

Aesthetic Theory

COLT 602, Class #22088, Fall 2007

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W 5-8

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Course description

In one respect, this course is simply a reading of several crucial works on Aesthetic Theory: Kant's Third Critique, Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Hegel's Introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. From time to time a few important interpretive essays have been assigned, but for the most part this will be a course based on careful reading of these texts. Much of the course will focus on the relation between aesthetics and politics and between aesthetic theory and culture as an object of study, but there will be room for very many issues, including the relation between aesthetic theory and historical art practices.

That means, of course, that there are more complex agendas at work than a simple reading of the texts might imply. In a further respect, this course is aimed at furnishing the basic requirements for beginning to read Adorno's daunting *Aesthetic Theory*—that in itself would be valuable enough. We will, however, also be pursuing questions as to the vexed relation between aesthetics and politics (not quite the same as art and politics, or as culture and politics, though they all overlap), to ideology, and to hegemony; as to the nature of community, the state, or society, as consideration of the aesthetic continually obliges us to pose them; as to the nature of “representation” in all its dimensions; as to the relation of aesthetics and history, development, and racialization. We will, hopefully, also consider how aesthetic theory might actually inform the approach to artworks, and vice versa. You should feel ready to bring in works from any period that you feel in any way illuminate, contest, obstruct or complicate our readings of aesthetic theory.

Reading Requirements

A schedule of readings for the whole semester is given below. Nothing we are reading can be comprehended without several re-readings, so allow yourselves time to read the assigned texts well before class. If you cannot commit to doing so, please reconsider your enrolment in this class, which will depend entirely on *informed* discussion. In addition to the four books assigned, which should be available at the USC Bookstore, a reader of assigned texts is required. It will be available from Magic Machine, the copy shop in University Village and is a required text (one or two extra essays are included as recommended background reading if you have time. They are mostly explicatory and should be read alongside the useful introductions to each of the assigned books).

Writing Requirements

This is a reading course, and students will be expected to produce **three** response papers rather than a longer research essay. These short papers (about five to six pages) should identify a problem or issue

in the primary or secondary literature and seek to explore it in any manner that seems to you appropriate. You should identify the issue, explain why it is of significance to thinking questions relating to aesthetics, elaborate the stakes of resolving or complicating the question (the stakes may be political, aesthetic, literary or art critical, or of any kind that seems to you important) and, if it seems possible and convincing, seek to resolve the issue. You are encouraged to discuss the question with me before writing. Papers are due as you write them, but final dates by which I expect to receive each one are listed in the schedule below: **October 10, November 7, and December 12.**

Further Requirements:

All students are expected to come to class having read and considered the texts assigned for that class. All students are expected to participate in discussion. Most classes will commence by oral presentations delivered by one or more students and everyone is required to do at least one of these, individually or in small groups (max 3). You should consider what text(s) you would like to prepare in detail and present to the class. Presentations should summarize the argument of the text, relate it to other readings and to discussions ongoing in the class, and indicate the stakes of the argument in relation to the issues we are exploring. You should end by suggesting two or three questions that might guide class discussion. The purpose of these presentations is to practice the careful reading of demanding material: you should think of them primarily as an exercise in painstaking exegesis that will be of use to the class collectively, not as in the first place presenting your own arguments or critiques. There will be time for that when we are sure we have understood the primary material.

Schedule of Classes

August

W 29 Introductory session

September

W 5 Michael McKeon, "The Origins of Aesthetic Value"; Ferenc Feher and Agnes Heller, "The Necessity and Irreformability of Aesthetics" (handouts).

W 12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Introduction and First Book (Sections 1-22).

W 19 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Second Book, Sections 23-42.

W 26 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Second Book, sections 43-60. Pierre Bourdieu, "Postscript [to *Distinction*]: Towards a 'Vulgar' Critique of 'Pure' Critiques". Recommended (in reader): Odo Marquard, "Kant und die Wende zur Aesthetik".

October

- W 3 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letters 1-13. Terry Eagleton, "Schiller and Hegemony".
- W 10 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letters 14-27; Paul de Man, "Kant and Schiller".

Response paper 1 due.

- W 17 G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Chaps 1, 2 and 3, Part 1 (pp. 3-46).
- W 24 Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Chaps 3, Part 2, and 4-5 (pp. 46-97), and Schiller, "On the Sublime"; Martin Donougho, "Art and History: Hegel on the End, the Beginning, and the Future of Art". Recommended (in reader): Terry Pinkard, "Symbolic, Classical and Romantic Art".
- W 31 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

November

- W 7 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art".

Response paper 2 due.

- W 14 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Draft Introduction (pp. 332-359) and sections "Art, Society, Aesthetics" and "Situation" (pp. 1-45); Shierry Weber NicholSEN, "Toward a More Adequate Reception of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: Configurational Form in Adorno's Aesthetic Writings"; Recommended (in reader): Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Autonomy of Art: Looking Back at Adorno's Ästhetische Theorie".
- W 21 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Sections from "On the Categories of the Ugly, etc" to "Coherence and Meaning" (45-163).
- W 28 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Sections from "Subject-Object" to "Theories on the Origin of Art"; Robert Kaufman, "What is Construction, What's the Aesthetic, What was Adorno Doing?".

December

- W 5 Last Class: Jacques Ranciere, "The Distribution of the Sensible" and Jean-Luc Nancy, "Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?".
- Th 12 **Final response paper due.**

Some Recommended Secondary Readings

This is not an exhaustive list by any means but a suggestion of some secondary readings that may be of use in following up certain themes in discussion or in providing some interpretive help with texts beyond the readings assigned. There are, obviously, many more things you could read, but these may be helpful.

Kant

Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). [Perhaps against your expectations, this is the best and clearest short introduction to the three critiques].

Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Critical Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982). [A mostly clear, expressly liberal account of the political implications of the 3rd Critique].

Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer, eds. *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Robin May Schott, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), esp. Section III, Aesthetics.

Schiller

The outstanding introduction to *Aesthetic Education* is probably all you need, but if you want more:

Georg Lukacs, *Probleme der Aesthetik* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969). [If you can manage German, the essay on Schiller is fundamental. I don't think it has been translated yet.]

David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1997), Chapter 1.

Hegel

Stephen Houlgate, ed. *Hegel and the Arts* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007). [A useful collection of essays beyond the handful in the reader].

Benjamin, Adorno and the Frankfurt School

Susan Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York : Free Press, c1977). [Still an excellent introduction to the Frankfurt School.]

Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: theses on the photography of history* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997). [A wonderful book on Benjamin and photography].

Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism : Adorno, or, The persistence of the dialectic* (London: Verso, 2007).

Politics and Aesthetics

Ernst Bloch, et al. *Aesthetics and politics*, ed Fredric Jameson (London: Verso, 2007). [An invaluable selection of essays with Jameson's fine afterword on the aesthetic debates of interwar German thinkers and artists].

Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). [Essays on Kant and Hegel as well as the one included in the reader].

Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). [Possibly the best-known and most unreliable book on the subject. The chapter on Schiller in the reader is probably the best.]

Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

For a sneak preview of some of my own work in the area, see:

--"Kant's Examples", in Representations, 28 (Fall, 1989), pp. 34-54.

--"Analogies of the Aesthetic: The Politics of Culture and the Limits of Materialist Aesthetics", New Formations 10, (Spring 1990), 109-126.