essays. 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.

Movies

We will watch three movies during the **Tuesday 5s–6 hour** slot. DVD's of the movies are on reserve in the library should you need to consult them later.

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