Philosophy of art: Introduction & Syllabus

All texts mentioned, other than Hegel and Kant, are online. You can find them by searching on the journal title on the library website’s front page or, in some cases, at JSTOR or Project Muse. Optional readings are marked with an asterisk.

Readings

*Basic questions: Kant’s Critique of judgment*

*Note:* Readings in parentheses are for background or added context. For Kant, ‘Ak.’ denotes the Akademie Ausgabe page numbers in the margins of your edition. Optional readings are marked with an asterisk.

7 Sep Disinterestedness; types of pleasure:
   *Critique* §1–5
   Stolnitz, “Origin”

12 Sep Subjective and objective: §6–9, §33–34, Ak. 277–278
Shier, “Ugly”
Wenzel, “Ugly”

14 Sep Finality without an end: §10–17 (§56–58)
Wicks, “ Beautifying”

19 Sep Communicability and our interest in the beautiful: §35–42
Langer, “Cultural importance of the arts”
Kristeller, “Modern system”

21 Sep Fine art: §43–50
Murray, “Genius”

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<th>Date</th>
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| 26 Sep | Beauty and morality: §51–54, 58–59 (§83–96)  
Baxley, “Significance of taste” |
| 28 Sep | = 3 Feb +  
Düsing, “Beauty as the transition” |
(with emphasis on §5–6)  
Lotze, *Outlines*, First division, ch1–2  
(pp. 3–30) |
| 5 Oct  | = 3 Oct |
| 10 Oct | Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Introduction, §7(i),  
8; Part I, c1–2 (pp.91–152) |
| 12 Oct | = 10 Oct |
| 17 Oct | Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Part I, c5: A, B1,  
B3 |
| 19 Oct | = 17 Oct |
| 24 Oct | Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Part II, Section III,  
Introduction |
| 26 Oct | = 24 Oct |

Requirements

Four papers; lengths: 6 pages, 6 pages, 6 pages, 8 pages. Participation is essential; participation presupposes being in class.
Introduction: A new discipline, or two

The philosophy of art—or "aesthetics"—is the newest major branch of philosophy (the others are metaphysics, logic/epistemology, and moral philosophy). The very fact that it has two names suggests that its identity has even now not been entirely determined. The term "aesthetics" was introduced into philosophy by Kant's predecessor Alexander Baumgarten, who intended that it should denote an ambitious new "science of sensible knowledge", a science that would treat the objections of sensation (colors, sounds, and so forth) as logic and mathematics treated the objections of understanding (numbers, concepts, and so forth).

That science has yet to exist. Kant, as was often his habit, took the label and gave it a new application—to the systematic treatment of the "judgment of taste"—the faculty or capacity by which we judge that things are beautiful or ugly. The link with Baumgarten is that the judgment of taste, unlike intellectual judgment, always concerns itself with things apprehended by the senses—as painting, for example, is apprehended by vision, or music by hearing.

The study of taste and of beauty had already been undertaken, notably by the British philosophers Hutcheson, Burke, and Hume. But only after Kant's Critique of Judgment did aesthetics become a fully-fledged branch of philosophy on a par with the traditional three.

A generation after Kant, Hegel redefined the branch as the study of the human power of producing art. The study of taste had included the beauty not only of artworks but of things in nature; Hegel, though he acknowledged natural beauty, centered what was now to be called the "philosophy of art" on art and the making, not just the apprehending, of artworks. This is in keeping with a shift in Hegel from the traditional emphasis, maintained by Kant, on the mind as knower to the human being ("man") as doer, as maker.

Thus the discipline which is the topic of this course has an ambiguous or twofold aim:

(i) to study aesthetic judgment and the aesthetic qualities that aesthetic judgment typically deals in—beauty being the traditional, and prime, example;

(ii) to study art and artmaking as one branch of human activity.

Part One: The founders

The first part of the course consists in a close study of the two founding works of Kant and Hegel.

Kant's Critique of Judgment (1790) was intended to complete the system that began with the Critique of Pure Reason (first edition, 1781) and continued with the Critique of Practical Reason. It was supposed to provide a bridge between the natural philosophy for which the first Critique provided a secure basis and the moral philosophy for which the second Critique performed a similar service. The natural world—for Kant the deterministic world of classical physics—and the world presupposed by moral judgment—one in which we must conceive ourselves to be free rational agents—could not, it seemed, be reconciled: we, as living things in the natural world, cannot be free, and yet in order to make sense of our moral experience we must presuppose in ourselves a will capable of freely following the moral law—i.e. moral injunctions such as "don't commit suicide" and "don't lie".

The faculty or capacity of judgment was supposed to tie together and harmonize the intellectual capacity by which we understand nature scientifically with the
moral capacity by which we come to know the moral law and to evaluate acts with respect to that law. The capacity of aesthetic judgment, or taste, Kant understands as mediating between sensation (our only source of knowledge about the actual world) and understanding (our source of knowledge concerning logic, mathematics, and certain other basic truths); it “harmonizes” those two faculties, and provides for the ideal objects of reason a kind of representation apprehensible by the senses (and thus available to and effective upon everyone, and not just those who exert themselves philosophically). The role of art in this framework is rather limited; natural beauty is primary, because it is only in appreciating the beauties of nature that we find hints of a reconciliation of nature and freedom.

Hegel’s Lectures were edited from the lecture notes on philosophy of art. Like Kant, Hegel fitted his aesthetics and philosophy of art fit into a larger system that comprises all the traditional branches of philosophy. Unlike Kant, Hegel regarded the philosophy of art not as having only a minor role in our understanding of ourselves in relation to the world; on the contrary, human art exemplifies our productive capacities and thus for Hegel our effective relation to the world. We are not merely spectators or knowers, we are doers and makers.

Art, however, produces only one sort of relation to nature, a relation mediated by the senses, and thus by what Hegel calls the appearances of things. Taking up and reworking a very traditional conception of art (that it deals in appearances only, and not in realities, a view found already in one form in Plato’s Republic), Hegel regards art as a kind of stepping-stone on the way to the highest relation of the mind to nature, which is that of reason, hence of philosophy as opposed to both art and religion.

Part two: topics

In the second part of the course, we will look at various topics in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. I have ordered two books on photography, so we’ll start with that. Photography, as a relatively new art that rests on the mechanical origination of images (unlike painting and drawing), raises a number of interesting questions for the philosophy of art, not the least of which is whether it can be successfully dealt with by “traditional” means. Sontag’s and Barthes’s texts, in addition to being two of the best-known works on photography, do not take for granted any existing philosophical framework in their treatment of this “new” art (though of course they have various allegiances).

After that, in what will probably be the last five or six sessions of the course, what we look at will be partly up to you. I think we’ll continue to look at particular arts; keep this in mind as we read Kant and Hegel, and

Texts


Düsinger, Klaus. “Beauty as the transition from nature to freedom in Kant’s critique of judgment”. Notos 24no1 (Mar 1990), pp. 79–92. [JSTOR]


5. Hegel gave courses on the philosophy of art in 1823, 1826, and 1828–1829 at the University of Berlin. The Lectures were first published in 1855 in an edition by G. Hothe (see the introduction to our text, pp. vi–vii).


**Additional reading**


Murillo, *Beggar Boys Eating Grapes and Melon* (1645/46; Münich, Alte Pinakothek); see Hegel *Lectures* 170