

Politics 301 : The Art of Revolution

How do entirely new political formations emerge? In this seminar, we will consider the possibility of responding to this question by way of aesthetics. Our inquiry will be bookmarked by two defining and radical modern revolutionary events: the 1789 French Revolution and the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Where the former initiated a period of Enlightenment, the latter, in creating an Islamic Republic, appears to have broken the Enlightenment mold. In light of these events, how might we characterize the relationship between aesthetics and political thought? Recent scholarship in political theory suggests that moments of radical democratic action involve the making seen of that which previously had not and could not be seen. For this proposition to hold, a new perspective must emerge whereby new—or revolutionary—modes of political and social life can be recognized in the first place. On the one hand, the aesthetic promises to foster these new ways of seeing. On the other hand, the aesthetic field of vision always seems to be conditioned by politics. What are we to make of this paradox? When and how might revolutionary change occur in light of it?

Credits 4