A picture is nothing but a bridge between the soul of the artist and that of the spectator.

- Eugène Delacroix
The Aesthetic Judgement and Art

- **Q1**: What makes us judge something as **beautiful**?

- **Q2**: What makes us judge something as **ART**?

- What triggers an aesthetic judgement?
Immanuel Kant’s Theory of Aesthetics

The **Aesthetic** judgement

1. is **subjective** (a felt judgement, not an intellectual calculation)

2. is **universal** (...not in the eye of the beholder)

3. is **disinterested** (value independent of usefulness/benefit to perceiver)

4. **Engages imagination and intellect** (in addition to the senses)
Today’s Focus

• What is ART?

1. The CONSTRUCTIVIST conception of art

2. Brief overview of Western Art Movements
What is **ART?**

**H1:** The **AESTHETIC** Conception of Art

**H2:** The **CONTEXTUALIST** Conception of Art

**H3:** The **CONSTRUCTIVIST** Conception of Art
What is **ART**?

**H1**: The **AESTHETIC** Conception of Art
   → The value of art is correlated with how aesthetically pleasing it is

**H2**: The **CONTEXTUALIST** Paradigm of Art
   → The value of art is correlated with
     (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
     (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
What is **ART**?

- **H3**: The **CONSTRUCTIVIST** Paradigm of Art
  
  $\rightarrow$ The value of art is correlated with
  
  (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
  (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
  (iii) the context in which it is perceived$^1$

- Art can gain **value** from its interpretation in context, after its creation!

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$^1$This is a moderate approach.
H3: The Constructivist Paradigm of Art

1503 ≈ 1504: Painted in Florence

1860s: Critics begin to hail it a masterpiece, but it is unknown outside of the art world

August 21, 1911: Stolen from the Louvre by an Italian patriot who tries to sell it to the Uffizi!

H3: The Constructivist Paradigm of Art

- **1913**: Returned to the Louvre
- Vandalism attempts, copies, parodies, analysis by art historians ...
- The artistic value of *La Gioconda/The Mona Lisa*, increased *after* its creation

http://www.npr.org/2011/07/30/138800110/
the-theft-that-made-the-mona-lisa-a-masterpiece
David’s “Oath of the Horatii”, commissioned by Louis XVI

- Tonal contrast expressively glorifies the virtues of
  - LOYALTY
  - SACRIFICE, and
  - SOLIDARITY to
    - (i) King Louis XVI (pre-revolution)
    - (ii) the State (post-revolution)

The CONSTRUCTIVIST approach assigns additional **artistic value** to the historical re-interpretation of this piece
H2: The CONTEXTUALIST Approach to Art

What is ART?

→ Marcel DuChamp’s “Fountain”
  - **challenged the conventions** of what art should be

(i) **Representational**
  (Duchamp: Rather it should be conceptual!)

(ii) **Visually-pleasing/beautiful**

(iii) Have a **medium** like paint, bronze, marble, etc.,

(iv) ...
H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Approach to Art

“Everything is Awesome” - Ai Weiwei

Dr. Meagan Louie
H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Approach to Art

What is ART?

→ Marcel DuChamp’s “Fountain” gains added artistic value from works like Weiwei’s “Everything is Awesome”
H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Approach to Art

→ Ai Weiwei’s “Everything is Awesome” gains added artistic value from works like Weiwei’s “LetGo Room”
What is **ART?**

- **H3:** The **CONSTRUCTIVIST** Paradigm of Art
  - The value of art is correlated with
    - (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
    - (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
    - (iii) the context in which it is perceived

- Art can gain **value** from its interpretation in context, after its creation!
Last Week:
REPRESENTATION vs EXPRESSION

Expression:
Inward-looking, aims to convey inner reality

- Moods
- Emotions
- Attitudes
The EXPRESSIVE Concept of ART

Q: Whose moods, emotions and attitudes?

- According to the Expressive Conception of Art:
  The artist’s moods, emotions and attitudes

- Question: Is this consistent with
  the aesthetic conception of art,
  the contextual conception of art, or
  the constructivist conception of art? Why?
The EXPRESSIVE Concept of ART

Q: Whose moods, emotions and attitudes?

- Another Interpretation:
  The viewer’s moods, emotions and attitudes
H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Paradigm of Art

→ The value of art is correlated with

(i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
(ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
(iii) the CONTEXT in which it is perceived

...but what do we mean by CONTEXT?

Stecker 2010 describes a SOCIETAL context

but we could interpret this as a INDIVIDUAL context too
H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Paradigm of Art

→ The value of art is correlated with

(i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
(ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
(iii) the GLOBAL/SOCIAL CONTEXT in which it is perceived

• Art can gain value from its interpretation by a social community, after its creation.

Dr. Meagan Louie
Individual/Personal Constructivism

**H3: The **CONSTRUCTIVIST** Paradigm of Art**

→ The value of art is correlated with

(i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and

(ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation

(iii) the **INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT** in which it is perceived

• Art can gain **value** from its interpretation by an **individual perceiver**, after its creation.
Art can gain **value** from its interpretation by an **individual perceiver**, after its creation.

→ An object can be personally meaningful for you, and be more artistically valuable because of that.
Individual Constructivism and Kant

Kant’s **AESTHETIC** judgement

1 is **subjective** (a felt judgement, not an intellectual calculation)

2 is **universal** (...not in the eye of the beholder) ✗

3 is **disinterested** (value independent of usefulness/benefit to perceiver)

4 Engages **imagination and intellect** (in addition to the senses)
Individual Constructivism and Kant

Kant’s AESTHETIC judgement

1 is subjective (a felt judgement, not an intellectual calculation)?

2 is universal (…not in the eye of the beholder)

3 is disinterested (value independent of usefulness/benefit to perceiver)

4 Engages imagination and intellect (in addition to the senses)
Defining Our Terms: SUBJECTIVE vs OBJECTIVE

Terminology VS Common Speech

- Like most academic disciplines, aesthetics has specific terminology.

- The meaning of these technical terms is often different from how the layperson uses these terms.

- And even within a discipline, different terms may be used differently.

→ This is why it is important to define your terms and understand how their meaning is distinct from common speech.
The Subjective/Objective Distinction
Stecker 2010 on Kant VS Lyas 1997

**SOURCE 1** (Stecker 2010:39)
Kant thought that four features are essential to such judgments and distinguish it from others with which it might be confused. First, such judgments are subjective, that is, they are based on a felt response of pleasure, rather than the application of a rule or a concept.

**SOURCE 2** (Lyas 1997:113)
The terms “objective” and “subjective” seem easy to characterize. The world, it is said, contains two classes of things. There are objects out there: trees, stones and clouds, which have properties like weight and shape. Then there are subjects that have a psychological life: me, your dog, their hamster and her pig. An objective assertion refers to a property out there, in the object. A subjective assertion expresses some state of the psychological life of the subject.
The Subjective/Objective Distinction
Stecker 2010 on Kant VS Lyas 1997

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The Subjective/Objective Distinction
Stecker 2010 on Kant VS Lyas 1997

SOURCE 1 (Stecker 2010:39)
Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:** determined by an innate, immediate feeling

- **OBJECTIVE:** determined by the systematic application of a rule/concept

→ These definitions are similar, but not exactly the same

SOURCE 2 (Lyas 1997:113)
Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:** based on a perceiver’s psychological point-of-view

- **OBJECTIVE:** based on an object’s inherent properties
The Subjective/Objective Distinction
Stecker 2010 on Kant vs Lyas 1997

**SOURCE 1** (Stecker 2010:39)
Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:** determined by an innate, immediate feeling
- **OBJECTIVE:** determined by the systematic application of a rule/concept

→ A perceiver’s “psychological” point-of-view can involve both emotions and intellectual calculation

**SOURCE 2** (Lyas 1997:113)
Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:** based on a perceiver’s psychological point-of-view
- **OBJECTIVE:** based on an object’s inherent properties
The Subjective/Objective Distinction
Stecker 2010 on Kant VS Lyas 1997

SOURCE 1 (Stecker 2010:39)
Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:**
  determined by an innate, immediate feeling

- **OBJECTIVE:**
  determined by the systematic application of a rule/concept

→ But Stecker 2010/Kant’s use of the term *subjective*
  by definition excludes intellectual calculation

SOURCE 2 (Lyas 1997:113)
Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:**
  based on a perceiver’s psychological point-of-view

- **OBJECTIVE:**
  based on an object’s inherent properties
The Subjective/Objective Distinction
Stecker 2010 on Kant VS Lyas 1997

**SOURCE 1** (Stecker 2010:39)

Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:** determined by an innate, immediate feeling
- **OBJECTIVE:** determined by the systematic application of a rule/concept

→ Lyas 1997’s definition of *objective* better corresponds to Stecker 2010/Kant’s *universal* criterion!

**SOURCE 2** (Lyas 1997:113)

Judgements can be

- **SUBJECTIVE:** based on a perceiver’s psychological point-of-view
- **OBJECTIVE:** based on an object’s inherent properties
Kant’s Criteria for an Aesthetic Judgement

Kant’s AESTHETIC judgement

1 is subjective (a felt judgement, not an intellectual calculation)

2 is universal (…not in the eye of the beholder)

3 is disinterested (value independent of usefulness/benefit to perceiver)

4 Engages imagination and intellect (in addition to the senses)
Kant’s Criteria for an Aesthetic Judgement

Kant’s AESTHETIC judgement

1 is subjective (a felt judgement, not an intellectual calculation)

2 is universal (…not in the eye of the beholder)

3 is disinterested (value independent of usefulness/benefit to perceiver)

4 Engages imagination and intellect (in addition to the senses)
The DISINTERESTEDNESS Criteria
Stecker 2010 on Kant VS Lyas 1997

**SOURCE 1** (Stecker 2010:54)
Judgements can be

- **DISINTERESTED:** not based on beneficial consequences for perceiver
- **INTERESTED:** based on beneficial consequences for perceiver

**SOURCE 2** Merriam-Webster
Judgements can be

- **DISINTERESTED:** not having the mind or feelings engaged; not interested
- **INTERESTED:** having the attention engaged

→ In this class, we will only use the definition on the left! for students of aesthetics, *disinterested* ≠ uninterested
H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Paradigm of Art

→ The value of art is correlated with

(i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
(ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
(iii) the context in which it is perceived
Correction:

H3: The Moderate CONSTRUCTIVIST Paradigm of Art

→ The value of art is correlated with
   (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
   (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
   (iii) the context in which it is perceived
H3: The **Radical CONSTRUCTIVIST** Paradigm of Art

→ The value of art is correlated with

(i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
(ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
(iii) the context in which it is perceived

**Q:** Is this approach compatible with the traditional **Expressive Conception of Art**?

Why or why not?
What is **ART**?

**H1:** The **AESTHETIC** Conception of Art  
→ The value of art is correlated with how aesthetically pleasing it is

**H2:** The **CONTEXTUALIST** Paradigm of Art  
→ The value of art is correlated with  
  (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and  
  (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation

**H3:** The **CONSTRUCTIVIST** Paradigm of Art  
→ The value of art is correlated with  
  (all the above\(^2\)) plus *the context in which it is perceived*

\(^2\)A non-radical perspective
Aesthetic Analysis: Three Conceptions of Art

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montréal. Francisque-Joseph Duret, 1836

Chactas en méditation sur la tombe d'Atala

Aesthetic Value

- Compositionally, the sculpture is balanced, but with enough asymmetry so the pose appears natural, not stiff.

- The bronze material has a warm reddish hue and reflects light easily, so that variation in value/tone clearly shows weight/form.

- Representationally, it portrays a sitting man with an ideal form and features.
Aesthetic Analysis: Three Conceptions of Art

**Contextual Value**

- The subject, Chactas, is the main character from the 18th century Chateaubriand novella “Atala,” a Romeo/Juliet story.

- Expressively, the slumped pose portrays the character’s sorrow.

- The tension in the feet can be interpreted as expressing the character’s pain.

---

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montréal. Francisque-Joseph Duret, 1836

Chactas en méditation sur la tombe d’Atala

Dr. Meagan Louie
Contextual Value (MBAM (2016))

- The pose (reminiscent of Rodin’s “Thinker”) also expresses the 16th/17th century concept of the heroic “noble savage” in tune with nature.

- The point of contemplation portrayed is a critical point in Chactas’ eventual conversion to Christianity.

- At the time in France, some viewed religion as crucial for social order and stability (pace the 18th c. Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau).
Aesthetic Analysis: Three Conceptions of Art

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montréal. Francisque-Joseph Duret, 1836

Constructivist Value ✓

- The myth of the “noble savage” is now acknowledged as a harmful stereotype

- This is because it denies the personhood of American Indians/First Nations People (since they are never portrayed with the complexities associated with real people)

- The “noble savage in tune with nature” theme of Chactas en méditation gains an extra layer of complexity when viewed through modern eyes...
Aesthetic Analysis: Three Conceptions of Art

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montréal. Francisque-Joseph Duret, 1836

Chactas en méditation sur la tombe d’Atala

Constructivist Value

- Consider the controversial (lack of) coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests

- The Sioux tribe are protesting a pipeline construction that may contaminate their drinking water

- The government has responded to the protests violently, with pepper spray, dogs, arrests

- Very little media coverage, despite the gravity of situation

Dr. Meagan Louie
Constructivist Value

- The “noble savage in tune with nature” theme of *Chactas en méditation* can be interpreted as a symbol of the North American media’s reluctance to represent

  (i) American Indians/First Nations people as real people (with real human rights)

  (ii) Environmental issues as important issues

- This re-interpretation adds complexity, and hence *artistic value* to *Chactas en Méditation*
THEORY can be either

- DESCRIPTIVE, or
- PRESCRIPTIVE

---

This is the case for most kinds of theory related to human behaviour, eg., aesthetic theory, art theory, but also linguistic theory, music theory, decision theory, learning theory, ...
Another aspect of academic theories...
DESCRIPTIVE THEORY: is a framework for describing how things/people are

e.g., a decision theory can DESCRIBE HOW PEOPLE make decisions

PRESCRIPTIVE THEORY: is a framework for guiding how things/people ought to be

e.g., a decision theory can be used to TELL PEOPLE HOW TO make decisions (to optimize benefit)

\(^4\)relative to some sort of goal
Descriptive VS Prescriptive Approaches

DESCRIPTIVE THEORY: is a framework for describing how things/people are

eg., a linguistic theory can DESCRIBE HOW PEOPLE speak

PRESCRIPTIVE THEORY: is a framework for guiding how things/people ought to be

eg., a linguistic theory can be used to TELL PEOPLE HOW TO speak (to be “formally correct”)

---

relative to some sort of goal

Dr. Meagan Louie
Descriptive VS Prescriptive Approaches

**DESCRIPTIVE THEORY:**

is a framework for describing how things/people are

eg., an aesthetic theory can DESCRIBE HOW PEOPLE judge things as art vs not-art, beautiful vs not-beautiful

**PRESCRIPTIVE THEORY:**

is a framework for guiding how things/people ought to be

eg., an aesthetic theory can be used to TELL PEOPLE HOW TO judge things as art vs not-art, beautiful vs not-beautiful

---

6relative to some sort of goal
For the purposes of this class, I am more interested in **DESCRIPTIVE THEORY** than **PRESCRIPTIVE THEORY**.

**Q:** Do you think Kant’s Theory of Aesthetic Judgements is a *descriptive* or *prescriptive* approach?
Weekly Instagram Assignment [OPTION 1, 2, 3]

1. Post an image/video of a work of art, and highlight its value as art...
   (i) ...with respect to the aesthetic conception of art (1/3)
   (ii) ...with respect to the contextualist paradigm of art (2/3)
   (iii) ...with respect to the constructivist paradigm of art (3/3)

2. Discuss your analyses in the comments - is it a SOCIETAL approach the constructivist approach, or an INDIVIDUAL/PERSONAL approach? (remember to identify with your student code!)
