One of the liveliest debates in literary and visual aesthetics in the last few decades concerns the legitimacy of criticizing art on ethical grounds. Without a doubt, aesthetic paradigms and economies have far-reaching ethical ramifications, and taste is an evaluative aesthetic judgment that may make injustice difficult to detect and dismantle. Our aim with this interdisciplinary course is to bring together formalism in literary and visual art, philosophical aesthetics, and socially engaged critique by asking how our tastes are not merely symptoms of the dominant order, but are constituent to alternately or simultaneously maintaining, promoting, or disrupting existing systems of domination and power—systems based on race, gender, ability, sexuality, and class—in ways that are often surprising, contradictory, and counterintuitive.

*For more information please email: aseinfo@usc.edu*