

# The 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Mountain-Plains Philosophy Conference

University of Central Oklahoma  
Edmond

October 11-13, 2019



## Keynote Address

Saturday, October 12, 5:00-6:30pm  
Mary Fallin Room, Nigh University Center

**Kitsch and Bullshit:  
Transgression and Imposture in  
Aesthetics and Epistemology**

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This paper will maintain that kitsch is to aesthetics what bullshit is to epistemology. While it appears likely that there is more than one kind of thing that such proverbial outliers have in common, and that there is more than one way in which each may prove detrimental, the focus here will be on kitsch and bullshit as clear exemplars of bad faith. I would like to dwell on this similarity, taking as fuel for my fire the account of bullshit offered by Harry Frankfurt and the account of kitsch presented in Tomas Kulka's *Kitsch and Art*. These two accounts make it exceptionally clear that kitsch sidesteps the aims of art in the same way that bullshit sidesteps the aims of justifiable assertion and that each does so while laying claim to class inclusion. The inspiration for this paper comes initially from Thorsten Botz-Bornstein's work on the subject, to which I at one time responded by proposing the above comparison. I agree with Botz-Bornstein's claim that the relations between kitsch and bullshit are many and various, since kitsch can, for instance, convey bullshit, and since bullshit may in at least in some respects admit of artistry. However, I believe that an investigation of the parallels between kitsch and bullshit can help to clarify the peculiar species of bad faith at the heart of each.

E.M. Dadlez is a professor of philosophy at the University of Central Oklahoma. She writes on issues at the intersection (often at the collision) of aesthetics, ethics and epistemology. She has written two books on the preceding: *What's Hecuba to Him? Fictional Events and Actual Emotions* (1997) and *Mirrors to One Another: Emotion and Value in Jane Austen and David Hume* (2009), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. She has also edited a collection entitled *Jane Austen's Emma: Philosophical Perspectives* for Oxford University Press. Dadlez is a feminist ethics dilettante and occasional novelist. She has indulged in the composition of a mean-spirited academic satire (*The Sleep of Reason*) that lampoons higher education in America. She also draws a lot.