

Carnegie Mellon University
Heinz College / College of Fine Arts
SYLLABUS - Aesthetics and Critical Judgment

Course Number: 93-835, 62-420
Meeting Time: Tue./Th. 9:00-10:20, Fall 2014 (Mini 1)
Location: TBA
Instructor: Andrew Swensen
Contact: 412-398-3183 / ajswensen@gmail.com

Course Learning Objectives: In this course, we will examine how one judges a work of art. The course will provide an overview of the history of aesthetics in the Western tradition, and in the process we will ask the central questions of: defining beauty, evaluating the artistic object, determining what external factors are relevant to aesthetic judgments (time, culture, biography), and analyzing the inter-relationships between artist, audience, and artistic object. Beyond the knowledge gained, course objectives include the cultivation of analytical skills in evaluating art and aesthetic theory, and the development of expository writing and speech skills in aesthetic analysis.

Course Structure: The course will follow two parallel paths: 1) an ongoing examination of aesthetics and the validity of critical judgments, using selected works of art as case studies in judgment, and 2) a historical survey of the Western tradition and aesthetics and artistic theory. While principal readings will consist of texts on aesthetics, exercises will engage artistic works across disciplines – visual art, music, literature, film, etc. – examined through the critical lens studied during a given week. As we build a vocabulary of critical judgment, we will then apply differing schools of thought to works, in order to compare their application in arriving at aesthetic judgments.

Course Requirements: Assignments will consist of one-paragraph reaction statements, two essays, and one class presentation. Grades will be determined as follows: Essays 50% (25% each), Presentation 25%, Participation, including reaction statements 25%.

Evaluation: Essays and presentations will be graded on analytical thought, presentation of argument, intellectual rigor, and originality of thesis – with each of those aspects weighted equally in determining the overall grade. Essays will be five pages in length and will address topics relevant to the course but chosen by the student. The presentations will occur on Wednesdays over the span of the course. Presentations will be graded on clarity of communication, use of the course content in an original way, and intellectual rigor. Often success in an essay or presentation begins with choosing a topic that is manageable within the confines of the assignment but also that is compelling and intellectually challenging. Students are encouraged to discuss topics with me. One final observation on both essays and presentations: while the course examines art, we need to be sure to compose material on aesthetics, as opposed to something that might more likely fall under the heading of “art history,” “music history,” “dance history,” etc. That is, the core of the argument should be about aesthetics and critical judgment.

The class participation grade will be based on reaction statements, attendance and discussions. Reaction statements will be due every Monday. They will be graded as complete or incomplete, and will *not* be graded on grammar, style, argument or rigor. Rather, they are an opportunity to explore anything about the readings in free-form expression. Students may miss two classes without affecting their grade. Class participation grades will be reduced by one full grade level for every class missed after two.

Academic Integrity: The CMU policies on academic integrity can be found at:
<http://www.cmu.edu/academic-integrity/headernav/policies.html>

The core of that policy reads: “It is the ethical responsibility of students to identify the conceptual sources of work submitted. Failure to do so is dishonest and is the basis for a charge of cheating or plagiarism, which is subject to disciplinary action.” This course will adhere to this and all university policies on academic integrity, and instances of questionable integrity will be referred to the dean’s office for review and appropriate adjudication.

Required texts:

Anne Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* ISBN-13: 978-0192891648

Berys Gaut, *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* ISBN-13: 978-0415782876 (Ideally the 3rd Edition, but 2nd edition page numbers are also listed in syllabus)

Hoftadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger* ISBN-13: 978-0226348124

Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* ISBN-13: 978-0486234113 (this is public domain and can be read online if desired, though the print version is inexpensive)

Readings will also include selections distributed in class.

Students are welcomed and encouraged to submit ideas, comments, and/or questions to me via email or in person. If you have a topic that you would like to see go before the entire class, please let me know; anonymity will be retained upon request.

Please consider this course as an opportunity to cultivate your skills in expository writing and oral presentation. I am always happy to discuss assignments. We will be discussing general composition issues in class, but I also encourage you to contact me (preferably sooner rather than later) about essay and presentation topics, and about drafting issues.

Course Schedule

Topics for class that day appear in plain text; readings for the *next class* appear in italics.

<i>Class</i>	<i>Topic, Reading</i>
Aug. 26	Introduction <i>Sheppard, pp. 1-75</i>
Aug. 28	What Makes Something Art? <i>M. H. Abrams “Orientation of Critical Theories” (handout); Gaut, pp. 213-223, 235-256 (2nd Edition 227-266)</i>
Sept. 2	The Case for Judging Art Presentations: <i>Hofstadter, pp. 8-45, 57-67, 97-125; Gaut, pp. 3-24 (2nd Ed. 3-28)</i>

- Sept. 4 The ancients: Plato, Aristotle
Hofstadter, pp. 141-185
- Sept. 9 The not-quite-as-ancients: Plotinus and Augustine
Presentation:
Hofstadter, pp. 280-343; Gaut, pp. 46-55 (2nd Ed. 55-70)
- Sept. 11 The Philosophers: Kant
Hofstadter pp. 347-357, 382-400, 448-468; Gaut, pp. 56-76 (2nd Ed. 71-96)
- Sept. 16 The Philosophers: Hegel, Schelling
Presentations:
Handout; Hofstadter, pp. 498-554
- Sept. 18 The Poets: Schiller, Shelley, Coleridge, etc.
Hofstadter, pp. 650-708; Gaut, pp. 77-86, 116-125 (2nd Ed. 97-108, 147-158)
- Sept. 23 The Moderns: Nietzsche, Heidegger. **FIRST PAPER DUE**
Presentation:
Kandinsky; Gaut 289-298 (2nd Ed. 293-306)
- Sept. 25 Kandinsky, a case study in theory and practice
Derrida (handout); Gaut pp. 170-178 (2nd Ed. 199-224)
- Sept. 30 Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, and their impact on the language of aesthetics.
Presentations:
Gaut, pp. 267-277, 442-451 (2nd Ed. 279-292, 489-500)
- Oct. 2 The Question of Art and Artist: Do We Still Have Style? Content?
Gaut, pp. 257-266, 299-308 (2nd Ed. 267-289, 307-317)
- Oct. 7 Beauty and Taste.
Gaut, pp.309-319, 375-383 (2nd Ed. 321-332, 401-413)
Presentation:
- Oct. 9 Concluding thoughts on critical judgment
- Oct. 15 **Second Essay Due. Please email to ajswensen@gmail.com**