

ONTOLOGY OF ART, PHIL 2170 / 7190 – FALL 2020

Instructor: Carl Matheson. carl.matheson@umanitoba.ca

Time: Tuesdays 2:30-5:15. We will meet online via Zoom.

Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 2:30-3:30, or by appointment. I'll frequently be available. It's not like I'm going anywhere.

Grading: Undergraduates will be expected to write two 3-4-page papers and one 6-8-page paper. The first two papers are each worth 30% of your course grade, while the longer final paper is worth 40%. Graduate students will be expected to do a bit more, usually in terms of another assignment or a longer and deeper version of one of your short papers. As much as possible, the papers will be equally spaced throughout the term. Your final paper will be due on Dec. 8, our final day of class.

Fall Term Break: Nov. 9 – 13.

VW Date: Nov. 23, 2020.

Readings: There is no textbook for the course. Readings will be posted and usually also uploaded on our UM Learn page.

Theme and Content: The ontology of art lies at the intersection of metaphysics and aesthetics, which, at first glance, differ not only in subject matter, but also in fundamental goals and techniques – a battle between the pocket-protector and the Euro-scarf. In this course, we'll think about and develop skills in both areas, and also examine the relationship between the two. Our main question is this: What sorts of things are artworks and what is the relationship between the sorts of things they are and what it is required to maximize one's appreciation an artwork.

Here's a **rough outline** of topics for the course and the order in which they'll be discussed.

1. Constitution, and Persistence through the addition and subtraction of parts.

Statue and clay: constitution and synchronic identity. What is the relationship between a statue and the lump of material from which it is made?

Diachronic Identity: Sorites Problem. Addition and subtraction of parts. How many parts, if any, can a statue lose before it goes out of existence.

Artworks: Michelangelo's *David*, *Venus de Milo*, *Mona Lisa*

2. Alterations other than the addition and subtraction of parts.

A painting fades over time. Do its aesthetic properties and artistic value change as it fades?

Aesthetic empiricism: Are the aesthetic properties of a painting completely determined by how it looks? Can we fully appreciate a painting as an artwork by attending solely to how it looks?

Artworks as types rather than concrete particulars, and the Museum of Indiscernibles.

3. Music and multiply instantiable works.

Musical works are sound structures: Sonicism, simple and timbral.

Levinson's objections to sonicism: creatability, context of composition, performance means. L's positive thesis: Musical works are indicated structures

Alternatives to Levinson: Caplan and Matheson: musical works are spatiotemporal fusions composed of appropriately related performances, scores, etc., as parts. Tillman: musical works are enduring material objects wholly located at each of their performances. Two locally sourced ontologies!

An objection to all of the above: the thesis there are no such things as works of music.

4. Other genres and artistic media.

Rock/pop music, including the relationship between works and songs: Are works of rock/pop music different in kind from works of classical music?

Conceptual Art: Is Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* a concrete object composed of the Brillo boxes themselves, an idea conveyed by the physical Brillo boxes, or something else? Does every artistic medium possess its own distinct ontology?

The Pandemic Elephant in the Room: The course will be conducted entirely online via Zoom.

I have a full one-tenth of a year's experience with Zoom, I'm feeling my way through this, and I expect you are too. Since none of us are sure of what's going on, we have to be mutually patient and forgiving. Let's tell each other of what's working and what's not. It's my duty to make my expectations clear and yours to let me know when you need more information concerning what we're doing in class or your assignments. I'll provide a more structured list of readings than I've provided in the past. I'll also try to provide paper topics and deadlines further in advance. In addition, I'll make a greater number of readings available on our UM Learn page. Here's what I want of you: although we won't be meeting together in a physical classroom, the success of the course depends on lively discussion. If you have Zoom-jitters, try to get past them. We'll exchange tips on what may help as we go along. Also, I think it's more important than usual for you to prepare for class. Do the readings! You don't have to fully understand them the first time you read them. However, try to get the gist of them. What are their main theses? What are their basic lines of argument? We'll go into more detail in class. In other words, it's essential for you to be active participants rather than passive receptacles for information. One learns philosophy by doing philosophy. **In light of these considerations, you have a weekly assignment: before we meet each week, send me a question about either the assigned**

reading for the upcoming class or on what we discussed in the previous class. Your questions won't count towards your grade, but I'll nudge you if you fail to send them to me. There are only ten of us or so. It shouldn't be difficult to form a mutually supportive and engaged community.

I will post further information on UM Learn concerning course-logistics, regulations, and related matters as they become relevant.

Academic Integrity. Don't cheat. If you ever have any concerns at all about academic dishonesty, come to me, but first go [here](#).

Legalese concerning recordings of lectures and copyright: As the course instructor, I hold copyright over the course materials, presentations and lectures which form part of this course. Students may not make audio or video recording of lectures or presentations in any format, openly or surreptitiously, in whole or in part without my express written permission. Course materials (both paper and digital) are for the private study and research of the students enrolled in the course. Recordings of sessions held via Zoom will be made by me by and will be posted on UM Learn.