

PHI 3240: Philosophy of Art

Session 1

August 31st, 2015



Introduction to the course

- Please **check the roster** being passed around to make sure your information is correct.



- **If everything is correct**, write your initials next to your name
- **If anything is incorrect**, write the correct info in the space to the right of your name
- **If you prefer to be called by a nickname**, please write it in the "Nickname" column

- **Please introduce yourself** to the class by sharing:
 - your **name, year, major** (or what interests you, if undeclared)
 - **what forms of art do you like to make and/or experience?**



Dance has a special place in my heart

What is Philosophy of Art?

- **Philosophy** is a method of investigating the world.
- **Philosophy of Art** poses and answers questions about art, corresponding to major categories of philosophical inquiry:
 - the ***ontology of art***
 - What is its metaphysical nature?
 - What defines something *as* art?
 - the ***social/cultural/political value of art***
 - What good does it do for us?
 - How is it used by communities?
 - ***social/cultural/political influences on art***
 - Why does only some work get recognized as great art?
 - Why does art have the content it does?

What is Philosophy of Art?

- (continued)
 - the ***aesthetic*** evaluation of art
 - What makes a work 'good? Who is a qualified judge of aesthetic 'goodness'?
 - the nature of our ***psychological*** responses to art
 - What role do our emotions play?
 - ***ethical*** concerns about art
 - Should some art be censored? Do moral flaws count against a work's goodness? Is it ok to enjoy morally questionable art?
- **Philosophy of Art** is often regarded as a subfield of **aesthetics**,
 - which is typically characterized as the study of *beauty*.
 - '*aesthetic*' (coined in the 18th century) comes from the Greek word *aisthesis*, which means 'relating to sensory perception'
 - Some people think we ought to use "aesthetic" to refer not only to beauty, but to any qualities of objects that appeal to our senses.

Philosophy of Art & Aesthetics

- The **relationship** between the two fields of study is **complicated**:
 - Artworks are just one category of objects we can evaluate aesthetically.
 - People, animals, nature, the built environment, and so on all have aesthetic properties, which appeal to our senses and provoke reactions.
 - But not all artworks have what we might call ‘aesthetic appeal’:
 - *E.g., Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’*



Classes of Art?



- Some theorists make a big deal out of distinguishing between:
 - **fine (or 'high-brow' art)**
(e.g., the *Mona Lisa*, Beethoven symphonies, Tolstoy novels)
 - **popular (or 'low-brow') art**
(e.g. *Mad Men*, Taylor Swift songs, the *Game of Thrones* novels)



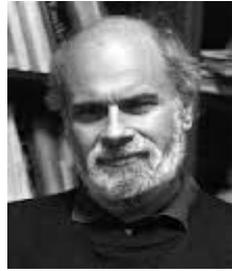
- I don't think we gain much of anything by separating these into classes – it's usually theoretically unhelpful, and often elitist.
- In this class, a mural you saw on the street is equally worthy of investigation as art as a painting you see hanging in the Metropolitan Museum.

Art Forms & Media

- Everything we call 'art' can be (roughly) divided into **art forms**:
 - **visual arts**
 - *painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, film, architecture*
 - **literary arts**
 - *poetry, novels, short stories, drama*
 - **performing arts**
 - *music, theater, dance*
 - **(others? hybrids?)**
 - Another way of categorizing art is by the **medium** (*the materials*) an artist uses to make their work.
 - e.g., *paint and canvas, clay, light and camera film, sounds, mortar and tiles, found objects, human bodies...*
- **Most theories about art are meant to apply to works in any & all of these diverse categories.**
 - *But even just giving a definition of "art" which transcends all these differences is very difficult.*

Statement on Diversity

- Most professional philosophers of art are white men, and most of the 'classic' or 'canonical' writing in philosophy of art is by white men.



- This should *not* be taken as an indication that white men are better at philosophy, or more qualified to do it, than any other group of people.

- **Philosophy should be by and for all kinds of people.**

- The syllabus for this course aims to recognize the contributions of female and non-white authors to the philosophy of art.
- We will discuss why these contributions are often neglected.



Course Requirements

- **attend** each class session and **participate** in discussions
 - read the article(s) or chapter(s) assigned for each session
 - please bring the text to class to refer to during discussion
- **give a presentation** to the class on one of the readings
 - ~10 min., using Powerpoint or a typed handout
 - you'll choose a reading to present on a couple weeks from now
- **write 4 mini-essays**
 - mini-essays will be ~2 pages long (600-750 words) and should make structured philosophical arguments
- **edit one or two essays into final versions**
 - you will **either a)** choose one mini-essay to expand into a 3000-word final essay,
 - **or b)** choose two mini-essays to expand into two 1750-word essays

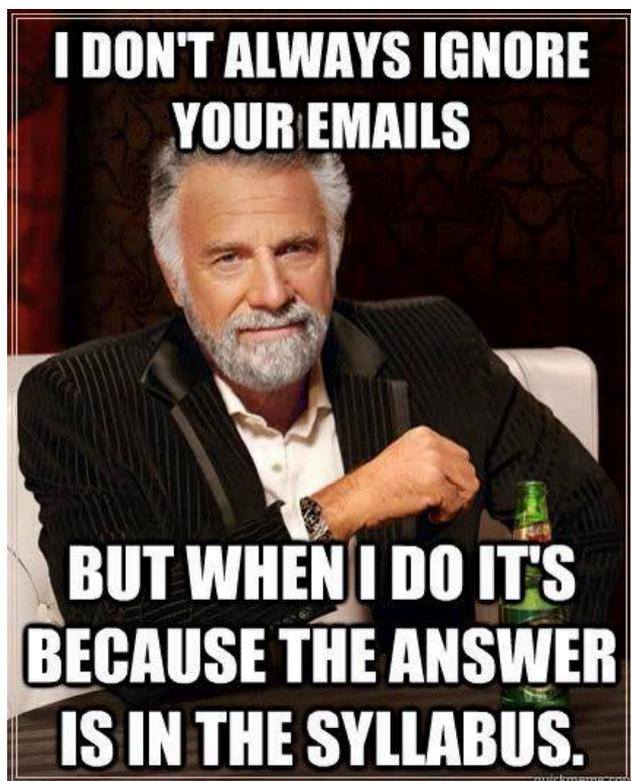
- **Opportunities for *extra credit* will be offered throughout the semester.** These will involve:
 - 1) attending an art exhibit or performance
 - I've suggested some free/cheap options: see the [Art Venues & Event Listings](#) page on the website.
 - You are welcome to propose events that interest you to attend.
 - 2) writing a brief (1-2 page) description of your experience with the artwork(s), making use of concepts and issues discussed in this course.
- **Another way to gain extra credit points** is to offer an artwork (or body of work) as a *counterexample* to a claim about art made in one of the assigned readings.
 - email me by 5pm on a class day with a link to an image/video/recording of the work in question.
 - I'll ask you to present (up to 5 minutes):
 - a description of the work, and
 - an explanation of why you think this work is *not* adequately accounted for by the theory about art under discussion.

Course Conduct

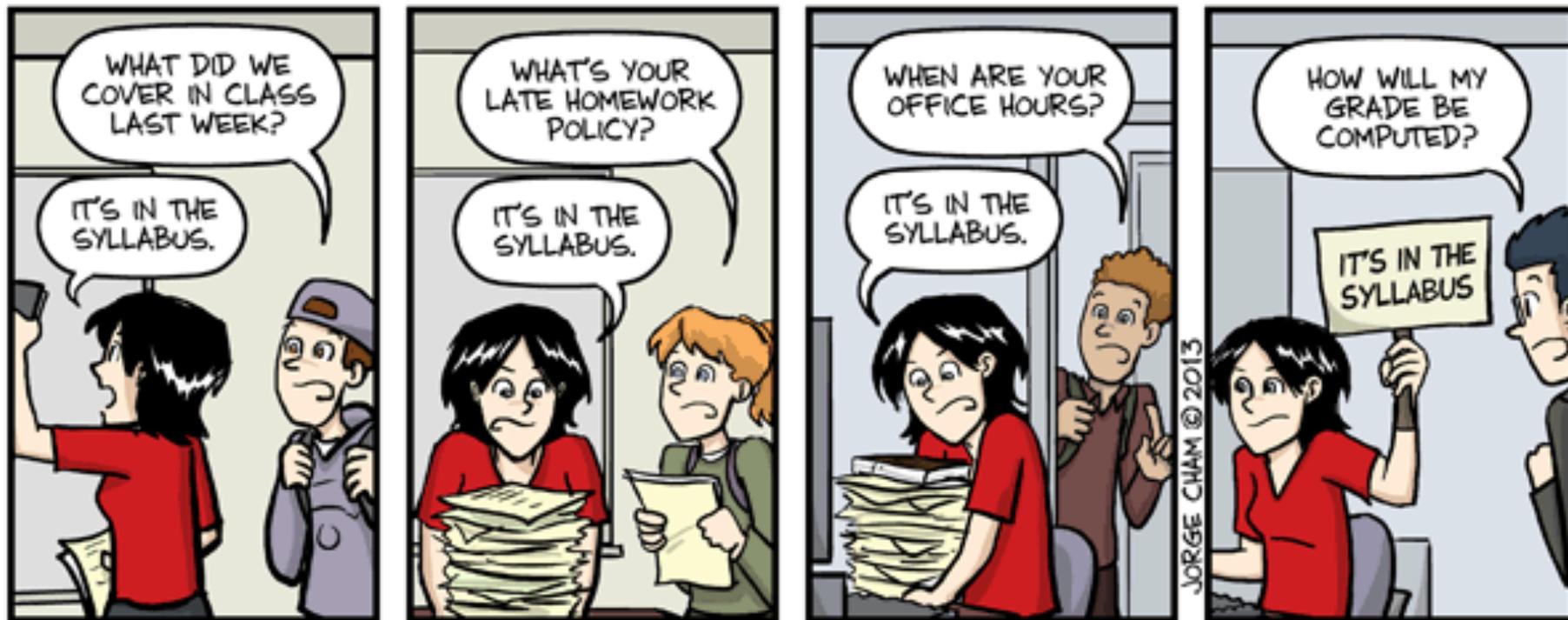
- Rule #1 is ***Don't Be a Jerk!***
 - Respect for one another's voices and viewpoints is indispensable.
 - Each of us brings to this class a unique background and perspective.
 - Discussions may get heated when we discuss controversial issues.
 - *Each person in this room is responsible for ensuring that their speech and behavior allows anyone to feel comfortable speaking up if they wish to do so.*
- We should aim to follow ***The Principle of Charity:***
 - We want to develop a comprehensive understanding of an idea *before* we call it into question or criticize it.
 - Listen to each other's ideas with an *open mind*, and with **compassion** for the individual who shares them.
 - If someone says something that seems wrong to you, try asking them to clarify what they mean before dismissing their view.

Course Policies

- Please try to **arrive on time and ready** to take notes
- Laptops are tablets are permitted *only if* they are not distracting to you, me, or your classmates.
 - likewise with food & drinks
- Please **silence cell phones** during class and **keep them out of sight/reach.**



- Please **notify me in advance if you will miss class.**
 - If you miss class, you are still responsible for the material covered that day.
 - Identify at least one classmate you trust to take good notes, and get their contact info.
- **When in doubt, consult the syllabus,** and *then* email me (lauren.r.alpert@gmail.com) *if* your question/concern has not been addressed.
 - *Please use 'PHI 3240' in the subject line!*
 - I will do my best to respond to emails promptly.



IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

This message brought to you by every instructor that ever lived.

Academic Honesty

- There is **zero tolerance for academic dishonesty** in this course, and at Baruch College in general.
 - “Cheating, forgery, plagiarism and collusion in dishonest acts undermine the college's educational mission and the students' personal and intellectual growth.
 - Baruch students are expected to bear individual responsibility for their work, to learn the rules and definitions that underlie the practice of academic integrity, and to uphold its ideals.
 - **Ignorance of the rules is not an acceptable excuse for disobeying them.**
 - Any student who attempts to compromise or devalue the academic process will be sanctioned.”
 - See http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic_honesty.html
- Confirmed instances of cheating/plagiarism will result in a zero for the essay/quiz in question – and possibly for the entire course.
- Suspected instances will result in a hold on your grade for the course until the issue is resolved with the Dean's Office.

- **“Cheating** is the attempted or unauthorized use of materials, information, notes, study aids, devices or communication during an academic exercise. Examples include:
 - Copying from another student during an examination or allowing another to copy your work.
 - Unauthorized collaborating on a take home assignment or examination.
 - Using unauthorized notes during a closed book examination.
 - Taking an examination for another student.
 - Asking or allowing another student to take an examination for you.
 - Changing a corrected exam and returning it for more credit.
 - Submitting substantial portions of the same paper to two classes without consulting the second instructor.
 - Preparing answers or writing notes in a blue book (exam booklet) before an examination.
 - Allowing others to research and write assigned papers including the use of commercial term paper services.
- **Plagiarism** is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writing as your own. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes.
 - Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging them.
 - Using information that is not considered common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
 - Failure to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.
 - Purchase & submission of papers from "paper mills," internet vendor sites, and other sources.”

- **Obtaining an Unfair Advantage:**
 - Stealing, reproducing, circulating or otherwise gaining prior access to examination materials.
 - Depriving other students by stealing, destroying, defacing or concealing library materials.
 - Retaining, using or circulating examination materials that clearly indicate that they should be returned at the end of the exam.
 - Intentionally obstructing or interfering with another student's work.
 - Engaging in activities that intentionally create an unfair advantage over another student's academic work.
- **Collusion:**
 - lending assistance or failing to report witnessed acts of academic misconduct
- ***Please copy the following paragraph onto an index card:***

I, (print name) , understand that committing any act of academic dishonesty will deprive me of the best possible learning experience in this course, and will jeopardize my grade.

Signed, (your signature) Date: (today's date)

- **For next class, read:**

- Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”
- Richard Shusterman, “The Fine Art of Rap”

➤ *Don't worry if it doesn't make sense right away.*

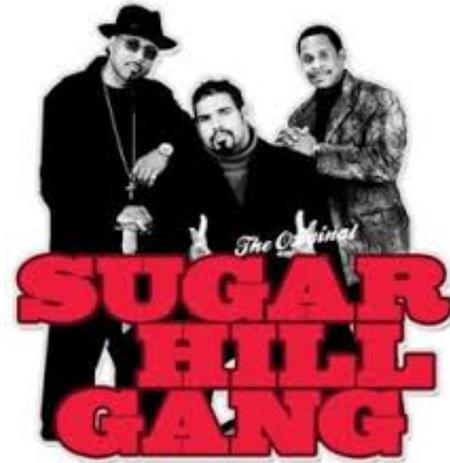
- Philosophical writing is like a whole new language:
- it takes time to get used to reading it and thinking philosophically.

- As a warm-up for Shusterman's article, let's discuss:

- **What reasons could we give to *defend* (support, endorse) the claim that *rap music is an art form*?**
 - Can you think of particular rappers whose work you would call *art*?
 - What about individual songs you would call *art*?
- **What reasons could we give to *argue against* that claim?**

By the way...

- Shusterman's article was written in 1991.
- Examples of rap he gives are way outdated. E.g.:
 - Sugar Hill Gang "Rapper's Delight": bit.ly/1VmHcGY
 - Public Enemy, "Bring the Noise": bit.ly/1NGq1yT;
"Fight the Power" bit.ly/1hLQmyD



- Run DMC, "Run's House": bit.ly/1LKdERO
- Ice-T, "Drama" bit.ly/1MUVdJ5
- BDP, "Stop the Violence": bit.ly/1fO7jX6
- Queen Latifah, "Dance for Me": bit.ly/1UkZkPa
- Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five: bit.ly/1O0IYsS

➤ While you're reading, consider:



- » Can you think of contemporary examples of songs that accomplish what Shusterman says about rap?
- » Do you think that his claims about rap are as plausible in 2015 as they might have been back in 1991?
 - Does it seem like the genre has evolved since then so as to support Shusterman's view, or to discredit it?