How to use this syllabus

This syllabus provides you with information specific to this course and information about important university policies. This document should be viewed as a course overview; it is not a contract and is subject to change as the semester evolves.

Course Materials

4. Excerpts from Descartes’ Error and Looking for Spinoza by Antonio Damasio will be provided online.

Course Plan

In ancient Greece, an art (techne) was merely a skill, cf. martial arts, nautical arts, medical arts. The distinctions we now make between fine arts, crafts, design, etc., were articulated much later, as the Renaissance progressed into the Modern Period when intellectual revolutions bloomed and systems became all the rage. In the contemporary period philosophy took a linguistic turn that changed the nature of the question “what is art?”.

There will be three units to the course this semester.

Week 1: Introduction to the topic (see attached Handout 1)

Unit 1: Performance as an Art - How exemplary experts answer Plato’s challenges
Unit 2: The Modern Period - The systematic/scientific turn
Unit 3: The Contemporary Period - The linguistic and political turns

Unit 1 overview: Plato’s arguments concerning rhapsody and imitation in the Ion and the Republic may initially strike us as silly and outdated, but we can find in them the seeds of philosophical issues that are live today. Consider the following philosophical questions as you read Plato (Challenger), Stanislavski (Contemporary Westerner), Zeami (Classic Easterner), and Damasio (Neuroscientist).

1. Why might one value a skilled performance more highly than a skillfully made artifact?
2. What makes a performance beautiful? Its subject matter, its form, something else?
3. Of what is an expert poet a master?
4. Of what is an expert rhapsode a master?
5. Can we generalize or analogize from rhapsody to other performing arts, e.g. script writing and cinematic acting?
6. Can one be a master of performance without mastering any distinct subjects or arts?
7. What are the excellences of performance? What makes a performance “inspired”?
8. Are inspired performances false? If so, what consequences would this have for the value and evaluation of art?
Course Objectives and Methods

Do not expect the texts we read to answer philosophical questions like those listed. Most philosophical work raises questions and attempts to make progress towards an adequate answer to them. Your job is to understand the question, critically assess our progress, and perhaps make some progress yourself.

In order to do this well, you will need to develop your philosophical skills. Converting the argument in an essay or dialogue into standard argument form is a philosophical skill that takes practice. Constructing your own argument is a related but distinct philosophical skill that can be practiced by proposing objections and replies to an argument.

In order to help you learn how to read philosophy of art and begin doing your job as a philosophy student, an interpretation of Plato’s argument in Ion as an inference to the best explanation is provided in Handout 2. This is an example of what you will need to do in order to understand the text, critically analyze it, and communicate your objections and insights effectively. Your notes should always outline arguments by the time you are finished. Sometimes the argument form, the premises, and the inferences are all explicit and clear [LOL]. Usually you will need to do a lot of work to construct a sound argument from the text.

Notes on the reading will be provided only for the first few reading assignments. We will practice parsing the arguments in the text together in class periodically throughout the course, but it will be up to you to construct your notes for most of the course because this is one of the best ways to develop your philosophical skills.

Course Requirements

This is a writing-intensive, upper division philosophy course. Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, on average, ten hours per week doing work for this course: 3 hours per week attending lecture and an additional 6-7 hours per week reading and studying the material, completing graded assignments, and otherwise preparing for class. This should total approximately 140-150 hours of work for the semester.

- Attendance and participation are required. Class discussions are an essential part of the learning process for this course. There is no substitute.
  1. Preparation is required. In order to be prepared for class, you will need to read the assigned text more than once, take notes on the key definitions and theses, outline the arguments presented, and identify questions raised.
  2. Online participation for this course is minimal, amounting basically to downloading reading materials and notes, checking your email, and turning in assignments.
- Presentation/Show and Tell (10%) You will be asked to share your philosophical analysis of an alleged work of art with the class. This is an opportunity to share and to practice speaking in front of a friendly group and fielding questions.
- Papers (40%). You are encouraged to submit a draft of your paper for advance feedback.
- Exams (50%) There will be at least two essay-based exams. For each exam you will be provided with a list of study questions from which the exam questions will be drawn.
Reading List

We will not be able to cover the entire book. If there are particular authors or topics you wish to cover, let me know and I will try to work your interests into the schedule. The following list of readings is our initial plan for the course. Note that many of the works included in our textbook are excerpts from a longer work, and there is plenty more material out there for those of you who continue on in this field.

Unit 1: Performance as an Art
- How exemplary experts answer Plato’s challenges
  Plato  
  Ion, Republic X
  Stanislavski  An Actor Prepares (especially Chapter 2)
  Wilson’s  Introduction to the Fushikaden
  Zeami  Fushikaden
  Damasio  Descartes’ Error and Looking for Spinoza (excerpts)

Unit 2: The Modern Period
- The systematic/scientific turn
  Hutcheson  An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue
  Hume  Of the Standard of Taste
  Burke  A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful
  Kant  Critique of Aesthetic Judgment
  Schiller  Letter of an Aesthetic Education of Man
  Von Schelling  Philosophy of Art
  Hegel  The Philosophy of Fine Art
  Schopenhauer  The World as Will and Representation
  Bullough  “Psychical Distance” as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle
  Clive Bell  Art
  Collingwood  The Principles of Art

Unit 3: The Contemporary Period
- The linguistic and political turns
  Weitz  The Role of Theory in Aesthetics
  Danto  The Artworld
  Dickie  What is Art? An Institutional Analysis
  Goodman  When is Art?
  Wimsatt/Beardsley  The Intentional Fallacy
  Gaut  The Ethical Criticism of Art
  Devereaux  Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator: The “New” Aesthetics

Each of these units will focus primarily on the fine and beautiful arts, but not exclusively.
Handout 1  
Dividing the Task

We may divide the topic art in several different ways, each of which will lend itself to some distinctive issues and some overlap with other ways of dividing art.

What are the arts?
- Martial
- Nautical
- Healing
- Political
- Plastic (sculpture, architecture)
- Dramatic
- Musical
- Literary
- Culinary
- Pedagogic

Is it possible to construct a complete system of all possible arts or categories of art?  
On what grounds can we correctly individuate arts? Is it arbitrary?  
Is there a fundamental difference between liberal arts, fine arts, and/or beautiful arts?

Who is involved in art?
- Artists
- Audience/observers
- Patrons
- Teachers
- Critics
- Supporting artists (director, editor, set designer, casting agent)
- Guilds
- The Public
- Publishers, Studios
- Schools
- Awarding institutions, the press
- Producers
- Consumers
- Funders
- Educators
- Evaluators
- Collaborators

Can there be non-artistic roles involved in the creation of art?  
Can we systematize the possible roles we may have in art individually and collectively?

We may also divide an investigation of art according to the traditional divisions of Western analytic philosophy.

Value Theory
- What is beauty? What is sublimity? Can we systematize the evaluative terms of art?  
- What is artistic genius? Can it be developed or disciplined?  
- What makes an art “fine” (refined)? What makes something a “work of art”?  
- Is the value of art the value of a skill? The value of an artifact?  
- Is the value of art political, moral, religious, instrumental, or irreducibly valuable “in itself”? ...

Metaphysics and Epistemology
- What is an “aesthetic judgment” (i.e. the peculiar sort of thing we do when we say “that is beautiful”)? What faculties are required do to this and how do they work?  
- Is there a standard of taste? Can there be a science of taste? Of feeling? Of art?  
- Can true artistry be learned or taught? What is a school of art? Is this different from a movement?  
- What are the proper objects of aesthetic judgment, if any? (nature, artifacts, fine art, myself)  
- Is art essentially representational? Is there truth in art? Should there be?  
- Can works of art be functional? Ought they be?

Each of these ways of dividing the topic is somewhat arbitrary and problematic. As mentioned in the syllabus, our initial approach to the arts in Unit 1 will be to focus on performance as a paradigm of art.