

**PHIL 336**  
**Aesthetics**  
Fall 2015

Monday and Wednesday 10:05-11:25, ARTS 260

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Office Hours:  
Wednesdays and Thursdays 1:00-2:00, Leacock 927

**Course Description**

This course will provide an overview of four major developments in the German aesthetic tradition: Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, and Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*. These works are of particular interest for aesthetics not only because they argue that art is a human activity of utmost philosophical and existential importance, but also because they have had considerable influence in philosophy, especially in the continental tradition, art historical studies, critical theory, and even the history of art itself. They propose ground-breaking theories concerning the universality of aesthetic judgments, art's capacity for salvation and ultimate truth, the historical role art played in the development of human rationality, and the foundational role it plays in establishing the ethical life of a community, to name just a few noteworthy points.

Throughout the semester, we will also critically assess the ways in which these philosophical theories of art and its production may have undesirable consequences: the exclusion of certain groups, in particular women, from the history of art and the art world; a leveling out of the rich diversity of artistic experience; the end of great art; or, in the case of Heidegger, a possible relationship to Nazism. Gaining knowledge of the four above-mentioned texts and prominent critiques of them will therefore provide students with a solid foundation for engaging in contemporary academic debates in aesthetics both inside and outside of philosophy, while also giving them new resources to question their own personal relationship to art.

Topics include (but are not limited to):

- Whether art is objective or subjective
- Art and its relationship to ultimate reality
- The beauty of nature vs. the beauty of art
- Aesthetic experience as a special, irreducible state of mind
- Artistic genius
- Feminist critiques of art
- The existential purpose of art
- The cultural function of art
- Whether art has any contemporary meaning

**Assessment**

The final grade will consist of four components:

- Participation (10%)
- In-Class Midterm Exam (20%), on October 5

- Term Paper of 2500-3000 words (40%), due December 2
- Take-Home Final Exam (30%), due date December 16, 5:00pm

### Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be familiar with several major historical developments in German aesthetics and, by consequence, some of the most crucial debates in aesthetics, especially from a continental perspective. They will also be aware of some of the potentially problematic implications of these developments. The two exams are meant to assure that students have sufficiently internalized this knowledge for their future studies. Students will also improve their critical reading and writing skills by analyzing texts and creatively putting them to use in order to explore their own philosophical interests and existential concerns through course material. The term paper, the topic of which can be freely decided by each student in consultation with the instructor, is to promote the development of such skills. Philosophy is not just a body of knowledge, but also a distinctive methodology best learned in practicing it.

### Course Schedule Introduction

September 4: What is aesthetics? Why German aesthetics?

September 7: no class, Labour Day

### Section 1: Kant

September 9: The Place of Aesthetics in Human Cognition

- Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Preface and introduction to *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. I have posted a translation by J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914). More recent and better translations, with full critical apparatus, are *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). I prefer the latter.

September 14: Aesthetic Judgments I: Disinterestedness and Universality

- *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§ 1-9.

September 16: class cancelled, instructor away at a conference

September 21: Aesthetic Judgments II: Purposiveness and Necessity

- *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§ 10-22.

September 23: The Sublime

- *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§ 23-30.

September 28: Art, Nature, and Genius

- *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§ 43-53.

September 30: The Myth of Genius: Unmasking Exclusionary Practices

- Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," in *Women, Art, and Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 145-78.

October 5: In-Class Midterm

## Section 2: Schopenhauer

October 7: An Introduction to Schopenhauer's Pessimistic Metaphysics of Will

- Chapter 1 "The Standpoint of Idealism," *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2. I have posted the translation by R.B. Holdane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. 1909). They render the title *The World as Will and Idea*. A more recent and accurate translation is that of E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1958).
- *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, §§18-24.

October 12: no class, Thanksgiving

October 14: Art as Pure Knowledge and Momentary Release from the Will

- *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, §§33-38.

October 19: The Arts and Music as the Mouthpiece of the Absolute •

*The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, §§42-45, §§51-52.

October 21: Criticisms of Disinterestedness in Aesthetics

- Nietzsche, "Third Essay," *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethelme (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §§ 5-8.
- Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Pleasure: Reflections on Aesthetics and Feminism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51.2 (Spring 1993): pp. 199-206.

## Section 3: Hegel

October 26: Logic and System: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Spirit

- Second preface to the *Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 11-21.
- Introduction to *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 1-20.

October 28: Hegel on the Scientific Status of Art

- Chapters 1 and 2, *The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art*. The translated posted is by Bernard Bosanquet (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1886). It has also been translated by T. Knox as part of the two-volume *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

November 2: Spiritual Beauty and the Critique of Natural Beauty

- Chapter 3, Part I, *The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art*.
- *The Philosophy of Nature*, trans. M.J. Petry, vol. 1 (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), §§247-250.

November 4: The History of Art I: The Symbolic Period

- *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art: The Hotho Transcript of 1823*, ed. and trans. Robert Brown (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 282-310. This is much more reliable and readable version of Hegel's lectures, but is very expensive.

November 9: The History of Art II: The Classical Period

- *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, pp. 311-332.

November 11: The History of Art III: The Romantic Period and the “End” of Art

- *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, pp. 332-352.

November 16: Has Great Art Really Come to an End?

- Arthur C. Danto, “The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense,” in “Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography and After the End of Art.” Special Issue. *History and Theory* 37.4 (Dec., 1998): pp. 127-143.

#### **Section 4: Heidegger**

November 18: Destroying the Traditional Concept of the Work of Art

- Introduction to and “Thing and Work,” *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

November 23: How Art Makes Our World Explicit

- “The Work and Truth,” *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

November 25: Art as the Happening of Truth

- “Truth and Art,” “Epilogue,” and “Addendum,” *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

November 30: Is Heidegger’s Aesthetics Anti-Semitic?

- “References to Jews and Judaism in Martin Heidegger’s Black Notebooks, 1932-48,” trans. Richard Polt, unpublished.  
[https://www.academia.edu/11943010/References\\_to\\_Jews\\_and\\_Judaism\\_in\\_Martin\\_Heidegger\\_s\\_Black\\_Notebooks\\_1932-1948](https://www.academia.edu/11943010/References_to_Jews_and_Judaism_in_Martin_Heidegger_s_Black_Notebooks_1932-1948)
- Robert Bernasconi, “Race and Earth in Heidegger’s Thinking During the Late 1930s,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48.1 (March 2010): 49-66.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

December 2: The Relevance and Challenge of German Aesthetics for Today, Term Paper Due

December 7: Review Class for Final Exam

#### **Language policy**

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

#### **Academic integrity**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (for more information see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).