This course explores the relationship between HOW we speak or write—an issue of style, literary form or genre—and WHAT we can (and cannot) say. We pursue the idea that FORM and CONTENT are inseparable, that “rhetoric” or “literary style” constitute (rather than ornament) what we say. We focus on the idea of “genre” by contrasting kinds of THEORY, as well as different narrative forms in POLITICS and LITERARY ART. We focus on the American case, on the INHERITED genre forms that shape political speech, action, and self-reflection. We ask: how do genre forms shape ideas of imagined (national) community & democracy? How are dominant genre forms related to imperial power, racial domination, and capitalism—and to ideas of equality? How do critics of exclusion, inequality, and violence address those who are enfranchised as citizens? How do critics (and literary artists) rework inherited genres? Do they invent “new” forms of address? How do their genres of speech shape what they (can) say?

**Learning Goals:**
* close reading of texts
* writing critical essays that use textual evidence to pursue an inquiry
* speaking in collaborative ways about contested topics
* exploring the relations of “culture,” literary form, and “politics”

**Course Requirements:**
- attendance is mandatory: we meet once a week; unexcused absence count
- preparation for each class
- response paper (1 single spaced typed page) for each class
- one 5-page assigned paper about course texts
- a second paper, either on a course text, or a genre project

**Grading:**
25% participation
25% response papers
50% two papers

* plagiarism—using content you do not attribute to its actual source—is punished by an F in the course. If you have ANY questions about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, passages, or work to cite) please ask!

* Policy on electronics: I expect all cell-phones to be turned off and put out of sight and reach. Laptop use is not allowed unless the student has learning issues that require it.

**Required texts in order of use:**
David Scott, *Omens of Adversity*
Sophocles, *Sophocles I* (Oedipus Tyrannos, Antigone, Oedipus at Colonus)
Aristotle, *The Poetics*
Thomas More, *Utopia*
Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*
Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (xeroxed packet provided by prof and downloaded at classes site)

**Optional Texts:**
Herbert Marcuse, Essay on Liberation (radicalism as romance)
Thomas Pynchon, Vineland (novelizing post-sixties politics)
Richard Iton, In Search of the Black Fantastic (post-civil rights politics)
#1  Introduction I -
9/8

#2  Relating genres to politics and to theory: an example
9/15
read:  
* Hayden White, “poetics of history” in Metahistory
* David Scott, Omens of Adversity (1-96)
* Peter Seitel, “Theorizing Genres”

optional:
* Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment & the Problem of Truth”
* Eric Santner, “History Beyond the Pleasure Principle...”

#3  Tragedy as a genre for theorizing politics
9/22 class canceled
but for 9/22 read (and write a response paper on)
* Simon Goldhill, “The City of Words”
* Sophocles, “Oedipus Tyrannus” and “Antigone” in Sophocles
* Jonathan Lear, “The Shrink Is In”

for 9/29
read:  
* Aristotle, The Poetics (p.3-48 then the intro sections 1-9)
* David Scott, “Tragedy’s Time”
* Virginia Jackson, “The Function of Criticism...”

#4  Utopia, Dialogue, and Irony
10/6
read:  
* Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres”
* Thomas More, Utopia
* Tzvetan Todorov, “the origin of genres” in Theories of Genre

first paper due Friday October 9 5pm

#5  Romance I: liberal nationalism/American Exceptionalism
10/13 class canceled
but for 10/13
read:  
* William Adams, “Political Poetics”
* Frederic Jameson, “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre”
* Richard Slotkin, from Gunfighter Nation
* Michael Rogin, “A History of Political Repression”

for 10/20
read:  
* John F. Kennedy, speeches
* Lyndon Baines Johnson, speeches
* Ronald Reagan, speeches
* Jimmy Carter, “malaise” speech
* Barack Obama, convention speech 2004

#6  Romance II - Romance as Melodrama
10/27
read:  
* Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style”
* James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”
* Elizabeth Anker, from Orgies of Feeling
* Linda Williams, “Melodrama revised”
* Linda Williams, “racial melodramas”
optional:

* Eric Bentley, “Melodrama” (x)
* Peter Brooks, “The Melodramatic Imagination” (x)
#7  Romance III -Kinds of Gothic: reworking melodrama  
11/3  
read:  
* Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” (x)  
* Tzvetan Todorov, from The Fantastic (24-57, 91-5, 140-173)  
* Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark (chaps 1 & 2/p3-59)  
optional:  
* Mark Edmundson, Nightmare on Main Street  

#8  The Genre of Prophecy/Jeremiads and Populism(s)  
11/10  
read:  
* Hebrew Bible, The Books of Amos, Micah, & Hosea (x)  
* Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July 4th to the Negro”  
* James Baldwin, from The Fire Next Time (x)  
* Bill Kaufman, Ain’t My America (x)  
* George Shulman, from American Prophecy (x)  

#9  Romance III: radicalism as romance  
11/17  
read:  
* Karl Marx, “The Communist Manifesto” (x)  
* Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement” (x)  
* Paul Potter (SDS), Stokely Carmichael (SNCC), Huey Newton (BPP)  
* Allan Ginsberg, “Wichita Vortex Sutra” (x)  
optional:  
* Herbert Marcuse, Essay on Liberation  

#10  Novelizing genres/novel as genre  
11/24  
read:  
* Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49  
* Mikhail Bahktin, “The Epic and the Novel” (x)  

#11  Re-imagining radicalism  
12/1  
read:  
* Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera (pages tba)  
* Frederic Jameson, “Magical Narratives…” (x)  

#12  Allegories of/and Radicalism  
12/8  
read:  
* Bonnie Honig, “Does Democracy have a genre?”  
* Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”  

final essays/projects are due Friday December 11 by 5pm
Possible projects:

1) build on and elaborate a unit in the course: e.g. melodrama, gothic, jeremiad, etc.
2) build on and elaborate an author/text - e.g. for radicalism and romance, read Marcuse and/or Fanon - or for novel, read Pynchon’s Vineland, or compare Pynchon e.g. to Anzaldua
3) explore aspects of genre we did not discuss

EXAMPLES:

on tragedy as a genre, on film noir

on utopia as a genre, on science fiction

on comedy as a genre

on forms of “romance” (melodrama, westerns)

on genres of radicalism (Marcuse and Fanon)

on the gothic or fantastic (walking dead, zombies, ghost stories)

on prophecy, jeremiads, the apocalyptic

on the novel as a genre (compared to epic, lyric, drama) on the graphic novel

on “speech genres” compared to “literary genres”(e.g. from praying to prayer to sermons, e.g. from spoken word poetry to The Iliad)

on “lyric” (poetry) compared to epic, drama, novel

on spoken word poetry and hip-hop in relation to Black culture

on genre and race

on genre and gender (on gender as genre)
week one study questions:

quote one passage from the text and read/use it to respond to ONE question:

1) How/why do genres matter in politics, and in narrating or theorizing it?

2) Assess Hayden White’s claim that history takes literary form, through “modes” of romance, tragedy, comedy, irony? How/why does history involve such “fictions”? How do we distinguish them? How are we to judge their relative — accuracy? usefulness? Value? He grants that factual accuracy matters, but assess his claim that truths are told only THROUGH fictions. Do different forms of history make different aspects of life visible? Or position us toward history in different ways? Create a different kind of meaning)

3) Assess Scott’s critique of “romance” and his turn toward “tragedy” and “allegory.” These are better genres in what sense or for what reasons? What is the problem with “romance?” what is the benefit of allegory or tragedy? (Is the issue accurate representation of past and present circumstances? Is the issue constitutive not referential: that genre shapes how we act, who we are and become, the world we make.)

4) White and Scott are both critical of romance: why? By what criteria do they evaluate a narrative, a literary form, or a genre?

5) For Scott, is tragedy (or allegory) ALWAYS a better way to represent the world and politics? or is his judgment that they are better suited (than romance) to our “conjuncture,” i.e. our circumstances, experience, needs NOW? Does he simply reject romance, or could there be moments when it makes sense?

6) Use White and/or Scott to consider: do you live ordinary life in or through particular genres?
week two (A) study questions on Oedipus and Antigone:

Remember: Oedipus is a KING and he stands for the POLIS as a whole as if personified. His fate is OUR OWN. Read this story in relation to the Periclean (democratic) idea of human mastery of circumstance through reason and will. If you blame him as if his fate were entirely in his hands, you are protecting that ideal. Remember, Creon is the personification of the democratic polis that survives civil war, and Antigone voices the gods and traditions that this new democracy would supersede. Creon is the voice of popular sovereignty embodied in the state. If you make him the bad guy and Antigone the pure heroine, you create a melodrama, not a tragedy.

1. What is the most important (if different) lesson of each play?

2. Is the purpose of tragedy to teach audiences to AVOID the outcomes it depicts? Or do we discover ourselves IN the characters, and accept that we CANNOT avoid the situation they dramatize?

3. What does O teach about fate and freedom? (can an ascribed fate be “false” -like Freud saying to women, “anatomy is destiny” -but how do we distinguish a true from a false fate? And when faced with it, does it deny our freedom, or set the conditions for it? (e.g. we are fated to die -how shall we live toward or bear that fate?)

4. If the central idea in Antigone is that political life is characterized by inescapable COLLISION, what follows from this truth for the audience witnessing it?

5. How do O or A dramatize -stage, question, transgress- the ideals articulated by Pericles?

WEEK TWO (B):
read Aristotle’s Poetics as a commentary on tragedy and genre and compare it with Scott and Jackson on genre. Write one page:

1) Why does A insist that tragedy is the imitation of an action?

2) Why does Scott say revolutionary romance must now be re-narrated as a tragedy?

3) How is Jackson’s account of genre and gender related to (and different than) Aristotle or Scott?