Kant’s Critical Aesthetics

Instructor: Katalin Makkai
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Class times: Tuesday and Friday, 13:30-15:00
Office hours: Tuesday and Friday, 15:00-16:00

Course description
This course is centred upon a close reading of Immanuel Kant’s “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment”, the first part of his Critique of Judgment. Our focus is his theorization of the experience and judgment of artistic beauty. For Kant, the “free” beauty of an artwork is independent of any meaning or message (ethical, religious, social-political, or otherwise) that it might convey. Nor is its point the arousal of some emotional response. As an object of “pure” aesthetic judgment, art is to be valued “disinterestedly” and for its own sake. Furthermore, the appreciation of beauty, in art as in nature, is no merely subjective matter. Far from being a function of personal taste, its reach is universal and necessary. We prepare to explore such thoughts by identifying some of the main views to which Kant’s work is responding, enlisting writings by David Hume and others. We follow—and reflect upon—our reading of Kant with a look at one strand of his remarkable influence upon art theory and art criticism, as well as art production itself. We consider the “formalist” views of Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg, twentieth-century inheritors of Kantianism who were directly inspired by contemporary art practice and (especially in the case of Greenberg) directly affected it. We close with the opposing voice of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose “social critique of the judgment of taste” calls into question the principal dimensions of Kantian aesthetics that we have been tracing.

Requirements and grading
20% seminar participation
15% presentation
25% (12.5% each) 2 short papers (~2 pp. or ~750 words each)
20% presentation-based paper (~5 pp. or ~1875 words)
20% final paper (~5 pp. or ~1875 words)

Due dates will be announced during the second week of classes.

Attendance at all classes is essential. Seminar participation involves productive contribution to class discussion, grounded in a close and complete reading of the text assigned for each class.

Bard College Berlin’s policy regarding late papers (reproduced from the Student Handbook): Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of
the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

**Ordered books**

All additional readings will be distributed during the semester.

**Preliminary weekly schedule v1**  
(subject to revision)

1. Tu Sept. 2  
   Introduction  
   F Sept. 5  
   Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (excerpt)

2. Tu Sept. 9  
   David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”  
   F Sept. 12  
   Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface and Introduction

3. Tu Sept. 16  
   Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Logic (excerpts)  
   F Sept. 19  
   Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Schematism (selections)

4. Tu Sept. 23  
   Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, I and II  
   F Sept. 26  
   Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History”  
   Kant, “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?”

5. Tu Sept. 30  
   Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Beautiful: First Moment, pp. 89-96  
   F Oct. 3  
   [holiday]

6. Tu Oct. 7  
   Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Beautiful: Second Moment, pp. 96-104 (focus on §§6-8)  
   F Oct. 10  
   Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Beautiful: Second Moment, pp. 96-104 (focus on §9)

7. Tu Oct. 14  
   Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Beautiful: Third
Moment, §§10-15 (pp. 105-113)

F Oct. 17 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Beautiful: Third Moment, §§16-17 and Definition (pp. 114-120)

[fall break]


F Oct. 31 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Sublime, pp. 128-143

9. Tu Nov. 4 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Analytic of the Sublime, pp. 143-159

F Nov. 7 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§30-40 (pp. 160-176). Main topic: the deduction of the pure judgment of taste

10. Tu Nov. 11 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§41-45 (pp. 176-186). Main topic: art

F Nov. 14 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§46-50 (pp. 176-197). Main topic: genius

11. Tu Nov. 18 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 197-212. Main topic: the arts

F Nov. 21 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the Dialectic of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment and Appendix, pp. 213-230 (focus on the antinomy of taste (§§56-57) and on aesthetic ideas (Remark I, §58)

12. Tu Nov. 25 Rachel Zuckert, “The Purposiveness of form: a Reading of Kant’s Aesthetic Formalism

F Nov. 28 Roger Fry, “Giotto”


F Dec. 5 Clement Greenberg, “Towards a New Laocoon”

14. Tu Dec. 9 Michael Fried, “Modernist Painting and Formal Criticism”