

# Introductory Lecture on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790)

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In our course, we will first try to establish a "baseline" reading of the CJ, looking for the author's intention, and using mainstream secondary sources. But we'll also try to follow some important continental themes as they arise. The main ones here are: 1) the economy of sense; 2) the connection of aesthetics and politics; 3) the question of fascism; 4) the connection of rationality and force (Gewalt) in politics.

## 1) THE ECONOMY OF SENSE

The course rubric is "aesthetics." For Kant, the word refers back to the Greek aesthanesthai, to "sense." Hence the Transcendental Aesthetic in the CPR, where space and time are shown to be the forms of outer and inner intuition.

But for us in modern European languages, "sense" is an economy, between sensation, intelligibility, and direction. Oddly enough, then, "sense" has at least three "senses." We'll pay attention to the way Kant navigates this economy of sense in treating pure aesthetic judgements: sensing the reaction to object as directedness w/o the direction provided by conceptual grasping--that is, sensing the referral of sensation to a non-conceptual, non-knowledge producing "subjective universality"

Closely aligned with sensibility in the economy of sense, though because of this closeness in need of vigilant policing, is the question of pleasure. For Kant, pleasure is an increase in the feeling of life, and in the context of aesthetics, is the feeling of free play of imagination and understanding provoked by the apprehension and mere (non-conceptual) contemplation of form; such free play is nothing other than what allows the beautiful to show itself.

Pleasure is here disclosive. Truth is directed by feeling, by sensation: contra all logocentrism. We'll have to think about the connection of disclosive pleasure and the truth of beauty. Kant seems to back away from disclosive pleasure by tying it to judgment, which as Kant notes, is the power of understanding. Judgment, which as Heidegger reminds us in Being and Time, is considered the traditional locus of truth: adequatio intellectus et rei. Yet Kant's aesthetic judgments are non-conceptual. It thus seems as if the home of truth is migrating about the economy of sense: from the intelligibility of concepts to the disclosiveness of feeling.

Now we'll have to connect this Kantian notion of disclosive pleasure in the furthering of the feeling of life to the Platonic notion of pleasure as the opposite of pain, as the restoration of harmony in a living creature (Philebus, 31d). And to the Aristotelian notion of life as inherently pleasurable, a pleasure that this is continuous and pure for the totally immanent life of the prime mover. And perhaps even to Deleuze's notion of pleasure as the interruption of desire's construction of a (pre-individual) plane of consistence; that is, pleasure as the assignment of affection to a subject: a reterritorialization. And all this opposed to "joy" as the very process of desire's construction.

But more narrowly, in the CJ, aesthetic judgment concerns the beautiful and the sublime, as provoked by the experience of nature and art.

## 2) AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

Some historical background, to this question, which is currently of interest in the Kantian context to followers of Arendt and Lyotard, who take up Kant's notions of sensus communis and reflective judgment in thinking politics.

Plato:

Ion The pretension of the enthusiastic rhapsode to the general's art meets with Socrates's ironic putdown.

The Phaedrus and Symposium, where erotic rhetoric and poetry lure Socrates first outside the city walls, then to a private party inside, to discuss political philia and divinely mad--hence non- or anti-political--eros.

Republic Book X, where naturally mimetic children must be protected from the unforeseeable changes to their bodily constitutions--to which Socrates had earlier paid such careful attention in discussing gymnastics and "music" (the organization of their bodies)--brought about by exposure to poetic image-mongering.

Laws VII, the scene of rivalry between poet and politician, where the Athenian claims the polis as "the truest tragedy" in virtue of its being "a representation of the fairest and best life."

Aristotle:

The discussion of natural mimesis in the Poetics is linked to a moral pedagogy of the application of pleasure and pain in Nicomachean Ethics and Politics. Shaping the character of the citizens through laws, and children through customs, is the most important issue facing the politician.

After Kant, we find the future course of aesthetics in the German tradition is increasingly intertwined with that of politics. I'll briefly mention only two foci of this tradition at this point, Hegel and Heidegger, although much could be said about Nietzsche: the mnemotechnics of body cruelty, the comparison of peoples by their capacity for art.

Hegel will soon come to announce that great art is past, that is, that art no longer forms a community. In terms of the economy of sense, Hegel claims public political order is no longer grounded in an aesthetic (sensible) representation of the Absolute, but is rationally (intelligibly) self-grounded in law, the concrete self-unfolding of the Absolute in its own proper medium, as opposed to its mere representation in another medium. With the passing of the age of great art, political grounding has passed within the economy of sense from sensibility to intelligibility: it has been de-metaphorized.

For Heidegger, trying to think art beyond the Hegelian closure, aesthetics--bound up as it is with metaphysical conceptuality--is to be overcome; this overcoming is in the service of the search for an art that would allow the founding of a community in its organic "immanence," to use Jean-Luc Nancy's phrase. In the case at hand, an art (Holderlin's poetry) that would allow Germany to assume its (Greek) destiny and produce itself as living artwork.

Now even if German destiny is not your interest, the question of aesthetics and politics might come alive in the following phenomena: the entire question of architecture, including that of "planned communities," especially those of Disney; the analyses of the "society of the spectacle"; political advertising, especially image-building as practiced in the US, as it becomes increasingly bound up with a growing interweaving/concentration of the media/entertainment/communication networks; the marketing of politics as entertainment, as in the new magazine George, edited by JFK Jr, with Cindy Crawford, in colonial drag, as its cover girl.

In contemporary French philosophy, besides Lyotard, we find Deleuze and Derrida involved with the question of aesthetics and politics. Deleuze and Guattari: art as revolutionary force in Anti-Oedipus. Derrida: creativity and tradition in the coup de force of institution.

Motivating all post-WW II considerations of aesthetics and politics, however, is the question of fascism.

### 3) THE QUESTION OF FASCISM

Aesthetics and politics are brought together in the question of fascism in the complementary phrases: the aestheticization of politics and the resistance to this in the politicization of aesthetics. And of course, not so much fascism as an isolated historical event, over and done with, once and for all, but fascism as one of things haunting the New World Order.

We won't so much pursue the Benjamin-Brecht-Adorno line as what one could call the Deleuze-Derrida line: fascism as the fatal desire for the forceful imposition of complete order. Complete order: pure presence w/o chance, change, motion. Thus death: repetition w/o difference, that is, no repetition at all.

So for fascism we have the desire for total aestheticization and totally organization. If Politics (capital P Politics, as distinguished from the "many politics" of Deleuze or "micropolitics" of Foucault) is the organization of a body, to use a Nietzsche/Deleuze/Guattari formula, fascism is total politics.

Now the body organized in Politics can be a body of knowledge, a body plain and simple--ordered according to knowing, desiring, or feeling--or a body politic. More than a mere symbol of the state or organic metaphor--for Kant at a crucial point of the CJ, it will be even the very symbol of symbolization itself--the body politic is perhaps the major theme of Western political thought, from Plato's discussion of how to purge the "feverish" city in the Republic, all the way through Hobbes' Leviathan to the contemporary concern with the micropolitics of the body.

So if fascism as desire for total control, for a totally organized body, is a death-desire, then we can think "life" as motion, chance, change, creation. [Note: Aristotle thought life as motion, but as subordinated to the prime [unmoved] mover,

which erotically orients all living motion to the purely immanent pleasure that is its life of thought; with such an unchanging telos, all deviation from paternally-induced form in the supplement of generation is to be condemned.] But life and death cannot be an opposition: we must think life/death: relative order open to change. The desire for the other, the mortal desire to be open for the chance encounter with the other.

We'll try to read this desire for openness, for life, in Kant's declaration that nature--and hence genius, which takes dictation from nature--is a self-formative force opened up by "deviation" to change with changing circumstance. That is, life or art is the openness to chance within a self-formation that follows patterns. Life or art is, then, creative dis-organization, perhaps even "revolution." Life or art is anti-fascistic in principle, the Deleuze-Guattarian "schizophrenia" or Derridean "the impossible," the "moment of madness" that revolutionarily scrambles the codes and allows events of dis-organization and creative novelty in a new organization, but one open to its own dissolution in time.

In our course, we'll think such an ordering/dis-ordering force in Kant's term Gewalt as it oscillates between violence and authority in Kant's project of a politics of reason and a rational politics.

#### 4) POLITICS AND FORCE:

Background:

Odysseus' restoration of his rule, with the help of Athena, through the blood of the suitors.

Despite the early confrontation with Thrasymachus, Plato's care in formulating the role of the auxiliaries in the Republic.

Aristotle's criticism of conventional slavery as based on force, and his identification of political rule as persuasion, yet his recognition of the real role of force in the city--in perhaps my favorite line of the Politics: "For those who have authority over arms also have authority over whether the regime will last or not" (1329a9-12).

Hobbes: the analysis of man in his immediacy leads to the definition of life in terms of motion (cf. Physics 8.1.250b16). Happiness is satisfaction of desires, which are small motions toward the object that occasions even smaller motions we call sense, which are then retained in the imagination. Desire is completely analyzable in terms of the physiological history of the desirer: past successful incorporations produced increased power, motion, life; but it is not subject to moral evaluation, for the good = object of desire. Reason is then the calculation of the apolitical bundle of motions of the efficient means to the objects of unceasing desire.

Locke: "political power, then, I take to be the right of making laws with the penalty of death."

The question of the course comes down to this: is there a force that an organized body that aspires to the title of "rational state" must rely upon, but cannot justify? Which would be simultaneously the resource of a dis-organization it fears? This is the question of the social contract.

In brief, Kant sees the state of nature as a field of force wielded by individuals, while the state wields rationally justified force. The social contract is the transition between the two types of force, the move from violence to authority, the organizing of a body politic. Violence is the private ordering for satisfaction of desire for the existence of an object. Authority is public ordering to allow the greatest possible freedom; freedom here of course, is rational self-ordering according to the moral law, the form of law itself.

However, the organization of a body relies upon a force Kant calls coercion, and coercion fits neither category--it is neither violence nor authority. The undecidable factor in the institution of authority, the undecidable in the social contract, is coercion: as the force applied to bring about organization, it cannot be legitimated in terms of the body it brings into being. Perhaps we should just call it "force." As a-legitimate, undecidable, force might even be turned to creative, artistic/vital, dis-organization; it might become "life-force" or "revolution."

Kant is anxious about this "undecidable" force, for the social contract forms an important metaphorical structure for the architectonic of each of the major fields of the critical philosophy, the organization of the body of knowledge of philosophy. Likewise, in the construction of a domain [CJ Intro #2] in which a faculty is to rule: i.e., the rule of understanding in knowledge, which orders the manifold of sensation (here the "constitution of an object" would be equivalent to the "organization of a body [that could be experienced]; and which takes advantage of the regulative use of reason to render nature as systematic as possible through the ordering of diverse empirical laws. Similarly, the domain of the faculty of desire, where pure practical reason is to have Gewalt over sensibility. So while there is a lesson to be learned from the violence of the state of nature of uncritical reason or from the violence of the sublime, no lesson can be

learned from the formal regicide, the act of a revolutionary justice. I claim Kant's abhorrence of formal regicide betrays his anxiety about the undecidable force of coercion upon which any rational state relies but that cannot be justified, and that might become revolutionary force.

Now, I do not claim here, nor do I believe necessarily that the state "rests" on violence or that "revolutionary force" means taking to the barricades in the pursuit of a state power that would in turn have its own simple replication as its telos. Rather, we need to think democracy as permanent revolution: always open to the event of the other in its very institution: an organ-ization institutionally open to dis-organ-ization.

In any event, Foucault and Deleuze-Guattari have shown that desires for state power are suspicious, to say the least, and that analyses of society that focus on state power need to be supplemented, for there's not always an iron fist in the velvet glove here, or at least in the "First World." (A term I take to be structural rather than geographic: North Philadelphia is as much "Third World" as any place you'd care to visit.) In fact I tend to believe Hannah Arendt: using force betrays the weakness of the state, which relies much more on consent than some leftists might wish to believe.

But I don't think "consent" is so purely a matter of reason, as too many liberals wishfully believe: witness the frightening thought announced by Deleuze and Guattari in Anti-Oedipus, (and exemplified in the documents unearthed by Thewelght in Male Fantasies), a thought which D & G trace through Spinoza and Reich: the desire for fascism is not just the desire of the few to give orders, but also the desire of the many to take orders: or better, the desire of all to live in a system run by orders.

A much wider question then moves to the role of force in "rational moral education" or the "production of desire" (two equivalent phrases): Aristotle says laws are much better when they accord with custom, but that educating the young into the customs of the city relies on pleasure and pain. A sentiment with which both Kant and Nietzsche's very different moral pedagogies would agree. And this opens up the field Foucault explored under the terms "discipline" and "normalizing society." What then is "revolution" in such a context? Leninist party discipline in the pursuit of the conquest of state power needs to be rethought, to say the least. So let me mark the question of force and education off for another discussion, and move now to Kant's system.

Ideally, class members will have read the CPR and the CPrR; as shortcuts, the Prolegomena and the Groundwork can be substituted.