

Spring 2025

**AH 302: Ideas of the Aesthetic
Syllabus**

Instructor: Katalin Makkai
When & where: Tuesday & Thursday 10:45-12:15, P98a SR 4
Email: k.makkai@berlin.bard.edu
Office hours: by appointment
Office: P98 004

Course description

Although etymologically rooted in ancient Greek, “Aesthetics” and its cognates are terms that entered the philosophical lexicon in the eighteenth century—relatively recently, in other words. This course examines texts that were central to the emergence—or invention—of the aesthetic, asking what kinds of problems the idea was meant to address and what work it was supposed to do. From there, the course turns to a recurring concern in these foundational accounts: the idea that aesthetic experience involves distinctive ways of being moved and depends on particular forms of attention and absorption. We explore texts that consider how artworks ask for, seize, or resist our attention, and what it means to be absorbed, distanced, attuned, or unsettled as a viewer or listener.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu), to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or

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a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences will not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

ASSESSMENT

Participation

Students are expected to arrive to class on time and prepared. Being prepared means: having carefully read the assigned texts in the assigned editions, bringing the readings to class along with writing materials, and being ready to initiate and to contribute to seminar discussion. Lack of preparation will affect the final grade, as will repeated and/or significant lateness.

Students may be required to post responses to readings as part of preparation for class.

Written assignments

Midterm exam, in class on March 10

Final essay, due 23:59 May 12

Policy on late submission of papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade breakdown

Participation	30%
Midterm exam	30%
Final essay	40%

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Provisional Schedule

*Readings will be uploaded to Google Classroom

*The schedule is subject to revision

*Once the semester has started, please consult Google Classroom for the current schedule as the syllabus on the website may be outdated

Tu Jan 27 introduction

Reading:

David Hume, from “Of the Standard of Taste”

Th Jan 29 Immanuel Kant on beauty

Reading:

Immanuel Kant, from *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (CPJ)

Tu Feb 3 Kant on beauty (continued)

Reading:

Kant, excerpts from CPJ

Th Feb 5 Kant on beauty (continued)

Reading:

Kant, excerpts from CPJ

Tu Feb 10 Edmund Burke on the sublime

Reading:

Edmund Burke, from *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

Th Feb 12 aesthetic distance

Reading:

Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle”

Tu Feb 17 formalism I

Reading:

Clive Bell, from *Art*

Arthur Danto, from *After the End of Art*

Th Feb 19 formalism II

Reading:

Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”

Tu Feb 24 absorption and the beholder

Reading:

Michael Fried, from *Absorption and Theatricality*

Denis Diderot, from *Salons*

Th Feb 26

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Reading:

Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood"

Tu Mar 3

Reading:

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"

Th Mar 5 TBD

Tu Mar 10 **midterm exam**

Th Mar 12 modes of attention

Reading:

Alois Riegl, selections from *Late Roman Art Industry*
Svetlana Alpers, from *The Art of Describing*

Tu Mar 17 against absorption: the political turn

Reading:

Bertold Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre"

Th Mar 19

Reading:

Bertold Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting"

Tu Mar 24

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer"
Siegfried Kracauer, from *Theory of Film*

Th Mar 26

Reading:

Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater"

[spring break]

Tu Apr 7

Reading:

Gaston Bachelard, from *The Poetics of Space* and *The Poetics of Reverie*

Th Apr 9 psychoanalysis

Reading:

Donald Winnicott, from *Playing and Reality*

Tu Apr 14 psychoanalysis

Reading:

Wilfred Bion, from *Attention and Interpretation*
Adam Phillips, TBD

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Th Apr 16 psychoanalysis

Reading:

Jonathan Lear, “The Call of Another’s Need”

Tu Apr 21 attention as moral practice

Reading:

Iris Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection”

Th Apr 23 refusal and the limits of attention

Reading:

Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”

Tu Apr 28

Reading:

Sara Ahmed, from *Queer Phenomenology*

Th Apr 30

Reading:

C. Thi Nguyen, from *Games: Agency as Art*

Tu May 5 final essay workshop

Th May 7 final essay workshop

Tu May 12 **final essay due 23:59**