

Paper Prompts

1. Film as Art (Week 3)

Pick one of the following two options:

- (a) In “Film as Art,” Carroll discusses a number of skeptical arguments for the conclusion that film cannot be art. Summarize one of these arguments and explore Carroll’s response to it in detail. Next, provide a counterargument to Carroll’s response on behalf of the skeptic and explain why Carroll’s response likely fails.
- (b) In response to the *causation argument*, Carroll objects that proponents of this argument commit a “modal fallacy” by moving from a conclusion about *conceivable* photographs to *actual* photographs. Develop a detailed defense of the causation argument against this objection.

Background: Carroll 2008, “Film as Art”; Scruton 1981, “Photography and Representation”

2. Anti-formalism (Week 7)

Walton argues for the falsity of the formalist thesis that the aesthetic features of an artwork are wholly determined by the formal features of that work. Instead, Walton maintains that (at least in many cases) the aesthetic features of an artwork are partly determined by certain historical factors. Critically analyze Walton’s argument. Does it succeed? Why or why not? You must provide additional reasons to accept Walton’s conclusion or else develop a detailed objection to his position—you shouldn’t just summarize Walton’s own argument.

Background: Walton 1970, “Categories of Art”

3. Art and Ethics (Week 8)

There are three different philosophical positions concerning the relationship between the moral flaws and aesthetic flaws (or successes) of artworks:

1. Autonomism – artworks are *never* aesthetically *good or bad* (to any extent) in virtue of their moral flaws.
2. Moralism – artworks are *always* aesthetically *bad* (to some extent) in virtue of moral flaws of a certain sort.
3. Immoralism – artworks are *sometimes* aesthetically *good* (to some extent) in virtue of their moral flaws.

Choose one of these three positions and then pick a movie or literary work that either supports or conflicts with it. Spell out your chosen position in detail and provide an argument for it. In the process, explain why your chosen piece supports or conflicts with your position. If the piece apparently supports your position, then explain how an opponent of your position should attempt to account for that piece and then explain why that account is mistaken. If the piece apparently conflicts with your position, then explain how your position can account for it and dissolve the apparent conflict.

Background: Gaut 2001, “Art and Ethics”; <http://www.iep.utm.edu/art-eth>

4. The Male Gaze (Week 10)

Pick a movie that apparently supports or conflicts with Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze." Next, using that movie to frame your discussion, develop an argument for or against Mulvey's theory. In the process, explain why your chosen movie either supports Mulvey's theory or raises problems for it.

Some more specific questions you might consider addressing:

- Should we think that Mulvey's insights concerning voyeuristic pleasure in cinema are inextricably tied to sexism? Or do those insights suggest something deeper about the nature of the medium—for example, that films are bound to invite visual pleasure in the figures (male or female) that appear on screen in a way that is problematic (e.g., objectifying)? If the latter, what should we do about that?
- Does Mulvey assume, or is she right to assume, that the "male gaze" always functions to arouse visual pleasure in a way that is problematic? Why couldn't it instead be used to *comment* upon male/female dynamics (or viewer/viewed dynamics) in a way that is amenable to feminism?
- What do the sex/gender distinction and/or considerations having to do with race suggest for Mulvey's theory?

Background: Mulvey 1999, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"; Carroll 1990, "The Image of Women in Film: A Defense of a Paradigm"

5. The Paradox of Horror (Week 11)

In detail, explain the "paradox of horror" and why it is supposed to be "paradoxical." Next, critically evaluate a purported solution to this supposed paradox. For example, develop an original defense of your own preferred solution, or else raise objections to an extant approach and explain why that approach is likely to fail.

Background: Gaut 1993, "The Paradox of Horror"; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcX9dur-px8>

6. Choose your own topic

Write a philosophy paper on any topic related to the philosophy of art. In order to choose this option, you **must** meet with me during office hours to discuss your topic and the thesis you intend to argue for. If I decide that your thesis is appropriate for the assignment, I will approve you to write the paper.