

# The Body Politic

## Social and Ecological Justice, Art, Activism

Stratford, East London: March – May 2009

*“It’s not an ego trip, it’s serious, it’s politics, it’s economics, it’s everything. And art in that instance becomes so meaningful both to the artist and to the consumers of that art”*

Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1994; executed 1995

**What makes you want to act for justice?**

**Racism? Climate change? Poverty? 2012 Olympics? the price of food?**

**Are you looking for new creative ways to make change happen?**

**Do you want to study how to work better together?**

This course is designed for people who want to study how social justice, the environment, arts and activism work together. Whether you're concerned about local, national or global issues, we investigate how creative approaches and collaborations combined with research can make your work more compelling, politically effective and also sustainable. This is also a chance to reflect on your own position and experience, think about where you are, and how you want to proceed. This course will give you a grounding in the fertile and sometimes difficult relationships between campaigning, art, activism, power, and action. Learning is done through sharing ideas, creative workshops, and visiting speakers. The course is very flexible and responds to the needs and desires of the group.

The Body Politic is run by interdisciplinary group PLATFORM, [www.platformlondon.org](http://www.platformlondon.org) with Birkbeck, University of London. This is the 5th year of the course.

**NB. This year The Body Politic will be based in East London at Birkbeck Stratford, in Univ of East London's Campus. (10 mins from Stratford tube, Central Line/Jubilee Line; also overground rail)**

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### Enrolment Details

**Module Title:** The Body Politic, Social & Ecological Justice, Art, Activism

**Module Code:** FFAP011S4

**Module Venue:** Birkbeck Stratford, (Univ of East London, Romford Rd, Stratford)

**Module Times:** 6 x Wed evenings and 2 x weekends  
Weds 18, 25 March, 1<sup>st</sup> April; *Sat and Sun 4 and 5 April*;  
Weds 22, 29 April; *Sat and Sun 9 and 10 May*;  
Wed 20 May

**Fees:** £170 full, £85 concs

**Enrolment:** You can enrol by Birkbeck's telephone line: 020 7631 6651 (full fee, debit/credit card enrolments only), 9am–5pm, Monday–Friday.) Or in person at 26 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ.

**Module Taught by:** Jane Trowell and others at PLATFORM [www.platformlondon.org](http://www.platformlondon.org)

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### **Teaching and Learning Methods:**

The course will involve a range of teaching and learning methods including: talks, discussion, workshops, groupwork, pairwork, off-site visits, student presentations, exercises.

### **Aims:**

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- \* To gain an understanding of, and the links between the arts, community activism, campaigning, environmentalism, human rights, cultural work, policy making and education.
- \* To engage critically with the spectrum of world politics, its power imbalances and underlying economic structures.
- \* To examine how to best further social and ecological justice.
- \* To gain a greater understanding of the value and potential of interdisciplinary working through structured discussions and participatory workshops.

### **Outcomes:**

- \* Provide grounding in the fertile and sometimes difficult relationships between campaigning, art, activism, personal development and action.
- \* Develop a critical awareness of social, cultural, economic, political and ecological issues.
- \* Equip students with the written and verbal skills to better articulate their position in relation to politics, activism and ecology.
- \* Understand how working collaboratively contributes to the development of the wider body politic.

### **Course Content:**

#### **1. Wed 18th March, 6 - 9pm**

**Inner Ear:** Introductions; political and artistic “epiphanies”. Listening to ourselves as a basis for any act of creation; learning to trust ourselves; under what circumstances do we stop listening?

#### **2. Wed 25th March, 6 – 9pm**

**Outer Ear:** what matters to us? who are we listening to? Or *not* listening to? Listening to places and communities, invisibilities, “others”, “othering”. egs. Ziauddin Sardar, Paulo Freire.

#### **3. Wed 1st April, 6 – 9pm**

**Eye:** witness, bystander, perpetrator? Seeing/analysing for yourself; independent thinking; the need for research, and the dangers of empathy. egs. Arundhati Roy

#### **4. Sat 4th April, 12pm – 5.30pm**

**Legs** (12 - 1pm): experiencing through being there. Whose place is it? Walking real landscapes/cityscape. Set frame for afternoon. Through PLATFORM projects, and writings of Rebecca Solnit.

**Workshop 1** (1.30 - 5.30pm): Group/individual research, projects, explorations. Reconvene for feast.

**FEAST (evening)**

**5. Sun 5th April 12 – 4.30pm**

**Workshop 2** (12 - 3pm): Feeding back on yesterday

**Frontal Cortex and Solar Plexus** (3 - 4.30pm): the limitations/possibilities of using facts alone to effect change; connecting information to experience, and going beyond the rational. egs. Clown Army, Gog & Magog

## **EASTER**

**6. Wed 22nd April, 6 – 9pm**

**Heart and Sex:** where is the drive to do this work? What is 'activism' feeding off? Is there a blinding "ecstasy of protest"? What role does sensuality, pain and love play when working on difficult and distressing issues? How do we take care?

**7. Wed 29th April, 6 -9pm**

**Tongue:** how do we speak? and how do we learn to speak together? the use of silence and the use of speech; articulation and silence as political danger. egs. the documentary films of Claude Lanzmann and Patricio Guzman; writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Susan Griffin.

**8. Sat 9th May, 12am – 5.30pm**

**Benevolent Viruses** (12 - 2pm) what can collaborative practices uniquely bring to this work; cooperation and solidarity; how do we find each other? how do we begin to work together? The importance of networks. Planning for rest of weekend.

**Workshop 3** (2.30 - 5.30pm): Open session, building towards whole day workshop tomorrow

**9. Sun 10th May, 12 – 4.30pm**

**Workshop 4** – 1-day workshop

**10. Wed 20th May, 6 – 9pm**

**Lungs:** endurance and stamina; how can you keep focused, evolving and working over time without burning out/becoming cynical; resistance; reflective practice. egs. writers bell hooks and John Berger, artist Joseph Beuys  
plus: REFLECTION - What have we learnt?

**And final FEAST.**

### **Coursework and Assessment:**

Overall assessment is *equivalent* to 5,000 words comprising:

#### **Assignment 1: Informal Assessment**

Engagement: As well as in-class discussion, some reading, writing or research will be set every week. Students may be asked for a response to ideas that have come up, through writing, drawing, music, performance. This work will be monitored and form part of the overall assessment of engagement with the course.

#### **Assignment 2: Formal assessment**

1 major or two smaller creative projects will be set, which will form the essential work for formal assessment. This work could be collaborative or done alone. Your proposals will be discussed with your tutors.

## **Module Evaluation:**

At the end of the course, students will be asked to complete an evaluation form

## **Some Reading**

- Becker, Carol, (1994) *The Subversive Imagination*, New York: Routledge
- Boal, Augusto, (1979) *The Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Urizen Books. Reprint Routledge Press, New York/London, 1982.
- Felshin, Nina, (ed) (1995) *But is it Art ? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Seattle: Bay Press
- hooks, bell, (1994) *Teaching to transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom*, London and New York: Routledge
- hooks, bell, (2003) *Teaching Community, A Pedagogy of Hope*, Routledge
- Kester, Grant (1998) *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, Duke University Press
- McKay, George, (1996) *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties*, London: Verso
- Papanek, Victor, (1995) *The Green Imperative: Ecology and Ethics in Design and Architecture*, London/New York: Thames and Hudson
- Roy, Arundhati, (2003) *War Talk*, South End Press
- Roy, Arundhati, (2004) *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*, South End Press
- Said, Edward W (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage (UK)
- Sardar, Ziauddin, (2004) *Desperately Seeking Paradise, Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim*, Granta
- Saro-Wiwa, Ken, (1995) *A Month & A Day*, London: Penguin
- Solnit, Rebecca, (2000) *Wanderlust, a history of walking*, London and New York: Penguin
- Solnit, Rebecca, (2004) *Hope in the Dark, Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, Penguin

## **Art, Activism, Social, Environmental Change: Websites of collective action**

- [www.alaplastica.org.ar](http://www.alaplastica.org.ar)
- [www.apsolutno.org](http://www.apsolutno.org)
- [www.artnotoil.org.uk](http://www.artnotoil.org.uk)
- <http://greenmuseum.org>
- [www.guerillagirls.com](http://www.guerillagirls.com)
- [www.appliedautonomy.com](http://www.appliedautonomy.com)
- <http://ev-eon.com>
- [www.helixarts.com](http://www.helixarts.com)
- [www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org](http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org)
- <http://justseeds.org/>
- [www.labofii.net/home](http://www.labofii.net/home)
- [www.littoral.org.uk](http://www.littoral.org.uk)
- [www.mongrelx.org](http://www.mongrelx.org)
- [www.mydadsstripclub.com](http://www.mydadsstripclub.com)
- [www.0100101110101101.org](http://www.0100101110101101.org)
- [www.revbilly.com](http://www.revbilly.com)
- [www.sarai.net](http://www.sarai.net)
- [www.spacehijackers.co.uk](http://www.spacehijackers.co.uk)
- [www.stencilrevolution.com](http://www.stencilrevolution.com)
- [www.temporaryservices.org](http://www.temporaryservices.org)
- [www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk](http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk)
- [www.theyesmen.org](http://www.theyesmen.org)
- [www.uhc-collective.org.uk](http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk)
- [www.virtualmigrants.com](http://www.virtualmigrants.com)
- [www.yomango.net](http://www.yomango.net)

