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### PHL 427.01: Problems in Aesthetics

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# Philosophy 427: Problems in Aesthetics

Professor Matthew Strohl

Office: LA 147

Office hours: MW 8:30-9:30 and by appointment

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## **Course description:**

This course will be an eclectic introduction to aesthetics. Some central issues that will be discussed include the nature of the aesthetic, the role of criticism, beauty, the paradoxes of tragedy and horror, and the supposed distinction between high and low art.

## **Required texts:**

*Aesthetics* (Oxford Readers)

Edited by Susan Feagin and Patrick Maynard

*Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*

By Alexander Nehamas

Other readings will be distributed via email, in .pdf format

## **Grading and exams:**

10% Attendance, Participation: This is not a lecture course. I will talk plenty, but you need to talk too. If you consistently come to class prepared and demonstrate this preparation by participating in discussion you will get an A for this portion. I realize some people are shy or don't like to talk in class: I won't punish you for being quieter than most, so long as it's clear to me that you're engaged with the course. I won't formally take attendance, but with a class this small I will be very aware of who's there and who isn't. Your grade will be lower if you miss more than a few classes, often seem not to have done the reading, and/or adopt a sullen, apathetic, clock-watching posture.

20% Presentation: 10-15 minutes on a reading assignment to get discussion started. On days when two readings are assigned, we can have two presentations. This doesn't need to be anything profound. You need to clearly explain the main points of the reading and outline the author's argument, and then raise an issue or two for discussion.

30% Short Writing Assignments: I'll be looking for thoughtfulness and evidence of engagement with the material.

40% Paper: ~2500-3000 words. You'll complete it in four stages: first you'll clear your topic and provisional thesis with me, then you'll write an outline, then a rough draft (shorter than the final draft will be, so you'll have room to expand what you say in light of my comments) which I'll comment on, and finally a final draft that I'll stamp a grade on. Your effort level for the earlier stages will affect the overall paper grade.

If you need an extension, ask in advance, otherwise I expect to receive written work on time (and in return I'll comment on/grade it promptly). I reserve the right to penalize late work at my discretion.

### **Movie showings:**

I will show three movies in class. The first two that I have chosen are slightly over 80 minutes long, so you really need to get to class on time or (preferably) a few minutes early on those days. Please don't come in late and ruin the viewing experience for yourself and others. If you can't make one of the movie showings, you still need to watch the movie and turn in the writing assignment that goes with it. If you have Netflix, you should have no trouble getting these titles. If not, talk with me about borrowing my copy.

### **Academic misconduct:**

You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://www.umt.edu.SA>). The in-class exams are closed-note: you may not consult anything but your own mind in order to answer questions on the exam. You may not use cell-phones, or any electronic devices to aid you, nor fellow students, nor fellow students' answers on exams, etc. You will receive no credit for any exam that you cheat on. Your conduct will also be reported to the Dean.

### **Special needs:**

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable modifications in this course. Your responsibilities are to request them from me with sufficient advance notice, and to be prepared to provide verification of disability and its impact from Disability Services. Please speak with me after class or during my office hours to discuss the details. For more information, visit the Disability Services for Students website at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/)

Please do not use a laptop during class unless you need to because of a documented special need.

### **Readings**

Note: Given that this is a small, seminar-style class I will treat the schedule as flexible, and I would like to be able to adjust the plan for the course depending on what people find interesting. To this end, I've left some days open. So if there's something you'd like to read or discuss that's not on the syllabus, let me know.

8/26 Hey, I'm Matt, here's your syllabus, see you Thursday.

8/28 Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis"; Ziff, "Anything Viewed"

9/2 Labor Day, no class

9/4 Carlson, "Aesthetic Appreciation and the Natural Environment"; Zangwall, "Rocks and Sunsets" (.pdf)

9/9 Roemer, "The Surfaces of Reality"; Movie: *Killer of Sheep* (dir. Charles Burnett)

9/11 Discussion of Roemer and movie; short writing assignment due.

9/16 Walton, "Categories of Art" (.pdf)

9/18 Bell, "The Metaphysical Hypothesis"; Hospers, "Art as Expression"; Tolstoy, "What is Art?"

9/23 Elliot, "Aesthetic Theory and the Experience of Art"; short writing assignment due

9/25 Beardsley "The Artist's Intention"; Davies, "Authenticity in Musical Performance"

9/30 Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"

10/2 Hume cont.; short writing assignment due

10/7 Wollheim, "Criticism as Retrieval"; Sontag, "Against Interpretation"

10/9 Hume, "Of Tragedy" (.pdf); Feagin, "The Pleasures of Tragedy"

10/14 Levinson, "Music and Negative Emotion"; Neill, "On a Paradox of the Heart"; Carroll, handout

10/16 Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror"

10/21 Movie: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (dir. Tobe Hooper); Nietzsche handout

10/23 discussion, short writing assignment due

10/28 Me, "Horror and Hedonic Ambivalence"

10/30 I'ut of town, no class

11/4 Nehamas Chapter 1

11/6 Nehamas Chapter 2, CLEAR YOUR PAPER TOPIC WITH ME BY THIS DATE (PLEASE!)

11/11 Veterans Day, no class

11/13 Nehamas Chapter 3

11/18 Nehamas Chapter 4, PAPER OUTLINE DUE

11/20 short writing assignment due

11/25 Sontag, "Notes on Camp." PAPER DRAFT DUE

11/27 Thanksgiving break, no class

12/2 Movie: *The Five Obstructions* (dir. Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth,

12/4 cont.

\*\*Final draft of paper due at noon on Wednesday, December 11th\*\*