

The material, practical, and conceptual relations between politics and aesthetics are mediated by the poetics of making sense of the world and creating communities of meaning and experience. The etymological intersections between *politikos* (the statics and dynamics of life within a polis where individuals need and shape each other and the commons enclosed by the polis), *aisthesis* (perception through the senses and the intellect), and *poesis* (making, producing, bringing-forth), are complex, plentiful, and serve as a premise of this course. These are life activities in which we manifest our relations to power, our location within the dominant temporal and spatial regimes, and our capacities of knowing, being, and feeling within the sensorial orders that shape us as well as those that we resist, redeem, and remake. This course focuses on the key inheritances that supply the aesthetic and political categories of our lives today, also analyzing how they are implicated in systems of real subjugation and imagined freedom. By first clarifying the difference between a course in the aesthetics of politics versus the politics of art, we will move on to introduce us to issues and questions pertaining to: the history of “the aesthetic” as a realm of political contestation; the relation between aesthetic and political judgments, and aesthetic and political theories; artistic and cultural production as site of critique, diagnosis, and political struggle; art as tool in political struggle, but also art as symptom and speculum; questions of form, content, and sensibility in political action; debates over the autonomy or complicity of art; western Enlightenment discourse and the subsequent demands of critical and decolonial aesthetics; the divisions between politics and literature, humanities and sciences, and what they reify; politics, pedagogy and radical aesthetics; the promise and problem of turning to the senses, the passions, and “the body” as final arbiters of truth and the means to counter the tyranny and horror of the Reason that upholds not only grand but also ordinary narratives of injustice and unfreedom.

**Texts to Procure** (*the rest will be accessible via the course Moodle page*)

Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*. Verso, 2007.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Blackwell, 1990. (will serve as ongoing reference text as well).

Hegel, Georg W.F. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Penguin, 1993.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Hackett, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Modern Library, 1968.

**Learning Outcomes**

- A familiarity with some of the key concepts, theories, and debates that have defined thinking about the relation of politics, aesthetics, and poetics in Western modernity to the present.
- The ability to recognize the continuities and discontinuities of conversations about art from conversations about aesthetics.

- Students who are more philosophically inclined should be more able to and confident in thinking of creative practice, including identifying their own, in connection to politics; and students who tend to be more practice-oriented, especially in the arts, should be able to think more critically and deeply beneath a functionalist and instrumentalist understanding of the relation between art and politics. All students should be able to distinguish--in writing and in discussion-- between these various modes of thinking about this relation.
- The ability to apply the foundational and conceptual issues that connect aesthetics and politics to everyday experience (not limited to the conventional understandings of art and culture). Such applications should also enable a critique of these categories.
- The ability to expand and pluralize the notion of criticism and judgment when it comes to analyzing artistic and cultural expression.
- The ability to engage with, converse about, and write about political and aesthetic theory without resorting to abstract jargon, and the experience of contributing to and creating a space that enables such sophisticated yet engaged and connected inquiry in the everyday experience.
- The greater capacity to read in a way that is consciously “political,” and to define that for oneself.
- An appreciation of the relation of method and object not only in aesthetics but in the practice of politics as well.
- A historical understanding of the key concepts in philosophical aesthetics that spur us to think about politics, and to see this discourse’s emergence in the 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries as inextricably linked with other historical events and conditions made manifest in this time period.

### Expectations

- Regular and punctual attendance. Please refer to the college policy on excused absences. Absences are not rights, which is why they need a valid excuse.
- Courteous and constructive engagement with texts and peers alike.
- Adequate class preparation: at minimum, this requires reading through all the material once.
- Abandonment of the computer while in class, unless we all determine together it is necessary for us to access something in the moment. For this reason, PLEASE print out your readings to bring with you to class.
- As much as possible, bring the course out into the everyday, and the everyday into the course. We will move through a range of historical texts, many of them challenging and difficult in their own way with no clear “punchline.” Let us train ourselves together to be patient with that, and with each other, and find our way together. There is no benchmark everyone has to meet in the same way—we will all do what we can, and help each other out through it. It is really crucial that you contribute by carrying your share of the burden of our collective understanding, and to try as much as possible to not be parasitic or purely reactive.

## Requirements and Evaluation

1. Class Participation and Presentation, 20%

(Written 5-10 minute presentation on an approved topic on an assigned day. Recommended texts should be given priority.)

2. “My pet project,” 45%

(At the beginning of the semester, each student will choose and have approved by me, a work of art to work with, read closely, get to know, cohabitate with, follow, render in quotidian experience, through the lenses acquired or concerns drawn from the various readings. I will be expecting to review this every Monday, and return to you every Wednesday. **No late or cumulative submissions AT ALL.** Submit a para or a page, if that’s all you have! At the end of the term, these various an/notations will be compiled and submitted with an introduction and conclusion. To be discussed further in class.)

3. Midterm Research Paper, 4-5 pages (Mod 1), 15% [due after break]

4. Final paper/presentation/TBD, 25%

(Contributions to a new scene of aesthetic education/proposal for aesthetic intervention in politics. To be discussed further. Due finals week).

## Reading Schedule

All readings marked with an asterisk will be available via the course Moodle page.

M, Jan 27 Introduction

W, Jan 29 **Required:**

Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Chapter 1.

\*Gary Shapiro, “Then and Now, Here and There: On the Grounds of Aesthetics,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26.2 (2012): 370-84.

**Due:**

Pet project proposal

M, Feb 3

\*Jacques Ranciere, “Prelude,” in *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*.

\*Jacques Ranciere, ““The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes,” *New Left Review* 14 (March–April 2002): 133–51.

W, Feb 5

**Required:**

\*Herbert Marcuse, “The New Sensibility” in *An Essay on Liberation*.

\*Joseph Tanke, “What is the Aesthetic Regime?” *Parrhesia* 12 (2011): 71-81.

\*Davide Panagia, “Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière.”

- M, Feb 10    **Required:**  
 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Preface to 1790 edition; Introduction (I-III, VI-IX); First Part, Book I, §§ 11-22.
- Recommended:**  
 \*Andrew Seligsohn, "Aesthetic Experience, Aesthetic Judgment?" *Theory & Event* 4.4 (2000).
- W, Feb 12    **Required:**  
 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, First Part, Book II, §§ 23-29.
- Recommended:**  
 Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde."  
<http://artforum.com/inprintarchive/issue=198404&id=32533>
- M, Feb 17    **Required:**  
 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, First Part, Book II, §§ 31-34, 39-46, 51, 55-57.
- W, Feb 19    **Required:**  
 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Chapters 3 and 4.  
**AND**  
     \*Susan Shell, "Kant as Propagator: Reflections on "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,"" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.3 (2002): 455-68.  
     **OR**  
     \*Paul Guyer, "Beauty and Utility in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35.3 (2002): 439-53.  
     **OR**  
     \*Ian Balfour, "Torso: (The) Sublime Sex, Beautiful Bodies, and the Matter of the Text," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39.3 (2006) 323-36.
- M, Feb 24    **Required:**  
 \*G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Pp. ix-xxxvi, 3-16, 25-46.
- W, Feb 26    **Required:**  
 \*G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Pp. 46-97.  
 \*Arthur Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory* 37.4 (1998): 127-43.

- M, Mar 3     **Required:**  
 \*Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense."  
 \*Friedrich Nietzsche, "*The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*" (selection TBA)
- W, Mar 5     **Required:**  
 \*Friedrich Nietzsche, "*The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*" (selection TBA)
- Recommended:**  
 \*Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (selection TBA)
- M, Mar 10    **Required:**  
 \*Jonathan Loesberg, "Materialism and Aesthetics: Paul De Man's Aesthetic Ideology," *Diacritics*, 27.4 (1997): 87-108.  
 \*Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited."
- W, Mar 12    **Required:**  
 \*James Meyer and Toni Ross, "Aesthetic/Anti-Aesthetic: An Introduction," *Art Journal* 63.2 (2004): 20-23.  
 \*Rei Terada, "The New Aestheticism," *Diacritics* 23.4 (1993): 42-61.  
 \*Hayden White, "The Aim of Interpretation Is to Create Perplexity in the Face of the Real: Hayden White in Conversation with Erlend Rogne," *History and Theory* 48.1 (2009): 63-75.
- M, Mar 17    BREAK  
 W, Mar 19    BREAK  
 M, Mar 24    BREAK  
 W, Mar 26    BREAK
- M, Mar 31    **Required:**  
 \*Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (selection TBA).  
 \*Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre" (selection TBA).
- Recommended:**  
 \*Tracy Strong, "The Lure of the Aesthetic," in *The Idea of Political Theory*.  
 \*Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Chapter 9.
- W, Apr 2     **Required:**  
 \*Karl Marx, excerpts from Dissertation and 1844 Manuscripts.
- Recommended:**  
 \*Chris Rasmussen, "Ugly and Monstrous: Marxist Aesthetics."

- M, Apr 7     **Required:**  
 \*Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (selection TBA)
- W, Apr 9     **Required:**  
 \*Mark Redfield, "Imagi-Nation: The Imagined Community and the Aesthetics of Mourning," *Diacritics* 29.4 (1999): 58-83.  
**OR**  
 \*Peter Hitchcock, "They Must Be Represented? Problems in Theories of Working-Class Representation," *PMLA* 115.1 (2000): 20-32.
- Recommended:**  
 Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Chapter 8.
- M, Apr 14    **Required:**  
 Benjamin, Bloch, et al. *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 86-140.
- W, Apr 16    **Required:**  
 \*Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry, or Enlightenment as Mass Deception."  
 \*Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, "Draft Introduction," pp. 332-61.
- M, Apr 21    **Required:**  
 \*Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, "Draft Introduction," pp. 332-61.
- Recommended:**  
 Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Chapter 12 and 13.
- W, Apr 23    **Required:**  
 \*Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, pp. 7-85.
- Recommended:**  
 \*Linda Zerilli, "'We Feel Our Freedom': Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 33.2 (2005): 158-88.
- M, Apr 28    **Required:**  
 \*Edouard Glissant and Pierre Joris, "From Introduction to a Poetics of the Diverse," *boundary 2*, 26.1 (1999): 119-21.  
 \*Edouard Glissant, "In Praise of the Different and of Difference," *Callaloo* 36.4 (2013): 856-62.
- Recommended:**  
 \*Emily Apter. *Against World Literature* (selection TBA).

- W, Apr 30 **Required:**  
\*Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*, Introduction and Chapter 3.
- M, May 5 **Required:**  
\*Gayatri Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalization*, Introduction, Chapter. 17, 21, 22.
- W, May 7 **Required:**  
\*Sylvia Wynter, "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice,"
- M, May 12 **Required:**  
\*Lauren Berlant, "Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 445-51  
**AND**  
\*Emily Apter, "Occupy Derivatives!/Politics "smallest p."" *October* 142 (2012): 86-106.  
**OR**  
\*Adriana Michele Johnson, "Two Proposals for an Aesthetic Intervention in Politics," *CR: The Centennial Review* 5.3 (2005): 207-32.
- W, May 14 **Required:**  
Richard Shusterman, "Thinking Through the Body, Educating for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40.1 (2006): 1-21.  
Arne de Boever, "Scenes of Aesthetic Education: Rancière, Oedipus, and Notre Musique," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 46.3 (2012): 69-82.