

# Philosophy of Art

(Sample Syllabus: Introductory/Intermediate)

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**Office:**

**Office Hours:**

## Content Warning

Some of the materials that we will read and discuss in this course might be difficult for students from a variety of backgrounds. (These include but are not limited to: violence/murder, and talk of anorexia, body image, and appearance.) Detailed content warning will be given prior to relevant units/readings. If you have any concerns about any elements of the course, or if there is any way that we can together make things easier to bear, please contact me by email, by Zoom, or in person.

## Textbook

There is no required textbook; all readings and videos will be made available on Sakai.

## 1. Course Description

In this course, we will explore philosophical questions about art and aesthetics. There are six units:

**Unit 1: The Standard of Taste.** We'll begin by discussing the philosophical problem of taste. Are there objective criteria for judging aesthetic qualities of artworks or our aesthetic responses to art? Are those criteria impartially determined?

**Unit 2: What is Art?** We'll explore different theories of art, including art as imitation, expression, and a medium of aesthetic experience. We'll end this unit by asking whether art can (and should) be defined.

**Unit 3: Art and Meaning.** How should we interpret art? In this unit, we'll look at the debate surrounding the role of an artist's intention in determining the meaning of artworks.

**Unit 4: Film as Art and The Paradox of Fiction.** Why do we cry at the tragic fate of a fictional character or fear a fictional monster while knowing that they are not real? We'll delve into *the paradox of fiction* and discuss how we get to experience strong emotional responses to fictional objects and situations.

**Unit 5: Art, Fiction, and Morality.** In this unit, we'll discuss some of the key questions about the relation of art to ethics. What is the relation between aesthetic value and moral value in works of art? Do morally deficient artworks have less aesthetic value? Why do we have difficulty imagining fictional worlds that are morally deviant from ours?

**Unit 6: Feminist Aesthetics and Art as Resistance.** In our final unit, we'll re-examine some of the ideas, theories, and assumptions about art and aesthetics from feminist perspectives. For instance, we'll look at how the dominant narratives in aesthetics could perpetuate sexist, transphobic, and ableist stereotypes in our community. We'll also look at how art can be used as a form of resistance.

## 2. Learning Objectives

This course has three learning objectives.

- You'll be introduced to **key ideas and theories** in philosophy of art and aesthetics.
- You'll practice **key philosophical skills**, including: identifying and critically evaluating different perspectives on a complicated issue, forming your own views based on such evaluation, and clearly communicating your views in writing and in speech with interlocutors who may have different or opposing opinions while engaging in respectful dialogue.
- You'll reflect on how the topics that we've discussed in class relate to **issues outside of the classroom** and form your own views on those issues.

## 3. Commitment to Respect and Diversity

Together as a class, we are fully committed to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for everyone involved, irrespective of their ability, age, economic status, ethnicity, first language, gender expression and identity, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexuality. Personal offenses or discriminatory remarks toward others on any of these bases will not be tolerated in class under any circumstances.

During the semester, we will have *anonymous climate surveys* to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and respected during class discussions and lectures. If you have any concerns about the learning environment at any time during the semester, please let me know immediately.

## 4. Course Assignments and Assessment

The required assignments for this course are as follows:

Due Date	Assignment	Percentage
Daily	Attendance & Participation	10%
Daily	Reading Reactions	20%
2/12 (Sun)	Paper I Outline (1 page)	1%

2/26 (Sun)	Paper I (3-4 pages)	9%
4/9 (Sun)	Paper II Outline (2 pages)	5%
4/18 (Tue) <u>or</u> 4/20 (Thu)	Paper II Presentation	10%
5/1 (Sun)	Paper II (5-6 pages)	20%
5/8 (Mon)	Final Exam	25%

### Attendance & Participation (10%)

You will meet this requirement in part by attending class regularly. But you will also need to regularly participate in discussions and in-class activities to get full points. There will be *alternative* ways of earning participation points; we will discuss a specific guideline for these assignments in class.

*Cold-calling.* In class, I will occasionally “cold-call” you to share your thoughts. You can always feel free to “skip” a particular question or “opt-out” of being cold-called at any point during the semester for a particular class, a unit, or the entire semester.

*Mid-semester estimate.* In the mid-semester, I will release an *estimate* of your participation grade—this does not count toward your overall grade and only serves to give you a sense of how you’ve been doing so far. If what you see is not the grade you expected or wanted, come talk to me and we will discuss the ways to boost your grade!

### Reading Reactions (20%)

Prior to each class meeting where there’s a new required reading, you’ll write a brief reaction (1-2 paragraphs) to the reading. On some days, I’ll give you a question about the reading for you to answer in your reaction. On other days, I’ll ask you to submit your own reaction that (1) briefly summarizes one of the main ideas, claims, or arguments in the reading, and (2) presents a question or a comment about this idea, claim, or argument.

**How to submit.** Include your reaction in the body of a message, not as an attachment, and send it via Sakai message, with the subject line RR Last Name Date (e.g. RR Jang 6/22), by **11:59pm** the night before the class meeting.

There will be 23 reading reactions in total, which I’ll grade *pass/fail*. I’ll drop your lowest 3, and the remaining 20 will count toward your grade. You’ll pass the reading reaction, if it clearly shows that you’ve carefully done the reading and made a serious attempt to engage with it. You’ll fail the reading reaction, if it doesn’t clearly show this attempt.

### Paper I (10%)

Before submitting your Paper I, you will submit a 1-page outline for your paper. The outline counts for a tiny portion of your overall grade (1%), so it’s a low-stakes opportunity to try out your ideas

and make mistakes. The paper itself should be 3-4 pages in length and is worth 9% of your overall grade. I will release a specific guideline for the outline and the paper closer to the due date.

### Paper II (25%)

You will again submit an outline for your Paper II. The goal is again to give you a chance to try out your idea for the paper. This outline should be 2 pages in length and is worth 5% of your overall grade. The paper itself should be 5-6 pages in length and is worth 20% of your overall grade. I will release a specific guideline for the outline and the paper closer to the due date.

### Presentation (10%)

You'll give a 10-minute presentation in class on your arguments for Paper II. The presentation itself will be worth 8% of your overall grade; the remaining 2% will come from asking questions and giving feedback to other presenters. I will release a specific guideline for this presentation closer to the due date.

### Final Exam (25%)

The exam will ask you to answer both short-answer questions and essay questions. All short answer questions will come from a study guide released before the exam; all essay questions will be released on the review session scheduled on the last day of classes. A detailed guideline on how to prepare for and take this exam will be posted on Sakai.

## 5. Grading and Other Class Policies

Each assignment will be marked out of the number of percentage points that it contributes to your overall grade. This will give you a total score of 100, which I'll convert to your final letter grade:

<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
94	90	87	84	80	77	74	70	67	60	0-59

For papers, I'll also give you a corresponding letter grade. We'll look at grading criteria closer to the due dates, but here's a rough description of what these letter grades signify<sup>1</sup>:

**A:** "*Mastery* of course content at the *highest level* of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development."

**B:** "*Strong* performance demonstrating a *high level* of attainment for a student at a given stage of development."

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<sup>1</sup> These descriptions are from UNC's official "Explanation of Grading System" (<https://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/grades/explanation-of-grading-system/>).

**C:** “A *totally acceptable* performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.”

**D:** “A *marginal* performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment [at a given stage of development].”

**F:** “For whatever reason, an *unacceptable* performance [at a given stage of development].”

Pluses and minuses will be given to papers that fall in between these descriptions.

## Anonymous Grading

I will grade the papers and the final exam *anonymously*. This means that you shouldn't put any identifying information on them, other than your PID number. Make sure to include your PID number *both* in the body of your paper *and* in the file name.

## Page Limit Policy

Paper I and II (but not outlines!) are subject to strict page limits. To standardize length, all submissions should be: 12pt font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. If you have a nonstandard formatting, I will convert it to standard formatting to check for length.

*I will dock a third of a letter grade for each half of a page you are over or under the required page range: 3–4 pages for Paper I; 5–6 pages for Paper II (excluding the reference list).*

## Due Dates, Late Policy, and Extension

All paper assignments are due at **11:59pm** sharp on the dates indicated below.

*Late Days.* You are given “three late days” that you can freely use on any of the paper assignments (not applicable to reading reactions or the final exam). You can use all three days on a single assignment, or spread them out on several assignments. (For instance, you may turn in Paper I three days late, or turn in Paper I an hour late and an outline for Paper II two days late without getting a late penalty. Turning in an assignment an hour late will use up a whole late day.)

You don't have to tell me in advance, and I won't ask any questions! If you submit the paper late, I will simply deduct the day(s) from the remaining late days you have. *Once you have used up the late days, late papers will be docked a full letter grade (10%) for each calendar day (or part of a day) that they are late.* (For instance, a paper due on a Friday that is turned in on Saturday by 11:59pm will be docked a full letter grade.) So, use the late days wisely!

*Extension.* You may earn an additional extension beyond the three late days given, if you make a reasonable request for an extension *at least 72 hours in advance* of the paper due date.

## Electronics

Electronics—laptops and tablets, but no phones—are allowed in class for accessing the electronic copies of the readings and note-taking. I reserve the right to rescind this permission if they become

of a distraction. Whether you bring a laptop to class or not, you should bring paper and something to write with in order to complete in-class exercises and activities.

## Plagiarism and the Honor Code

You are expected to abide by UNC's Honor Code, and refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. At UNC, plagiarism is defined as "deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." This includes *unintentionally* stealing another person's work or failing to give credit to someone else's idea *by accident*.

Just as you are bound by the Honor Code not to plagiarize, I am bound by it to report suspected cases of academic dishonesty of any kind to the Honor Court. If you are ever in any doubt as to whether something constitutes plagiarism, check with me first!

## 6. Resources

### Accessibility Resources & Service

If you need special accommodations for class assignments, please register with the Accessibility Resources & Service Office (<https://ars.unc.edu/>). Once I receive an official request from the ARS Office, I'd be happy to make the arrangements.

### Writing Center

To ensure the anonymous grading, I will not read the paper drafts. But you can always set up an appointment with one of the coaches at the UNC Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>) to improve your paper at any stages of writing—from brainstorming, to polishing a full draft.

### Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS (<https://caps.unc.edu/>) is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, both for short-term and long-term needs.

### Title IX Resources

Any students impacted by acts of discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, stalking, and related retaliation are encouraged to report the incident and seek resources on campus or in the community.

Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Rebecca Gibson: [rmgibson@unc.edu](mailto:rmgibson@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential: [caps@unc.edu](mailto:caps@unc.edu)), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (confidential: [gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu)) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at <https://safe.unc.edu/>.

## 7. Reading Schedule (Subject to change)

1/10 Tue – Course Introduction

- Course Syllabus

### Unit 1. The Standard of Taste

1/12 Thu – *Aesthetic Subjectivism*

- Hume, excerpts from “Of the Standard of Taste”

1/17 Tue – *Aesthetic Normativity*

- Kant, excerpts from *Critique of Judgment*

1/19 Thu – *Aesthetics and Power*

- Carol Duncan, “Who Rules the Art World” in *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in the Critical History of Art* (1993)
- Optional: Cynthia Freeland, excerpts from *But Is It Art? An Introduction to Art Theory* (2001)

1/24 Tue – *Wrapping Up Unit 1*

- No reading

### Unit 2. What is Art?

1/26 Thu – *Art as Imitation*

- Plato, excerpts from *The Republic*
- Aristotle, excerpts from *Poetics*

1/31 Tue – *Art as Expression*

- Tolstoy, excerpts from *What is Art?* (1897)
- Wordsworth, preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800)

2/2 Thu – *Art as Experience*

- Monroe Beardsley, excerpts from *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1981)

2/7 Tue – *Can Art be Defined?*

- Wittgenstein, excerpts from *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)
- Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” (1956)

2/9 Thu – **Paper Writing Workshop**

- No reading!

2/12 Sun – **Paper I Outline due!**

2/14 Tue – *Wrapping up Unit 2!*

- No reading!

## Unit 3. Art and Meaning

2/16 Thu – *Intentionalism, refuted*

- William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946)

2/21 Tue – *Intentionalism, defended*

- E. D. Hirsch, “In Defense of the Author” in *Validity in interpretation* (1967)
- Optional: Gregory Currie, excerpts from *Arts and Minds* (2004)

2/23 Thu – *Wrapping up Unit 3*

- No reading!

2/26 Sun – **Paper I due!**

## Unit 4. Film as Art and The Paradox of Fiction

2/28 Tue – *Film as Art*

- Noël Carroll, excerpts from *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (2008)

3/2 Thu – *The Paradox of (Emotional Responses to) Fiction*

- Colin Radford, “How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina?” (1975)

3/3 Fri – Film screening: *Psycho* (1960)

3/7 Tue – *The Paradox of Fiction, cont’d*

- Kendall Walton, “Fearing Fictions” (1978)
- Optional: Noël Carroll, excerpts from *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990)

3/9 Thu – *Wrapping up Unit 4*

- No reading!

3/14 Tue – *Spring break* (no class)

3/16 Thu – *Spring break* (no class)

## Unit 5. Art, Fiction, and Morality

3/21 Tue – *Art and Morality*

- Berys Gaut, “The Ethical Criticism of Art” (1998)
- Plato, excerpts from *Republic X*

3/23 Thu – *Art and Morality*

- Daniel Jacobson, “In Praise of Immoral Art” (1997)

3/28 Tue – *The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance*



- Tamara Gendler, “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance” (2000)
- Optional: Kendall Walton and Michael Tanner, excerpts from “Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality” (1994)

3/30 Thu – *Wrapping Up Unit 5*

- No reading!

## Unit 6. Feminist Aesthetics and Art as Resistance

4/4 Tue – *Why Women Need to Write*

- Helene Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976)

4/6 Thu – *Feminist Aesthetics*

- Alfred Archer and Lauren Ware, “Beyond the Call of Beauty: Everyday Aesthetic Demands under Patriarchy” (2018)
- Sherri Irvin, “Resisting Body Oppression: An Aesthetic Approach” (2017)

4/9 Sun – **Paper II Outline Due!**

4/11 Tue – *Disability Aesthetics*

- Anita Silvers, “From the Crooked Timber of Humanity, Beautiful Things Can Be Made” (2011)
- Optional: Tobin Siebers, Chapter 1 from *Disability Aesthetics* (2010)

4/13 Thu – *Art as Resistance*, cont’d

- hooks, bell, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectator” in *Black Looks* (1992)

4/18 Tue – *Art as Resistance*, cont’d

- Tommie Shelby, “Impure Dissent: Hip Hop and the Political Ethics of Marginalized Black Urban Youth” (2015)

4/20 Thu – *Presentation*

- No reading

4/25 Tue – *Presentation*

- No reading

## Exam Preparation

4/27 Thu – ***Final Exam Review Session***

- No reading

5/1 Mon – **Paper II due!**

5/8 Mon – **Final Exam** (8:00am-11:00am)