

## COURSE JUSTIFICATION

The mass mobilizations and revolts in a wide range of Arab countries sparked interest in “artistic expression” that accompanied so many of the protest events. This course will neither document nor celebrate the “creative” sides of the often-bloody confrontations. Or rather, while requiring students to gather information about contemporary art, graffiti, music, and even food practices, it will launch from there to raise multiple questions both about the movements themselves and the attention given to this side of them.

First, why all the fuss? Was the artistic factor essential? Or, was it simply more accessible and laudable in the eyes of many spectators?

Second, is there something necessarily populist about the artistic production that can fill this role?

Third, can aesthetics generally be used as an analytic to trace the *limits* of activism? Is there something about art forms that brings about both the social cohesiveness and the aspirational far-sightedness necessary for social change, or is this simply the contemporary utopian version of German Enlightenment philosophy?

Fourth, could taking aesthetics seriously lead people seeking social change to develop new, more effective tools?

Fifth, can we develop a language for analyzing and discussing our findings that does not flatten artistic production to “expression” or “reflection”?

State management of citizens and self-production of moral beings have been much studied but with little attention to the subjective experience of performing aesthetic worthiness, learning from art forms, and encountering social (and cultural) others through sensual cues. What happens when aesthetics and sensuality are overtly politicized? How exactly are bodies and imaginations enlisted when people gather around songs and produce their new thought in graffiti? To what degree are platforms for social change shaped and conveyed in aesthetics? More particularly, how have artist communities enabled dissent or taught citizenry new ways of conceiving themselves and their communities? And if they mostly have not, what immaterial factors limit their impact, when 2000 LL spent on a movie is as valuable as a 2000 LL spent on a newspaper or car ride?

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course combines cultural anthropology, art studies, urban studies, and history to look at the role of sensuality and aesthetics in social movements that involve envisioning a different future. Focusing on case studies from the Arab world, the US, and the former Soviet Union, the course exposes students to the most recent literature in affect theory and critical art theory, as well as classic texts on power, hierarchy, and agency.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will familiarize students with the anthropological, art historical, and philosophical literature on aesthetics, social agency, and belonging. It will teach students to trace the limits of activism in specific cases and to heighten awareness of their own roles as participants in their society. It will enable them to contribute to contemporary debates about the role of aesthetics, taste, and affect in social processes. It will prepare them for future ethnographic or art critical study by helping them to analyze critically the current approaches to artistic production that have developed out specific histories of citizenship, rights, and morals.

## COURSE OUTCOMES

This course exposes students to the major schools of thought on aesthetics, social change, and “expressive” culture. Students who complete this course will be able to analyze and evaluate the different schools, and to select ones appropriate for applying to the cases that interest them. They will be able to design a research hypothesis, conduct ethnographic fieldwork, conduct a literature review, and present their findings in a scientific manner.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

- 1) Occasional commentary on the texts, in brief written form (*a précis*), to be posted for discussion forums on Moodle, to enable sustained interaction. Your commentary should be posted by 10 pm Tuesday before class.
- 2) Occasional object findings, to hone articulation of your material sensibility.
- 3) Ethnographic explorations – either of aesthetics events or their coverage to hone your analytical skills.  
→ These first three items, together with avid and well-prepared class discussion, constitute your Participation, 20% of your final grade. I will give you feedback on your written submissions and object findings, but not a specific grade.
- 4) A presentation on two sets of readings. 20% each (See Presentation Rubric on Moodle)
- 5) A final paper on a case study or literature review of your choice, to be determined in consultation with me. (Topic due Sept. 30.) 40% (See Essay Rubric on Moodle)

## COURSE ETIQUETTE:

### Important to Know:

- Précises will NOT be accepted late.
- It is your duty to ensure that your assignment uploads before the deadline. Please note that sometimes AUB's internet is slow; if you postpone submitting to the last minute you take a great risk that may affect your grade.
- Those students who have questions not addressed in class, who are experiencing difficulties of any kind, or who wish to pursue a class discussion further, should see me during office hours or schedule an appointment.
- Class members are expected to have their Moodle ID and AUB address activated. Important information regarding the course will be posted to the class's Moodle site.

### Class Participation and Attendance Policy:

By attending class and participating in discussion you contribute to the learning atmosphere. Your absence diminishes from the intensity of classroom thinking, just as your silence contributes to a sense of passivity. Raise a ruckus – but an informed one!

Absences will lower your grade, and more than 3 unexcused absences before November 6 will lead to your automatic dismissal from the class.

Late-arrivals (> 10 minutes late) will be counted absent.

Your active participation will be evaluated as part of your final grade in terms of:

- Arriving on time and with your reading
- Preparing the in-class material when asked
- Sharing your ideas based on assigned texts and course concepts
- Listening attentively and respectfully to others in class
- Taking notes on lectures, discussions, and presentations
- Not even appearing to own a phone, computer, iPad, or any such electronic device
- Not eating
- Not leaving the room unnecessarily

### Academic Integrity Policy:

Formulating your own response to ideas presented in texts or class is a fundamental component of the learning process. It also provides the main medium by which your instructor can evaluate your skills acquisition and intervene where necessary to ensure

your success. Therefore, your resorting to copying others' words or thoughts demonstrates a breakdown in the learning process.

AUB offers an on-line tutorial that explains exactly what plagiarism involves and how to avoid committing it. You are required to take this tutorial and pass its test. Once you have taken it you will be held responsible for your commitment to academic integrity. Turn-It-In may be used to verify the integrity of your work. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely. By this I mean, I will give you a "0" for the assignment. I will also report you to the Student Disciplinary Affairs Committee, which can request a Dean's Warning or more, depending on their assessment of the gravity of the offence (I'm on that committee).



### **3) Art that stops you in your tracks (& stops Generals, too) – formal matters: 2**

Readings: Alfred Gell, “Technology of Enchantment,” and “Introduction” to *Art & Agency*; Daniel Miller, “Materiality: An Introduction”; Amiria Henare et al., “Introduction: Thinking Through Things” and Adam Reed, “*Smuk* Is King: The Action of Cigarettes in a Papua New Guinea Prison”; Marilyn Strathern, “The Patent and Malanggan,” p.259-286; Elizabeth Grosz, “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom”; William Connolly, “Materialities of Experience”; Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*; Kirsten Scheid, “Divinely Imprinting Prints: Or, How Pictures Became Influential Persons in Mandate Beirut”

Presenters: 1) 2)

Assignment to follow: Object Finding 2, bring to class

### **Aesthetics and the Limits of Social Change (and Scholarship)**

#### **4) Sensual scholarship: 2**

Readings: Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italy*, Larry Shiner, “Art Divided” from *The Invention of Art*; Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, Kirsten Scheid, “No Innocent Victims”; Mark Westmoreland, "Making Sense: Affective Research in Postwar Lebanese art"; Charles Hirschkind, “Ethics of Listening”; Jonathan Shannon, “Emotionality and *Tarab*”; Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Things Ethnographic*; Eve Sedgwick, *Touching/Feeling*, “Introduction”

Presenters: 1) 2)

#### **5) Emotions and virtue: 1**

Readings: Saba Mahmood, “Rehearsed Spontaneity,” Monique Scheer, “Emotion-Practices”; Samuli Schielke “Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity and Aspiration among Young Egyptians”; Lori Allen, “The Beginning of the Decline: International Aid and the Production of Bad Faith”; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* pp. 1-44

Presenters: 1) 2)

### **Factoring Aesthetics In, Taking Art & Embodiment Seriously**

#### **6) Affect: 2**

Readings: William Mazzarella, “Affect: What Is Good It For?”; Yael Navaro-Yashin, “Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge” and “Abjected Spaces, Debris of War” in *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*; Judith Farquhar, 2002. *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Maoist China*; Kathleen Stewart, 2007, *Ordinary Affects*

Presenters: 1) 2)

## **7) Back to State and into the galleries – state and structure: 2**

Readings: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*; Philip Gorski, “Bourdieu as a Theorist of Change” and David Swartz, “Metaprinciples for Sociological Research in a Bourdieusian Perspective”; Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art & Culture in Contemporary Egypt*, Fred Myers, “Truth and Beauty in Pintupi Painting,” “Materializing Culture & the New Internationalism,” “Postprimitivism”; Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*

Presenters: 1)

2)

## **8) Dissent & Agency magnified: 2**

Readings: Alexi Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More*; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*; Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love*, pp. 27-58, 175-236; Joao Biehl and Peter Locke, “Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming,” and commentaries; Brian Massumi, “Introduction: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts” and “Arts of Experience, Politics of Expression: In Four Movements”; Tim Ingold, “When ANT Meets SPIDER: Social Theory for Arthropods”

Presenters: 1)

2)