COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This graduate seminar is devoted to close readings and discussions of important works in the philosophy of art and aesthetics, political theory, and art history and criticism, with an eye to such questions as: What is the meaning of art for politics? What is the political significance of the differentiation of an “aesthetic” domain of activity and experience in Euro-American modernity? Can aesthetic judgment serve as a model for political judgment? Can artistic creation serve as a model for political action? What can the study of art and aesthetics teach us about how and when people experience events, objects, or spaces as (politically) meaningful or engaging?

In its 2007 iteration, the seminar will begin with an extended consideration of Kant’s third Critique and end with a reading of the interpretation and appropriation of Kant’s idea of aesthetic judgment in the political theory of Hannah Arendt. Between these bookends, we shall also consider the relationship of aesthetics to politics in two key essays of the 1930s, by Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger. Our readings will also connect the works of these four central authors to debates among modernist artists and critics over such issues as formalism, the relation of art to life, the historical position of the avant-garde; and to debates among political theorists over such issues as the relationship of aesthetics to ethics and the nature of freedom.

TEXTS:

The following required texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op. All other readings will be on electronic and paper reserve through Regenstein Library.

Immanuel Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge)
Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought (Harper)
Hannah Arendt, Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy (Chicago)
Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago)

One additional book—Larry Shiner, The Invention of Art: A Cultural History (Chicago)—has also been ordered from the Co-op but is recommended only.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: A 15–20 page seminar paper, due on March 15, on a topic of your choice, designed in consultation with me.
WEEKLY MEETINGS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Week One (January 3): Introduction

[You need not read these items in advance of the introductory session; read them at your convenience as the seminar proceeds.]


Week Two (January 10): Kant, I


Week Three (January 17): Kant, II


Week Four (January 24): Kant, III


Week Five (January 31): Benjamin, I


**Week Six (February 7): Benjamin, II**


**Week Seven (February 14): Heidegger, I**


**Week Eight (February 21): Heidegger, II**


**Week Nine (February 28): Arendt, I**


**Week Ten (March 7): Arendt, II**