



**The European Graduate School**  
**EST. 1994**

Seminar with Professor Rebecca Comay (4.5 ECTS credits)  
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought  
October Session/June 21–23 2017

**Dramaturgy and Dialectic: Hegel, Marx, Beckett**

In this seminar, we'll be exploring the constellation of dialectics, theatre, and politics in (and in the wake) of Hegel. Our point of departure will be Hegel's notorious proclamation of the "end of art" in his lectures on *Aesthetics*. Why does he say that art is a "thing of a past" – that it "no longer counts" as a significant manifestation of truth and that its function must now be taken over by philosophy? How does --and why must -- art itself collaborate in registering its own obsolescence and why must this collaboration be continually reenacted? What does all this imply for the practice of philosophy, for politics -- and for the ongoing practice of art itself? The primary texts for this seminar will be Hegel, Marx, and Beckett, but we may have occasion to refer to other writers (e.g. Adorno, Brecht, Badiou).

**Day 1: The End of Art and the Endgame of Theatre in Hegel's Aesthetics**

After considering the various ways in which to make sense of Hegel's enigmatic pronouncement concerning art's ending, we'll turn to his discussion of dramatic poetry in the concluding chapter of the *Aesthetics*. Hegel declares drama to be both the "highest" and the final of all the art forms -- the point at which art must supersede itself and relinquish its place to philosophy. Why does theatre occupy this culminating position in Hegel's system of the arts? All art wrestles with its own finitude, but there is a peculiar way in which theatre is involved in the demonstration of its own cancellation. How does a play come to an end and how does drama itself negotiate its own ending?

Reading: Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford University Press), vol 1, Introduction pp. 1-105 (focus on pp 10f, 22, 103) and vol. 2, pp. 1158-1237 ("Dramatic Poetry") (focus esp on pp 1156-1208 and 1233-1237)

## **Day 2: Revolution and Tragedy**

This seminar will explore Marx's revisionary appropriation of Hegel's dialectic in the ***Eighteenth Brumaire*** as he searches (in vain?) for a new revolutionary subject amidst the "farce" of the post-1848 counterrevolution. Is there a connection between tragedy, revolution, and dialectic? Does the "end of tragedy" imply the end of revolution, and does this also mean the end of dialectic?

**Reading:** Marx, ***Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte***

## **Day 3: Dramaturgy and Dialectic in Beckett's Endgame**

Beckett's scanty—often distracting, reluctant, and occasionally misleading -- allusions to his philosophical precursors and contemporaries conspicuously do not include Hegel as a significant interlocutor. In this last seminar, focusing on ***Endgame***, we'll be exploring some of the Hegelian resonances of Beckett's dramaturgy, paying particular attention to how these might elucidate the problematic of the end of theatre and theatrical endings. Could there be political implications?

**Reading:** Beckett, ***Endgame*** and Adorno, "Trying to Understand Endgame"