

SYLLABUS  
Course: Philosophy 310 - Aesthetics  
Winter, 2007

Instructor: Dr. Michael H. Reed

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Required texts: Coursepack (Available at Ned's Bookstore)

Tom Wolfe: The Painted Word, Bantam

Course description: In this course we will explore in depth some of the most important issues and most influential texts in the field of aesthetics. Among those issues are: the aesthetic legitimacy of abstract and other "modern" works of art; issues in feminist aesthetics, e.g., the relevance of gender-specific experiences of women artists; whether political art should be judged by the same criteria as non-political art; whether it should matter to us if we discover that a painting we admire is determined to be a forgery; and whether a distinction between "high" and "popular" art is defensible.

Note: As some of this material is new this semester, some minor adjustments in format or written work requirements may be necessary.

Course grade: The grade for this course will be based on written work and on class participation.

Written work

This course is a Writing Intensive course in the philosophy program. During the semester, written work will consist of the following: (1) "Worksheets" intended to help students prepare for in-class discussions of assigned readings. These worksheets will require students to briefly summarize and/or comment on main topics in the readings; they will be due prior to class discussion; (2) Short papers or essay exams to follow class discussions of assigned readings in each segment of the course. (3) A substantial term paper is also required. (See p. 2.)

Through their work on writing assignments, students will improve their ability to read, analyze, and write philosophical essays. The learning process begins with the reading and discussion of writings with philosophical content on some aspect of the arts. Philosophers read philosophical writings with two main questions in mind: (1) What is the most charitable interpretation of the author's argument?; (2) Are the premises of author's argument(s) acceptable and do those premises support his or her conclusion(s)? Students will be involved in this type of critical reading throughout the course as we explore the works of philosophers, artists, critics, and others who cast a reflective eye on the arts. In class discussions and writing assignments, we will reconstruct the authors' arguments and analyze and critique their positions. The skills involved are critical reading and critical reasoning, skills which students will have been developing in at least one previous philosophy course.

The term paper. In general, the term papers are intended to be further investigations of a philosophical issue, or issues, arising in the assigned readings, and should be approximately 10 -12 pages long. A list of possible topics will be handed out early in the semester. Materials necessary for preliminary research for the term paper topics appearing on this list will be placed on reserve in the library. If a student has a different issue in aesthetics on which he or she particularly wishes to write, this is certainly permissible. However, the topic must receive prior approval from the instructor.

Two drafts of the term paper are required. For grading purposes, the first draft will have the same weight as the final draft. Accordingly, the first draft should not be a "rough" draft, but should represent your best effort to produce a finished product. The first draft will be provided with constructive comments and graded. These comments are intended to provide guidance for preparation of the final draft. The better the first draft, the fewer revisions will be required. Students who turn in an excellent first draft may not be required to make any revisions at all and may submit their first draft as their final draft. All papers will be graded on their philosophical content as well as on spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Papers must be double-spaced with one-inch margins. Pages must be numbered. Further guidance term papers will be provided on a separate sheet.

Late work: Papers must be turned in on time. Grades on late papers will be reduced for each day they are late. Exams must be taken on time. Make-up exams will not be given. In the case of a medical or other legitimate emergency which is verified by an appropriate office on their letterhead, the missing exam will be dropped from the final grade computation.

### Class participation

This course is designed around class discussion rather than lectures. Participation in class discussion is required and will form part of the basis for the final grade. It is expected that every student will have studied (not simply "read over") the materials to be discussed and will come to class prepared to comment on and raise questions about them. The worksheets referred to above are intended to aid students in their preparations for class discussions. They will be made up of questions such as, "What philosophical issue(s) does the author raise in the first few paragraphs?", "What is the author's argument for the claim that...?", "What does the author mean by the term...?", etc..

The following components of the course grade are approximations, but the relative weights of those components will not be far from this distribution:

Exams and/or short papers:	50%
Reading Worksheets:	10%
Class participation:	10%
Term paper:	30%
(First draft, due in the 11 <sup>th</sup> week	15%)
(Final draft, due on the last day of class:	15%)

One worksheet assignment may be skipped without affecting students' final grades. Final grades will be posted on students' my.emich accounts within 48 hours after the time scheduled for the final exam.

EMU policy on plagiarism: "Students are not to engage in any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, plagiarism...For the purposes of this section, plagiarism is defined as the knowing use, without appropriate approval, of published materials, expressions, or works of another with intent to represent the material(s) as one's own" (*Eastern Michigan University Undergraduate Catalogue*).

Note: Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense. Punishment for plagiarism via the internet, or any other source, can include expulsion from the university.

## **Schedule of Readings**

### **Modern Art and Modern Art Theory**

Greenberg, Modernist Painting  
Rosenberg, "Barnett Newman: The Living Rectangle"  
Wolfe, *The Painted Word*  
Rose, "Wolfeburg"

Short Paper

### **The Aesthetics of Political Art**

Piper, "Monologues from 'Four Intruders Plus Alarm Systems' and 'Safe'"  
Brand, "Revising the Aesthetic-Nonaesthetic Distinction: The Aesthetic Value of Activist Art"  
Silvers, "Has Her(oine's) Time Now Come?"

Exam or Short Paper

### **The Aesthetic Status of Fakes**

Gombrich, "Truth and the Stereotype"  
Lessing, "What Is Wrong with a Forgery?"  
Dutton, "Artistic Crimes"  
Goodman, "Art and Authenticity"

Exam or Short Paper

### **"High" versus "Popular" Art**

Selections from Noël Carroll, *a philosophy of mass art*  
"Is High Art Superior?", Chapter 2 from *What Good Are the Arts?*, John Carey  
Selections from Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain*

Exam or Short Paper