

The Body Politic: **Social and Ecological Justice, Art, Activism 2007**

PLATFORM at Birkbeck, University of London

- 1. Do you have an interest in or are you working in the arts, community activism, campaigning, environmentalism, human rights, cultural work, policy making, or education?**
- 2. Are you concerned about the state of world politics, its power imbalances and economics, and how to further social and ecological justice?**
- 3. Do you want to learn more about interdisciplinary working?**

The 3rd year of the course **The Body Politic: Social and Ecological Justice, Art, Activism** commences in January 2007, run by interdisciplinary group PLATFORM with Birkbeck, University of London. **It has been expanded from a 12-week to a 16-week course.**

The Body Politic, Jan - May 2007

There are increasing tensions in the world situation - not least the war in Iraq, increasing corporate power, terrorism, and global ecological issues such as climate change. This course discusses these, and addresses activism, in all and any of its meanings, from solo meditative acts through to mass action, from campaigning to education. The course also examines how art and cultural strategies can play a unique role. Throughout, the course considers how working collaboratively contributes to the development of the wider Body Politic.

Background

In 2004 PLATFORM ran a pilot for the course with 22 students, entitled **The Body Politic, Social and Ecological Justice, Art, Education**. Go to www.platformlondon.org/bodypolitic.htm for details of the pilot course and students' responses. An article on the pilot course was published in *New Practices, New Pedagogies*, Editor Dr Malcolm Miles, (Routledge 2005). The Lipman-Miliband Trust supported the development of this course in year 1.

SEE COURSE OUTLINE BELOW FOR DETAILS.

Course Details

Commencing Wed 10th January 2007, 6 - 9pm, 16 weeks

Tutors: PLATFORM - Jane Trowell, Dan Gretton

Location: Central London

Birkbeck Course Code: FFAP01 | UACA (Accredited course)

Fee: £125; £60 concs

Enrolment: www.bbk.ac.uk/ce/courses/enrolment/ce.shtml

You can enrol by telephone 020 7631 6651 (full fee, debit/credit card enrolments only), 9am–5pm, Monday–Friday.

Course Outline

Please note that this highlights the key subjects and practitioners that will be discussed – of course there are more that we haven't mentioned here. The outline will adapt according to students' needs and desires. Of course there are absences and holes: we can try to address these, according to expertise within the group.

Assessment for this accredited course.

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

“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, 1994; executed 1995

1. **Introductions** to PLATFORM and each other; political and artistic “epiphanies”; people involved in politics and culture who have influenced our politics/values.
2. **Inner Ear:** listening to ourselves as a prerequisite for any act of creation; learning to trust ourselves; under what circumstances do we stop listening?
3. **Outer Ear:** what’s happening now in the world – who are we listening to? Listening to places and communities, invisibilities, “others”, “othering” and ourselves. Egs. The work of bell hooks, Ziauddin Sardar, and Paulo Freire; Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa
4. **Tongue:** the use of silence and the use of speech; articulation of language as political danger Egs. the documentary films of Claude Lanzmann and Patricio Guzman; writings of Osip and Natasha Mandelstam, and Susan Griffin.
5. **Workshop 1:** student-led session on issues or activity identified from previous sessions
6. **Frontal Cortex and Solar Plexus:** the limitations of using facts alone to effect change; connecting information to experience, and going beyond the rational. Egs. Austrian group Wochenklausur, the power of music as an agent of change, PLATFORM’s project Gog & Magog.
7. **Hand and Fingertips:** co-operation and solidarity; how do we find each other - seeking collaborators; the huge challenges of working collectively and/or through consensus; overcoming conflicts/acknowledging differences; when to stop and when to push through. Egs. Helix Arts, PLATFORM
8. **Benevolent Viruses:** what can collaborative practices uniquely bring to this work; and the importance of networks: Egs. Littoral’s socially engaged arts gatherings, Black Environment Network, www.moveon.org.
9. **Workshop 2:** student-led session on issues or activity identified from previous sessions
Feast, and mid-course review.
10. **Sex:** where is the drive to do this work? What is ‘activism’ feeding off? Is there an “ecstasy of protest”? Conversely, when do we feel inert or numb? What role does sensuality, touch, pain, silence, noise and pleasure play when working on difficult and distressing issues or in extreme situations? Egs. Women in Black, clown army CIRCA and more.
11. **Legs:** experiencing breakthrough through walking/exploring real space; land/cityscape and dialogue - through PLATFORM projects, and writings of Rebecca Solnit.
12. **Workshop 3:** student-led session on issues or activity identified from previous sessions
This session takes the form of a walk.
13. **Knee & Heel:** Facing the other direction, the path less travelled, courage in difference; invisible histories and untold stories; the acupuncturist’s needle and the rhinoceros’s hoof – Egs. the work of artist Joseph Beuys and writers WG Sebald and Ernst Neizvestny.
14. **Lungs:** endurance and stamina; how can you keep focused, evolving and working over time without burning out/becoming cynical; reflective practice. Egs. writers Suzi Gablik and John Berger, filmmaker Ken

Loach, Argentinian artists Ala Plastica

- 15. Workshop 4:** student-led session on issues or activity identified from previous sessions
- 16. REFLECTION:** summing up and feeding back. What have we learnt? **And final Feast.**

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