

The State is Not a Work of Art



Hans Haacke, *Der Bevölkerung*, 2000, detail

Mondays 3:00-5:30 | Prof: Blake Stimson | Office hours: Wednesdays 1:00-2:00

It has been a commonplace for a century now that “to understand the esthetic”—this is John Dewey in 1934 —“one must begin with it in the raw.” Therein lies art’s autonomy, its capacity for critical distance. This course will question this assumption by drawing on the tradition in German philosophy that turns on Hegel’s assertion “The state is not a work of art.” By drawing on the continuities between the political and aesthetic philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Lukács and Adorno we will develop a working account of realism that might effectively respond to the tragic cultural politics of our own day.

REQUIREMENTS

Class participation will count for 50% of your grade, one quarter each based on your attendance, written responses to the questions posed online, three short essays each responding to any chosen assigned reading and presented in class, and your contribution to classroom discussion. Your final project will count for 30% and your midterm presentation 20%.

The final paper assignment is in two parts. The first part is to be an initial draft of 7 pages presented like a 20-minute conference paper with feedback from the rest of the class in the paper workshop. The final paper should be 15-20 pages and focus on any point of intersection between aesthetics and politics. Please submit as a Google doc through Google Classroom. Alternately, you may submit a final video with a minimum length of ten minutes and with the level of research, coherence of thesis and polish of production value as [this piece](#) by a graduate student at Colorado or any of [these](#) by art historians in the UK or [this one](#) on Ai Wei Wei.

You might think of these writing assignments as opportunities to make some headway working through this experience described by Andrew Ross:

It took me many, many years to find my own voice, which I think is the most difficult thing for people to do with a standard academic training. [One is taught to] work with the voice of the disciplinary consensus or to ape some master thinker who has been influential in the discipline, and that's not unrelated to your choice of research topics.

Put differently, your task is one that is often more challenging than it would seem—to think for yourself.

Finally, here are some recent [writing tips from the New York Times](#), a few of which might be helpful.



SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT	QUESTION
I. Our question negatively defined			
1/14	Introduction I: State	Elizabeth Anderson, Liberty, Equality, and Private Government	What is the state?
1/28	Introduction II: Art	Immanuel Kant, "Introduction B," <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> Immanuel Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> David Graeber, Dead Zones of the Imagination	What is art?
II. Political theory			
2/4	Conservative political theory: Corporatism *Presentation by Urooj Shakeel, CAA Ambassador	Thomas Hobbes, The Leviathan , Introduction; Chapter XIII: Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery; Chapter XVII: Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth; Chapter XXI: Of the Liberty of Subjects Carl Schmitt, "The State as a Mechanism in Hobbes and Descartes" Antonin Scalia, Dissent in Obergefell v. Hodges Antonin Scalia, comments reported in Scalia: 'You either believe in a democracy or you don't'	What is conservative political theory?
2/11	Liberal political theory: Individualism	John Locke, The Second Treatise of Civil Government , I. Of Political Power; II. Of the State of Nature; IV. Of Slavery; V. Of Property; VII. Of Political or Civil Society. C.S. Lewis, Equality Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" Francis Fukuyama, "The Universal and Homogenous State" Robert Cooper, The New Liberal Imperialism	What is liberal political theory?
2/18	Left political theory: Socialism	G.W.F. Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right , §§4-10: Freedom; §§41-53: Persons and Things; §57: [Slavery]; §§257-258: The State as Ethical Idea and Objective Freedom Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party and Engels, The Principles of Communism Ernest Mandel, "The Marxist Theory of the State" Paul Krugman, The Economics of Soaking the Rich	What is left political theory?
III. Aesthetic theory			
2/25	Conservative aesthetic theory: Corporatism	Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" Bruno Latour, "Introduction: How to Resume the Task of Tracing Associations," "Third Move: Connecting Sites," and "Conclusion: From Society to Collective—Can the Social Be Reassembled?," <i>Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory</i>	What is conservative aesthetic theory?

3/4	Liberal aesthetic theory: Individualism	John Dewey, Chapter I: The Live Creature, Chapter II: The Live Creature and 'Ethereal Things', Chapter III: Having and Experience, and Chapter XII: The Challenge to Philosophy." <i>Art as Experience</i> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic" and "The Scholastic Point of View"	What is liberal aesthetic theory?
3/11	Left aesthetic theory: Socialism	György Lukács, "Art and Society" and "Art and Objective Truth" Theodor Adorno, "Art-object"	What is left aesthetic theory?
Interlude: Paper presentations and workshop			
3/18	Paper presentations	Formal 20 minute (7-page) presentations of first drafts of term papers. 10 minutes for discussion.	
4/1	Paper workshop	Read all papers at home and annotate with comments for workshop discussions in class. 30 minutes of discussion per paper.	
IV. Our question as a site of contradiction and struggle			
4/8	Poststatist political and aesthetic theory	T.J. Clark, Introduction, Heaven and Earth: Painting and the Life to Come T.J. Clark, For a Left with No Future	What is poststatism?
4/15	Statist political and aesthetic theory	Nancy Fraser, The End of Progressive Neoliberalism Jodi Dean, "Not Him, Us (and we aren't populists)" Vivek Chibber, Development From Below Vivek Chibber, Our Road to Power	What is statism?
4/22	Art at the mercy of the state	Lane Relyea, Your Everyday Art World	What is state dependency?
4/29	Art as the basis for the state	Thierry de Duve, Aesthetics at Large: Volume 1: Art, Ethics, Politics	What is state accountability?
Final paper			
5/6	Due	15-20pp on any point of intersection between aesthetics and politics. Please submit as a Google doc through Google Classroom.	

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As an academic community, UIC is committed to providing an environment in which research, learning, and scholarship can flourish and in which all endeavors are guided by academic and professional integrity. All members of the campus community—students, staff, faculty, and administrators—share the responsibility of insuring that these standards are upheld so that such an environment exists. Instances of academic misconduct by students will be handled pursuant to the [Student Disciplinary Policy](#).

DISABILITY

The University of Illinois at Chicago is committed to maintaining a barrier-free environment so that students with disabilities can fully access programs, courses, services, and activities at UIC. Students with disabilities who require accommodations for access to and/or participation in this course are welcome, but must be registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). You may contact DRC at 312-413-2183 (v) or 312-413-0123 (TTY) and consult [this resource](#).

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Students who wish to observe their religious holidays shall notify the faculty member by the tenth day of the semester of the date when they will be absent unless the religious holiday is observed on or before the tenth day of the semester. In such cases, the student shall notify the faculty member at least five days in advance of the date when he/she will be absent. The faculty member shall make every reasonable effort to honor the request, not penalize the student for missing the class, and if an examination or project is due during the absence, give the student an exam or assignment equivalent to the one completed by those students in attendance. If the student feels aggrieved, he/she may request remedy through the campus grievance procedure.