

PAR 316: Philosophy of Art

Term:	Spring 2021	Instructor:	Robert Smithson
Time:	TR 2-3:15pm	Email:	smithsonr@uncw.edu
Room:	BR 261	Office:	BR 266
		Office Hours:	TR 1-2 or by appointment

Course Description

This course will introduce students to major questions and themes from aesthetics and the philosophy of art. What is beauty? Is it objective or subjective? What makes something beautiful? What is it like to experience beauty, or ugliness, or the sublime? Why is beauty important to our lives? What is its relation to art? What roles does art have both in the lives of individuals and in our larger society? How are art and beauty related to truth, goodness, knowledge, self-expression, consolation, courage, authenticity, integrity, community, education, and politics?

Course Goals

1. To provide students with a philosophical overview of the roles of art and beauty in human life.
2. To develop students' philosophical writing as well as their ability to reconstruct philosophical arguments.

Grading

Three papers (4 pages each): 50% (OR, by instructor permission: one term paper of at least 12 pages, along with preliminary outline and proto-draft)

Miscellaneous art analyses: 20%

Miscellaneous homework assignments (1/2 page responses): 20%

Class attendance/participation: 10%

Attendance

The participation grade takes into account both attendance and discussion in class. Class attendance is mandatory. Students arriving late will receive reduced credit for attendance that day. Students leaving class early will also receive reduced credit.

The professor will accommodate a reasonable number of excused absences for religious holidays and official off-campus college business such as academic conference presentations and athletic competitions. However, students must discuss with the professor the dates of the anticipated absences no later than the last day of the drop period. Students must present to their professor written evidence of the anticipated absences and discuss with him/her how and when make-up work should be completed prior to missing the class. Students should not expect to receive allowance for excused absences if they do not meet with the professor beforehand and clarify the dates as necessary.

Absences will be addressed by the professor in accordance with his attendance policy. The professor retains the right to determine what would be considered to be a reasonable number of absences (excused or otherwise) for the course. A student will not fail a course because the number of religious observances and/or college business absences exceed the number of absences allowed, except if excessive absences make it impossible to fulfill the expectations of the course. The student's class participation grade in the course, though, may still be affected.

Honor Code

All students enrolled at UNCW are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code, which is intended to help every member of the UNCW community appreciate the high value placed on academic integrity and the means that will be employed to ensure its preservation. Students are expected to perpetuate a campus culture in which each student does his or her own work while relying on appropriate resources for assistance. In such a climate, students enjoy a special trust that they are members of a unique community in which one's thoughts and words are attributed correctly and with proper ownership, and in which there is little need for systems to sanction those who cheat. As such, all UNCW students shall commit to the principles and spirit of the Honor Code by adhering to the following pledge:

As a student at The University of North Carolina Wilmington, I am committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge. I pledge to uphold and promote the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.

More information on the Honor Code is available at the following website:

<http://www.uncw.edu/odos/honorcode/>.

Please be especially familiar with UNCW's position on plagiarism as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you take someone else's ideas and represent them as your own. Here are some examples of plagiarism:

1. You write about someone else's work in your paper and do not give them credit for it by referencing them.
2. You give a presentation and use someone else's ideas and do not state that the ideas are the other person's.
3. You get ideas from some other reference material and do not reference that material.

Accessibility Services

It is very important that this classroom be an inclusive environment that meets the learning needs of all of its students. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of academic accommodations in order to fully participate in your classes, please contact the Office of Disability Services (962-7555). Please give me a copy of the letter you receive from Office of Disability Services detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking, please make sure I have

the referral letter no fewer than three days before the test.

Title IX Statement

UNCW practices a zero tolerance policy for any kind of violent or harassing behavior. If you are experiencing an emergency of this type contact the police at 911 or UNCW CARE at 962- 2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://uncw.edu/noharm/resources/index.html>.

University Learning Center

The University Learning Center's (ULC) mission is to help students become successful, independent learners. Tutoring at the ULC is NOT remediation: the ULC offers a different type of learning opportunity for those students who want to increase the quality of their education. ULC services are free to all UNCW students and include the following:

- Learning Services (University Learning Center) <http://uncw.edu/ulc/learning/>
- Math Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/math/index.html>
- Supplemental Instruction <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/si/index.html>
- Writing Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/index.html>

Electronic Device Policy

In order to promote classroom discussion, no laptops, tablets, phones, etc. are permitted during class except by instructor permission. If you need to use technology for educational reasons, please let me know.

In order to protect the integrity of the classroom experience, the use of recording devices is limited to either the expressed permission of the faculty member or with proper documentation from the Office of Accessibility Services.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, depending on the progress of the discussion in the class. If there are changes, I will make note of them in class and will send out an email about the changes. Next to each class period, there are assigned readings, songs, videos, etc.. The material for 08/24 should be completed before class on 08/24, etc. If no URL is given, the material can be found on Canvas under the "Readings" tab.

In addition to the listed reading, there is typically a powerpoint summarizing the material discussed in class. This powerpoint will be made available on Canvas. If it is helpful to you, you are able to read the handout prior to class, but this is not required. Headphones required for musical selections.

Date	Topic/[Reading Assignment]
R 8/19	Introduction, core concepts. <i>Reading:</i> Syllabus.
T 8/24	What is beauty? The antinomy of taste.

Listen: J.S. Bach. *The Art of the Fugue*. (p.b. Glenn Gould)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uX-5HOx2Wc>

Listen: Ambrose Akinmusire (2017) Confessions To My Unborn Daughter.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4yRqmkOveg>

Listen: 100 Gees (2019) Money Machine. (contains profanity)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z97qLNXeAMQ>

Assignment: Find an example of a work of art (or something else) that you find beautiful but many other people do not find beautiful. (Or vice versa).

If you have trouble finding an example, just try to think of something that you appreciate that many other people do not appreciate. (Or vice versa.) We will discuss these in class, so choose something appropriate for class.

R 8/26

The antinomy of taste, continued.

Read: Alexander Nehamas (2010) *Only a Promise of Happiness*. Lecture II (pp. 208-

T 8/31

Aesthetic judgments.

Watch: Esperanza Spalding (2019). Lest We Forget.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i21b35DtbIQ>

Watch: Adrienne Lenker (2020). Zombie Girl.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zhd2Wfk6l4w>

Read: Philip Sherburne (2020) Review: “songs / instrumentals” by Adrienne Lenker.

<https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/adrienne-lenker-songs-and-instrumentals/>

R 9/02

“Meta-aesthetics”: objective accounts.

Read: Charles Beardley (1975) *Aesthetics from Ancient Greece to the Present* (excerpt)

Read: Shakespeare (1609) Sonnet 141.

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/Poetry/sonnet.CXLI.html>

Watch: Scene from *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcKm3bC7wV4>

T 9/07

“Meta-aesthetics”: subjective accounts

Read: Hume (1757) *On the Standards of Taste*.

Listen: Francois Houle (2020) *The Black Bird*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O62fRyEo_X0

Listen: Caroline Shaw (2016) *Partita for 8 Voices*. (p.b. Roomful of Teeth.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDVMtnaB28E>

Listen: Hiatus Kaiyote (2021) *Red Room*.

Analysis 1: Identify a case where you “changed your mind” about the beauty of a work of art. Explain what made you change your mind. What did the experience of changing your mind feel like? (1-2 pages) **(due: 09/09)**

Paper 1: Present and motivate subjectivism about beauty. Provide what you consider to be the strongest objection to subjectivism. Provide a response on behalf of the subjectivist. Optional: a counter-response. (4 pages) **(due: 09/14)**

What is beautiful?

- R 9/09 **The classical, idealist, hedonist, telos, and contemplation conceptions**
Read: Plato (385-370BCE) *Symposium*. Excerpts.
Listen: Miles Davis (2008) “Stella by Starlight.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGx1HvLV_NQ
Robert Glasper Trio (2015). “Stella by Starlight.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-VY-zs2eiY>
Watch: Adam Neely (2021) Why are these chords SO beautiful? | Q+A. (0.18-4.25)
- T 9/14 **The contemplation and longing conceptions.**
Read: Plato (385-370BCE) *Phaedrus*. Excerpt.
Listen: Johnny Flynn and Laura Marling (2010) “The Water.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4QQ7HYdWw>
Listen: Dervish (1993) “A Stor Mo Chroi.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oARdc1EqhWE>
Read: Lyrics to “A Stor Mo Chroi.” (Canvas)
Assignment: What are the chief characteristics of beauty as described by Plato in either the *Phaedrus* or the *Symposium*? (1/2 page)
- R 9/16 **Aesthetic experience**
Read: Peter Schjeldahl (1998) Notes on Beauty.
Listen: Mitski (2013) *Strawberry Blond*.
- T 9/21 **Aesthetic experience, continued.**
Read: Elaine Scarry (2001) *On Beauty*. (part 1 excerpt: pp. 1-20)
Listen: Sarah Jarosz & Aoife O’Donovan (2014) “Some Tyrant.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgTkVV1C9io>
Listen: Sabine McCalla (2020) “Baby, Please Don’t Go.”
Listen: Vivaldi (1723) Four Seasons (summer movement), p.b. Anne-Sophie Mutter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=124NoPUBDvA>
Listen: Outkast (1998) Chonkyfire.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5uoxivoSSo>
- R 9/23 **Beauty, human life, and pearl-diving.**
Read: Czeslaw Milosz (1986). *One More Day*.
Read: Elaine Scarry (2001) *On Beauty*. (pp. 20-34, 46-53)
Listen: The National (2019). “Oblivions.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_xMl32mWds
Watch: Mike Mills & The National (2019) *I Am Easy to Find*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifElv18k2O8>
- T 9/28 **Elegy and tragedy.**
Read: Samantha Vice (2012). Beauty, Mourning, and the Commemoration of Evil.
Read: Linda Gregerson “Love Poem II”
<https://www.lyrikline.org/en/poems/love-poem-ii-15471>
Listen: Benh Zeitlin, Dan Romer (2012). “End of the World.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAKsvsO5Dlc>

Listen: Arvo Pärt, “Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp2oxWdRMuk>

Read and look: Robert Motherwell (1965-67) *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79007>

Assignment: Discuss: why do we find certain sad things beautiful? (1/2 page)

Analysis 2: Choose a work of art, or something else, that you find exceedingly beautiful. Carefully analyze your aesthetic experience of that item, and carefully explain why exactly that item is beautiful. (1-2 pages)

Paper 2: Choose an account of beauty discussed in this unit. Explain and motivate this account. Provide an objection to this account. Respond to this objection, or else explain how the original account could be modified to account for this objection. (3.5-4 pages)

Poesis: art as creation

R 9/30

Worlds: dystopia, utopia, consolation, fantasy, voyage, play.

Read: Joanna Russ (1972). “When It Changed.”

Watch: S1E3 protest scene from *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHiG5fHHeYs>

Assignment: Find a work of art with political significance.

What gives this work its political power? (1/2 page)

T 10/05

Persons: authenticity, originality, and spontaneity.

Read: Bernard Williams (2001) *Truth and Truthfulness*. (sections 1-3)

Listen: Ghostface Killah (1997) “Nutmeg.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS0XhXsmCRs>

Listen: Outkast (1994) “Ain’t No Thang.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r42P-n-Yjm0>

Watch: Outkast (2002) “The Whole World.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udmTfK6_aM8

Watch: Harry Mack (2020) Omegle Bars 2.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgCUCg9aMyA>

Listen: Black Thought (2017) Freestyle on Flex.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prmQgSpV3fA>

R 10/07

Persons: self-definition, stability, and dialogue.

Read: Charles Taylor (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity*. (excerpt)

Read: Henry James (1881) *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (excerpt).

<http://pnhs.psd202.org/documents/mgleason/1516996606.pdf>

T 10/14

Community and communion.

Read: Alymer Maude (1904) Introduction to Leo Tolstoy’s *What Is Art?* (excerpt)

Read: Jia Tolentino (2018) *The Misreading of Mitski*.

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-misreading-of-mitski>
Read: Margaret Talbot (2019) On the Road with Mitski. (excerpt)
Watch: Julian Lage, Kenny Wolleson, Scott Colley (2016) “I’ll Be Seeing You.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8a3qAp81vY8>
Listen: Mitski (2018) “Me and My Husband.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU_Dbxciei8

R 10/16

Catch-up day.

Analysis 3: Choose an imagined world (in a novel, film, album, etc.) that is meaningful to you. What draws you to that world? (1-2 pages)
Paper 3: Choose an account of authenticity from “3.3 Authenticity and Self-Definition.” Explain this account as well as the alleged role of art in achieving such authenticity. Critically assess this account. (3.5-4 pages)

***Mimesis*: art as truth-telling**

T 10/21

Society: the artist as lover, historian, and witness.

Read: James Baldwin (1962). The Creative Process.
Read: James Baldwin (1962). Letter from a Region in My Mind.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind>
Reading: John Jeremiah Sullivan (2019) Rhiannon Giddens and What Folk Music Means
[https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/05/20/rhiannon-giddens-and-what-folk-](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/05/20/rhiannon-giddens-and-what-folk-music-means)
Listen: Most Def (2009) “Mathematics.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5vw4ajnWGA>
Listen: Olivier Messiaen (1941). Quartet for the End of Time.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYpBHc8px_U

R 10/23

Society: art, propaganda, and protest.

Read: W.E.B. Du Bois (1926) Criteria of Negro Art.
Read: Alain Locke (1928) Art or Propaganda?
Read: James Baldwin (1949) The Protest Novel. (excerpts)
Listen: Brother Ali (2007) Uncle Sam Goddamn.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO18F4aKGzQ>

T 10/28

Human nature: the artist as prophet, guide, and psychologist.

Read: Flannery O’Connor (1960). *Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*.
Read: Flannery O’Connor (1955). *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*.
Listen: Andre Antunes (2000). Kenneth Copeland goes METAL! [HA HA HA remix]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Q_cNjlyxAY
Assignment: Choose a certain work of art. What view of human nature is implicit in the piece? (1/2-1 page)

T 11/02

The self: confession and authenticity.

Read: Spencer Kornhaber (2019) The Plot Against Persona.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/09/lana-del-rey-says-she-makes-up-her-own-music/587111/>
Read: Louis Menard (2018) Literary Hoaxes and the Ethics of Authorship

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/12/10/literary-hoaxes-and-the-ethics-of-Read>: Sheldon Pearce (2020) The Whitewashing of Black Music on TikTok.
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-whitewashing-of-black-music>
Watch: Lana Del Rey (2013) Summertime Sadness
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdrL3QxjyVw>

Analysis 4: Choose a certain meaningful work of art. Analyze how that work of art tells the truth (or attempts to tell the truth) about either society, human nature, or the artist his or herself. (1-2 pages)

Art and the soul

R 11/04

Narrative, lost time, and immortality.

Read: Proust (1913) In Search of Lost Time (madeleine passage)

Watch: Mitski (2019) Two Slow Dancers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EICoe9gfr0A>

Watch: Big Thief (2019) “Orange.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-7H1a7UKPs>

Assignment: In this passage, Proust describes an instance of “involuntary memory” spurred by the narrator’s tasting of a madeleine. If possible, describe an instance of involuntary memory in your own case. If you can’t think of any, you can instead describe a work of art that makes you feel nostalgic. (at least 1/2 page)

T 11/09

Courage and consolation.

TBD

R 11/11

Aesthetic and moral conflict.

Read: Paul Elie (2020) How Racist was Flannery O’Connor?

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/22/how-racist-was-flannery-oconnor>

T 11/16

The social abuse of beauty.

Read: Elaine Scarry (2001). *On Beauty and Being Just* (part 2 excerpt).

Read and look: Calvin Tomkins (2021). The Epic Style of Kerry James Marshall

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/08/09/the-epic-style-of-kerry-james-marshall>

Read: William Blake (1789) The Little Black Boy.

Read: Louise Gluck (2020) Nobel Lecture.

Read: Hindi (2020) F*** Your Lecture on Craft, My People are Dying.

Read: Viet Thanh Nguyen (2020) The Post-Trump Future of Literature.

Look: catalog of Gerard Richter.

gerhard-richter.com/en/

Listen: Mitski (2012) “Pearl Diver.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3Jq35HZuCG>

R 11/18

The personal abuse of beauty: cynicism, sarcasm, camp, irony.

Read: Susan Sontag (1964) Notes on Camp.

Read: Matt Ashby & Brendan Carroll (2014). ... Irony is ruining our culture.

https://www.salon.com/2014/04/13/david_foster_wallace_was_right_irony_is_ruining_o

Read: Roger Rosenblatt (2001) The Age of Irony Comes to an End.

<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1000893,00.html>

Look: Jeff Koons: A Retrospective. (2014)

<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/jeff-koons>

Watch: Radiohead (1995) Street Spirit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCJblaUkkfc>

Listen: The Darkness (2012) Street Spirit (Live for Thetford)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0sOonkWiE>

Assignment: Identify and analyze a contemporary example of the ironic stance discussed by Ashby, Carroll, and Rosenblatt. What is the function of this irony? (1/2 page)

T 11/23

Catch-up day

Watch: Season 2 finale of The OC.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYIb-acZwk4>

Watch: SNL Skit: The Shooting AKA Dear Sister.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmd1qMN5Yo0>

Watch: Imogen Heap (2019) Hide and Seek on Tiny Desk.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QtklTXbKUQ> (start 11.15)

Paper 4: Critically assess one of Scarry's (2001) arguments for the thesis that beauty aids the pursuit of justice. (3.5-4 pages)

Analysis 5: Identify a work of art that you enjoy (or at least enjoyed in the past) that was created by an artist with deep moral flaws? How are these flaws relevant to the work itself? How has the revelation of these flaws influenced your experience of the work? (1-2 pages)

Student presentations.

T 11/30

Sign-up.

R 12/09 (3-6pm)

Sign-up.