Communication, Popular Culture and Philosophy  
COMM 4711 L21  
Dr. Jonathon Appels  
Office Hours: TBD  
Summer II (2016)  
MTWTh 9am-12pm  
Phone: (212) 242-1664

Course Description:

This course brings together the fields of Communication and Philosophy, considering the ways in which the two disciplines complement and inform one another, each offering a route to a deeper understanding of issues conventionally thought to be the exclusive domain of the other. In philosophy, one of the oldest disciplines, we have the study of fundamental questions pertaining to the nature of existence, reality, knowledge, human nature and the mind. In communication, one of the newest disciplines, we have the study of the processes by which we transmit, share, and process information, and the impact of mediated communication on our understanding of ourselves, each other and our shared reality. There is a large area of overlap between these two sets of issues, as each field offers a set of tools with which to consider how we make sense of, represent, and share our understanding of the world around us.

We will examine this intersection of disciplinary concerns by considering contemporary popular culture. Calling upon a diverse range of scholarship from both intellectual traditions, this course examines the ways in which popular forms of mediated communication can help to engage a mass audience in questions of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, embodiment, and metaphysics that have been debated by scholars for thousands of years, as well as inviting us to ponder newer philosophical issues, unique to our age.

Required Books:
Mark Matousek, Ethical Wisdom: The Search for a Moral Life (Doubleday) ISBN: 978-0767930680
One Yoga book of your own choosing
Some cost for performances, museums, and gallery trips

Reserve readings can be accessed through E-Res, and are marked on the syllabus as [R].
Additional Required Books:
(Choose two of the following)

Charles Seife,  *Virtual Unreality: Just Because the Internet Told You, How Do You Know It’s True?*  ISBN: 9780670026081 (Penguin)
Additional Required Books (Continued)


Wayne Koestenbaum, Andy Warhol: A Biography ISBN: 978-1497699892 (Open Road Media)


Eric Berkowitz, Sex and Punishment: Four Thousand Years of Judging Desire ISBN: 978-1619021556

Lambert, The Shadow Work: the Unpaid, Unseen Jobs that Fill Your Day

Ford, Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future

Paarlberg, The United States of Excess: Gluttony and the Dark Side of American Exceptionalism

Gawande, Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End

Iyengar, Light on Prânãyãma: The Yogic Art of Breathing

Iyengar, Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom

Goleman, A Force for Good: The Dalai Lama's Vision for Our World

Farrarons, The Mindfulness Coloring Book: Anti-Stress Art Therapy for Busy People

Glass, Words Without Music: A Memoir

Salzberg, Real Happiness at Work: Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement, and Peace


Required Graphic Nonfiction:
(Choose one of the following)

Marx's *Das Kapital For Beginners* by Michael Wayne, Illustrated by Sungyon Choi
Derrida For Beginners by Jim Powell, Illustrated by Van Howell
Foucault For Beginners by Lydia Alix Fillingham, Illustrated by Moshe Susser
Gender & Sexuality For Beginners by Jaimee Garbacik, Illustrated by Jeffrey Lewis
Kierkegaard For Beginners Written and Illustrated by Donald D. Palmer
Malcolm X For Beginners Written and Illustrated by Bernard Aquina Doctor
McLuhan For Beginners by Terrance Gordan, Illustrated by Susan Willmarth
The Olympics For Beginners by Brandon Toropov, Illustrated by Joe Lee
Paul Robeson For Beginners by Paul Von Blum, Illustrated by Elizabeth Von Blum & Ramses
Plato For Beginners by Robert Cavalier, Illustrated by Eric Lurio
Shakespeare For Beginners by Brandon Toropov, Illustrated by Joe Lee
Zen For Beginners by Judith Blackstone and Zoran Josipovic, Illustrated by Naomi Rosenblatt

Electronic devices (iPods, iPads, tablets, cell phones, Kindles, Nooks, texting, laptops, photography, recording devices, etc.) will not be allowed during the seminar.
Grading Criteria:

All of the following assignments assume the clarification of a theoretical and ethical position.

35% Research paper (Due 3/14)
The research paper is 12-15 pages.
Late papers will be downgraded one grade per week late. No email submissions. Papers should be proofread for all grammatical and typographic errors before submission. Multiple grammatical errors will lower the overall grade. More than three typographical or grammatical errors on a single page can be graded no higher than a C. Two errors on a single page can be graded no higher than a B.

25% Idea Book (Due 3/14)

10% Class participation and attendance, and short in class written assignments

20% Four individual oral presentations
The oral presentations are an integral part of the writing and revising process because they enable students to articulate ideas in both an informal and formal manner. These class presentations rely upon skills not always utilized in the formal writing process.

10% Final Portfolio One-on-One Presentation
All of your written work including your oral presentation handouts, your term paper, and your Idea Book are required for resubmission and review at this conference.

Attendance Policies:

No more than three absences or you risk failing the course. Tardiness of more than half an hour counts as a full absence. You are requested to drop the course after three absences unless you have the Dean’s written permission. Students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss one or two classes please speak to me in advance.
**Requirements for the Idea Book:**

Idea Book: The Idea Book is a form of free writing, that is, writing without grammatical concerns, or subject restrictions (as long as the writing is linked to the work of the class).

- 25 pages typed (14 font and double spaced) or handwritten (single-spaced)
- Make sure to paginate each page
- Include Table of Contents as the first page with a list of the trips taken and the corresponding page numbers
- The content is concerned with your individual impressions and interpretations of the required books, class discussions, and the visits to cultural institutions.
- Also consider your reflections on how your academic work is connected to the rest of your life.
- Discuss how the artistic pedagogies and sensibilities you discern in this course relate to the development of your ideas and creativity.
- Writing is stream of consciousness thought process, associational thinking, and not structured, similar to a diary, a journal, or blogging.
- Please be sure to turn in a copy to the Idea Book and save the original for yourself.

**Requirements for Research Paper:**

- 14-15 pages, double spaced, 14 font
- Refer to all the visits to cultural institutions.
- Thesis as part of the introduction.
- Restatement of thesis as part of the concluding paragraph.
- Integrate one quote each from all the books you have read.
- Integrate two scholarly quotes (from outside sources, not from the required books you have read in this course).
- Develop thoughtful transitions between the books and the visits to cultural institutions.
- Note: Quotes should be between one and four sentences long.
- Use MLA Format.
- Work Cited page required.
Course Outline

Unit 1: INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATION, POPULAR CULTURE and PHILOSOPHY

An overview of the central themes to be examined this term, and the ways in which the disciplines of communication and philosophy complement one another. What do we mean when we speak of ‘communication’? Why should we study popular culture? What is the relationship between reality, our perceptions of reality, and mediated representations of reality? How can storytelling help us make sense of what it means to live a good life? Key issues of epistemology, metaphysics, embodiment, aesthetics and ethics are considered in conjunction with the study of mediated communication.

We also examine a number of specified questions that may be clarified through our interdisciplinary work: Why is the mind prioritized over the body? Is there a linkage (or dissociation) between popular media and popular culture? Why is high culture often considered not a component of popular culture? What constitutes popular culture, and who determines that?


Unit 2: PHENOMENOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND EXPRESSION

What do we know, and how do we know it? What is real and what is an illusion? Can we trust our senses? Philosophy of Mind and the age-old ‘Mind/Body’ split. Dualism and our ‘divided nature.’ The thinking/feeling divide and gender differences in ways of knowing. How do we represent our knowledge and understanding of the world? The unbridgeable ‘gaps’ between reality, perception and representation. What is embodied philosophy and “movement” philosophy? When is a body not expressive?


http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en


Merleau Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception

Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations

**media examples:** *The Matrix, The Truman Show, Dr. Who – Season 1, episode 7*
Unit 3: MEDIA, MESSAGES and MEANING: Communication Technologies and Epistemology

How do the tools we use to transmit messages shape the experience of communicating? What difference does the medium make? How do the means of representation shape our understanding of the world around us? What are the epistemological consequences of the widespread use of particular tools of communication? Do different media have separate ‘capacities’ for capturing and transmitting the ‘truth’? Are our brains transformed by the media we use on a regular basis? Are some media more ‘intellectual’ and others more ‘emotional’? Do certain media privilege a more ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ worldview? Does the dominant medium of an era privilege certain governmental forms over others?


Carr, Nicholas, The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), pp 1-16. [R]

Hare, Peter. “Photography, Popular Epistemology, Flexible Realism, and Holistic Pragmatism”, in Irwin & Garcia, eds., Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture, pp 275-295

Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography

media examples: Connected, Dr. Who – Season 1, episode 12
Unit 4: LANGUAGE, CULTURE, STORIES, AND ETHICS

Our unique ability to communicate as essential to the human experience. We create language and symbols, and with those we make and share meaning, weave culture and tell stories, all of which contributes to the social construction of our ethical frameworks.

William Irwin “Philosophy as/and/of Popular Culture”, in Irwin and Garcia, Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture, pp 41-57.


http://www.memecreator.org/

Jonah Lehrer, Proust Was A Neuroscientist

Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations

media examples: My Fair Lady, Alice in Wonderland, Beatles
Unit 5: SEE ME/FEEL ME: EMOTIONS, SENSATIONS, NEUROSCIENCE AND MASS CULTURE

Recent developments in neuroscience pertaining to the processing of sensory stimulus. Mirror neurons as key to audience response. Media that transmit images and sound as uniquely suited to engaging a mass audience with philosophical concepts. Our identification with characters and the role of mass culture as a mirror of the human experience.


Jonah Lehrer, Proust Was A Neuroscientist

Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception

Austin, Meditating Selflessly: Practical Natural Zen

media example: The Hunger Games
New media offer new means of self representation, raising new versions of age-old questions about identity, authenticity and connection. Public and private self. Facebook and the presentation of self. Who am I? Who are you? What is friendship? Are we really friends? Personal identity in Asian cultures, i.e. egoless sociality. The impact of social media on social life. How are these new tools for connection changing the nature of connecting?

In order to understand different forms of art we consider many aspects of popular culture, including graffiti art. Why is art sometimes understood to be contrary to popular culture? What is “fine” art? How are theories of value determined? How is aesthetics a socially constructed discipline? When is aesthetics a part of the dialogue about social responsibility and social justice? Problems of management of technology. We will also reflect on the “popularity” of Pop Art!: Lichtenstein, Warhol, Rauschenberg, Johns, Rosenquist, etc.


Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just

Scarry, Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing Between Democracy and Doom

Seife, Virtual Unreality: Just Because the Internet Told You, How Do You Know It’s True?

Wayne Koestenbaum, Andy Warhol: A Biography ISBN: 978-1497699892 (Open Road Media)

**media examples:** Catfish [www.mtv.com/shows/catfish/video/full-episodes](http://www.mtv.com/shows/catfish/video/full-episodes)
Popular culture as a medium through which many westerners are first introduced to aspects of Eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism. The Force, the Tao, Yin/Yang and the balance of opposites, the power of the mind, spiritual/material.


Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu*

Mark James Russell, *K-Pop Now! The Korean Music Revolution*

**Media examples:** *The Matrix, Avatar, Contact*
Unit 8: EMBODIMENT, DANCE, YOGA, MEDITATION

Has yoga entered the discourse of popular culture? Does yoga function as a second language in certain cultural moieties in the United States? We examine body philosophy and movement of the body, as well as the philosophy of expression. What constitutes embodiment? What is the relation of sensation to embodiment and expression? How do we differentiate between media forms of hip hop culture, and “live” hip hop culture? What does it mean to be the “King” (or Queen) of Pop? Given recent changes in the new technologies, what are the new forms of embodied nonverbal communication? How does phenomenology as a philosophic system create forms of embodiment for the reader-as-mover?

Margo Jefferson, On Michael Jackson

Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception

Austin, Meditating Selflessly: Practical Natural Zen

Trich Nhat Hahn, The Art of Communicating
Unit 9  SEXUALITY AND MEDIA

There has been much discussion in recent decades on gender and philosophy, i.e. where are the female philosophers throughout history? As well, we have seen much discourse on the distinct ways that women and men communicate, and even the media they sometimes separately pursue. This unit begins a dialogue that is concerned with whether there are specific communicative and philosophic modalities that are understood to characterize differing sexual identities. What correspondences exist between the creation and transmission of popular culture, and the construction and transmission of cultivated social forms of sexuality? What are the forms of mediation in both cases?

Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*

Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*

Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*

Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*

Cixous, *I Love to You: the Jouissance of Writing*
What does it mean to live a good life? Are we still tethered to Ancient Greek notions of comedy and tragedy? When is pathos a useful idea or feeling? How have notions of empathy been transformed by new forms of media? How can acting in live standup be differentiated from acting in comedic television and film?


Ben-Shahar, *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*


Huizinga, *Homo Luddens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*

**media examples:** *Pee Wee Herman, Mr. Bean*
Please note: This syllabus is subject to revision at the discretion of the professor as the semester unfolds. We may examine other media forms, art forms, and performances and outings may be added. Any changes will be announced.

Policy on Plagiarism:
Please read carefully the Fordham policy regarding plagiarism, which can be found on the Fordham website.
The Academic Integrity Statement follows:
As a student of Fordham University, I recognize that I am part of a community dedicated to the disciplined and rigorous pursuit of knowledge and communication of truth. I therefore commit myself to the University Code of Conduct and upholding the highest standards of academic integrity. Any work that I claim to be my own will be my own; I will give appropriate credit where credit is due; I will be fair and honest in all of my interactions with members of the Fordham community.

Disability Statement:
Please note the following information on disability accommodations:
If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, you need to register with the Office of Disability Services for Students (ODS) in order to request academic accommodations for your courses. Please contact the main ODS office at Rose Hill at (718) 817-0655 to arrange services. Staff at ODS can walk you through the process and arrange appointments at the appropriate campus. Accommodations are not retroactive, so you need to register with ODS prior to receiving your accommodations. Please see me after class or during office hours if you have questions or would like to submit your academic accommodation letter to me.

Discussion Groups:
Students will be part of Discussion Groups with Presidents and Vice Presidents. If you have forgotten the homework, or are absent, and are not clear on the assignment, you can contact the President or Vice President, or any member of the Discussion Group, as well as anyone else in the class through the President and Vice President of each Discussion Group. In short, your first resource is each other. If your questions are not clarified through that means, then feel free to call me by leaving a message at my home number (212) 242-1664. Please be sure to pronounce your phone number on my answering machine since I do not have caller recognition.

8/15/15 RS
1/11/16 SS 4/22/16 SS