

# The Philosophy of Mass Art

## Syllabus Précis

**Instructor:** Dr. Aaron Smuts

### Description

Is popular art essentially flawed? Does it aim at the lowest common denominator? Is there something politically liberating about mechanically produced art? What is mass art? How does mass art engage the emotions? On what grounds can we criticize popular art? How might mass art instruct and corrupt us morally? These are some of the questions this class will explore. The goal of this class is to critically evaluate the fundamental assumptions and central arguments that set the stage for much of the current critical work in the humanities. Students will develop a sophisticated, clear understanding of the key positions in the philosophy of mass art. Students will also gain an understanding of several major issues in the philosophy of art.

### Texts

There are two required texts for this class: (1) Noel Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford, 1998), which will structure the course. It will serve as both a primary source and as a comprehensive secondary source. (2) The second text is the course packet. The majority of the readings will come from articles in the packet. We will be reading figures such as: Adorno, Dwight MacDonald, Greenberg, Collingwood, Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, David Novitz, Susan Feagin, Marx, Engels, Plato, and Althusser.

### Schedule

**Week 1:** Introduction, The Major Issues — How to read philosophy.

**Week 2:** Philosophical Resistance to Mass Art — MacDonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture” | Carroll, ch. 1, pp. 1-30

**Week 3:** Resistance Part II — Greenberg, “Avant-garde and Kitsch” | Collingwood, excerpts from *The Principles of Art* / Carroll, ch. 1, pp. 31-70

**Week 4:** Resistance Part III — Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception” | Carroll, ch. 1, 71-109

**Week 5:** Philosophical Celebrations of Mass Art — Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical of Reproduction” | Carroll, ch. 2, pp. 110-144

**Week 6:** Celebrations Part II — McLuhan, *Understanding Media* | Carroll, ch. 2, pp. 145-171

**Week 7:** The Nature of Mass Art — Carroll, ch. 3, pp. 172-221

**Week 8:** Nature Part II — Novitz, “Noel Carroll’s Theory of Mass Art” | Fiske, excerpts from *Understanding Popular Culture* | Carroll, ch. 3, pp. 222-244

**Week 9:** Mass Art and the Emotions — Plato, *Republic*, book X | Carroll, ch. 4, pp. 245-260

**Week 10:** Emotions Part II, Identification — Feagin, excerpts from *Reading with Feeling* | Carroll, ch. 4, pp. 261-290

**Week 11:** Mass Art and Morality — McCormick, “Moral Knowledge and Fiction” | Carroll, ch. 5, pp. 291-341

**Week 12:** Morality Part II, Simulation — Currie, “Imagination or Simulation” | Carroll, Chapter 5, pp. 342-359

**Week 13:** Mass Art and Ideology — Marx and Engels, excerpts from *The German Ideology* / Althusser, excerpts from *For Marx* and “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” | Carroll, ch. 6, pp. 360-363

**Week 14:** Ideology Part II — Carroll, ch. 6, pp. 364-418