

# GRADUATE SEMINAR: CRITICAL READINGS IN THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF MUSIC

Instructor: Dr. Dan DiPiero

Date/Time/Format/Location

Office Hours:

## Course Description

This graduate seminar stages and investigates the relationships among three key terms: aesthetics, politics, and music. While both aesthetic and political theory have their own independent (overlapping) genealogies, at least since the Frankfurt school, critical theory has also been concerned with how these realms of experience bear on one another. The dialogic study of aesthetics and politics together takes as its premise that all artistic culture produces political implications/effects, while all political activity is subject to the question of appearance, or even more generally, lived experience. This, broadly, is the lineage that we take up here. What, on the one hand, can the study of music bring to these conversations? How does music's complicated status as what Georgina Born calls a "multiply mediated" object complicate aesthetic and political theory? On the other hand, how does a broad reading in aesthetics and politics help to expand and nuance our study of music, for too long concerned with the "sounds themselves"? Incorporating perspectives from philosophy, musicology, Black studies, queer and feminist theories, and more, this seminar focuses on interdisciplinary approaches to music study, always with an eye toward the connections between aesthetic and political experience.

## Course Components

### **Participation (40%)**

Seminar discussions are run by you. I will be very excited about the subject matter, and therefore will place strict limits on the amount of time that I (ideally) will be speaking, weighing in only when necessary. In the end, this seminar is more effective when you are exploring the readings collectively, finding your own way. This means that participation is an absolutely critical component of this course. Participation means doing the reading in advance of class, taking detailed notes, and coming with questions or points to discuss. Participation does *not* mean talking over others, interrupting, or otherwise being disrespectful (by, for example, not having done the reading). Doing the former increases your score; doing the latter decreases it.

### **Response Papers (20%)**

Each week you are responsible for writing a 1-page (single spaced) response to one of the readings (of your choice). The response can concern any aspect of that reading whatsoever, so long as it is thoughtful and demonstrates sincere engagement with the text. You may skip 3 of these papers throughout the term, whenever you want. The rest are mandatory.

### **Discussion Leading (10%)**

Once per term, you will be responsible for leading a discussion on one of the texts assigned for a given week. It will be your responsibility to direct the conversation, ask questions, redirect, draw our attention to material, and so on. The expectation is that you will do the legwork to generate a productive

conversation with your peers while also demonstrating your engagement with the text. Group assignments will be distributed in advance.

### **Final Essay (30%)**

Your final essay should be a graduate-level term paper with a clear thesis. You are required to discuss your topic with me by the 10<sup>th</sup> week of our course. You are also required to present your term paper to the rest of the class during the final two weeks of our course. This presentation can be informal and low-stakes; but it is required.

Tentative Schedule
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#### Week 1: Introductory Context

1. Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw, "Introduction: What is Social Aesthetics?" in *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, ed. Born, Lewis, and Straw (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 1-32.
2. Martín Plot, "Introduction: The Advent of the Aesthetico-Political", in *The Aesthetico-Political: The Question of Democracy in Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, and Rancière*.

#### Week 2: Modernisms (I)

1. Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author" in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (CAR)
2. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author" (CAR)
3. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (CAR)
4. Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered", *Popular Culture*, 103-108.

#### Week 3: Modernisms (II)

1. Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music" *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, New York: Institute of Social Research, 1941, IX, 17-48.
2. Fumi Okiji, "Introduction", in *Jazz As Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited*.

#### Week 4: Postmodernisms

1. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern*.
2. Jacques Rancière, "Artistic Regimes and the Shortcomings of the Notion of Modernity", in *The Politics of Aesthetics*.
3. Dan DiPiero, "This and The Coming Crisis: Reid Anderson, Dave King, and Craig Taborn's Golden Valley is Now", *Blog, Los Angeles Review of Books* (February 3, 2020).

#### Week 5: Ontologies (I)

1. Lydia Goehr, "Introduction", in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*.
2. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle, "Introduction", in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*.
3. Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things", in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*
4. Deleuze and Guattari, "Percept, Affect, and Concept" (CAR).

### Week 6: Ontologies (II)

1. Marie Thompson, "Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies", *Parallax* vol. 23, no. 3 (2017): 266-282.
2. Robin James, "Vibration and Diffraction: Acoustic Resonance as Materialist Ontology", in *The Sonic Episteme: Acoustic Resonance, Neoliberalism, and Biopolitics*.
3. Sara Ahmed, "Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism'", *European Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 15, no. 1 (2008).

### Week 7: Ontologies (III)

1. Fred Moten, "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream", in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1-24.
2. Fred Moten, "Preface", in *Black and Blur*.
3. Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black popular culture?" in *Black Popular Culture* ed. Gina Dent (New York: The New Press, 1998), 21-33.
4. Brian Kane, "The Fluctuating Sound Object", in *Sound Objects*, ed. James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow.

### Week 8: Avant-Gardes

1. Katherine McKittrick, & Alexander G. Weheliye, "808s & Heartbreak", *Propter*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall 2017).
2. George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music since 1950: Afrological & Eurological Perspectives" and "Afterword to 'Improvised Music since 1950': The Changing Same" in *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 131-162.
3. Fred Moten, "The Sentimental Avant-Garde," in *In the Break*.

### Week 9: Phenomenologies

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", "The Intertwining: The Chiasm", *Phenomenology of Perception* (excerpts)
2. Sara Ahmed, "Introduction" and "Chapter 2: Sexual Orientations", in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*.
3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (excerpts)

### Week 10: Agencies

1. Tracy McMullen, "Improvisation within a Scene of Constraint: An Interview with Judith Butler" in *Negotiated Moments: Improvisation, Sound, and Subjectivity*, ed. Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
2. Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City", in *The Practice of Everyday Life*
3. Saidiya Hartman, "Redressing the Pained Body: Toward a Theory of Practice", in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America*.

### Week 11: Intersectional Readings (I)

1. Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion" (CAR).

2. Susan McClary, "Introduction: A Material Girl in Bluebeard's Castle", in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*.
3. Francesca T. Royster, "Introduction: Eccentric Performance and Embodied Music in the Post-Soul Moment", in *Sounding Like a No-No: Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era*.

#### Week 12: Intersectional Readings (II)

1. Christina Sharpe, "Chapter 1: The Wake", in *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*.
2. Kara Keeling, Introduction: Black Futures and the Queer Times of Life: Finance, Flesh, and the Imagination"; and "The Sonic Bartleby: The Digital Regime of the Image and Musical Speech", in *Queer Times, Black Futures*.
3. Daphne Brooks, "Afro-sonic Feminist Praxis: Nina Simone and Adrienne Kennedy in High Fidelity", *Black Performance Theory* (2014).

#### Week 13: The Politics of Aesthetics

1. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics", in *Dissensus*
2. Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics", in *The Politics of Aesthetics*.
3. Barry Shank, "Introduction: A Prelude", in *The Political Force of Musical Beauty*

#### Week 14: Improvisations

1. Dan DiPiero, "Conclusion: On Aesthetics and Politics", in *Contingent Encounters: Improvisation in Music and Everyday Life*.
2. Anthony Reed, "Introduction: Black : Sonic : Textuality", in *Soundworks: Race, Sound, and Poetry in Production*.
3. Stuart Hall, Interview on contingency (excerpts)

#### Week 15: Presentations

#### Week 16: Presentations

#### Running List of Additional Resources:

- Dylan Robinson, "Introduction", in *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*
- Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Afro-Sonic Modernity*
- Emily Lordi, *The Meaning of Soul*
- La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity*
- Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*
- Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science: and Other Stories*
- Jayna Brown, *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*
- Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice*