
MEDIA AESTHETICS in Fall 2018 (CM3075)

Course Code	CM3075	Professor(s)	Jessica Feldman
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	305 Grenelle
Class Schedule	W: 12:10-15:05 in G-002	Office Hours	Wednesdays 3:15-4:45 or by appointment
Credits	4	Email	jfeldman@aup.edu
Semester	Fall 2018	Office Tel. Ext.	

Course Description

What we consider to be pleasing, appropriate, and/or beautiful is conditioned by culture and “habitus.” This course examines how global media relates to varying aesthetic standards: the role of media in defining contemporary aesthetic values as well as in responding to them. How do contemporary media shape cultural ideals of beauty, taste, resistance, and desire? How do aesthetics help us to communicate and (re)imagine ourselves and others? How might these media's aesthetics reinforce or encourage social problems around inequality, sexism, and racism? This course considers the aesthetic issues raised in media production and consumption, and their connections to political and cultural values. Focus is placed on digital media such as: photography, video, digital audio, networked platforms such as Instagram and tinder, and online gaming. Class will include visits by media makers and researchers, and class trips to institutions such as Jeu de Paume and IRCAM. This is paired with texts in Sound Studies, Visual Culture, Feminist Media Studies, Critical Race Studies, Game Studies, and Aesthetic Theory, and close reads of the media themselves.

Course Learning Outcomes

Gain an overview of the field of aesthetics and understand major media aesthetic theories, concepts and figures

Apply aesthetic theory to modern mass media

Recognize differing aesthetic attributes among media forms

Able to analyze media and media texts along aesthetic criteria

General Education

Course Outline

Class 1: September 12

Introductions: Who am I? Who are you? What is Media and What are Aesthetics?

Overview of key terms, ideas of habitus, distinction. Scheduling.

Readings due: None

Class 2: September 19

Traditions

Visit to Musée Quai Branly permanent collection

Readings due:

- George Dickie, "The Theory of Beauty: Plato to the Nineteenth Century"
- Kathleen Higgins, "Comparative Aesthetics"
- Grazia Marchianò, "What to learn from Eastern Aesthetics"
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?"

Assignment due: Bring a notebook to the museum and jot down thoughts.

Class 3: September 26

Foundational questions

Museum debrief, further discussion of last week's readings.

Readings due:

- Plato, excerpts from the *Republic*, books II, III, X
- Aristotle, excerpts from *Poetics*
- Pierre Bourdieu, excerpt from *Distinction*
- Re-read the Appiah if necessary.

Class 4: October 3

Visual Culture: Semiotics, Countervisuality, Problematizing Beauty

Readings due:

- Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, "Practices of Looking,"
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, "What is Visual Culture?" and/or "The Right to Look: How to think With and Against Visuality"
- Naomi Wolf, excerpts from *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*

Class 5: October 10

Visual Culture: Film & Cinema Studies

- Jacques Amount et al, excerpts from *Aesthetics of Film*
- Jack K. Shaheen: "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People"
- Laura Mulvey: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Class 6: October 12 weekend

Visual Culture: Aesthetics, Utopia, and Performance

Visit from Julia Ramirez-Blanco

Readings due:

- Julia Ramirez-Blanco, excerpts from *Artistic Utopias of Revolt: Claremont Road, Reclaim the Streets, and the City of Sol*
- Jacques Rancière, excerpts from *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*
- Nicholas Bourriaud, excerpts from *Relational Aesthetics*

Assignment due: First short essay

Class 7: October 17

Visual Culture: Photography

Visit to Jeu de Paume for Dorothea Lange exhibition

Readings due:

- Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
- Erving Goffman, excerpts from *Gender Advertisements*
- Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

Class 8: October 24

Sound & Music Studies: Musicking, Listening, and Consuming

Readings due:

- Jacques Attali, excerpts from *Noise: A Political Economy of Music*
- Michel Chion, "Three Listening Modes"
- Martin Scherzinger, "Music, Spirit Possession and the Copyright Law: Cross-Cultural Comparisons and Strategic Speculations"

Tiny excerpts of / crash course lecture on:

- Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*
- Arthur Schopenhauer's "On the Metaphysics of Music"
- Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Music and Words"

October 31 – No Class – Fall Break

Class 9: Nov 7

Sound & Music: Electronics & Gender

Workshop with TECHNE

Readings due:

- Fred Maus, "Music, Gender and Sexuality"
- Tara Rodgers, excerpts from *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*

Class 10: Nov 14

Sound & Music: Taste-Makers, Institutions, Commodities

Visit to IRCAM

Readings due:

- Theodor Adorno, excerpts from *The Culture Industry*
- Stephan-Eloïse Gras, "What if Adorno Had a Spotify Station?"
- Georgina Born, excerpts from *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*

Assignment due: Second short essay

Class 11: Nov 21

Networked Social Media: Insta, Tinder, fb, etc.

- Ben Davis, "Ways of Seeing Instagram"
- Fred Turner, "The arts at Facebook: An aesthetic infrastructure for surveillance capitalism"
- Corinne Lysandra Mason, "Tinder and humanitarian hook-ups: the erotics of social media racism"

Nov 28 – No Class – I am away for conference – (class made up on Oct 12)

Class 12: Dec 5

Gaming

Readings due:

- Anna Anthropy, excerpts from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Drop-outs, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You Are Taking Back an Art Form*
- Natasha Dow Schüll, excerpts from *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*
- Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum, excerpts from *Values at Play in Digital Games*
- John Sharp, excerpts from *Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art*

Assignment due: Final project proposals; short individual meetings with me to discuss.

Class 13: Dec 12

Assignment Due: In class workshoping of final projects, crits.

Final Exam Period: Dec 19

Assignment Due: Presentations of final projects

Textbooks

This course doesn't have any textbook.

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

Grading

Attendance and participation in class: 25%

Presentation: 10%

Pop quizzes: 4 @ 5% = 20%

Short essays: 10% each = 20%

Final essay or project and presentation (including proposal and workshopping): 25%

Assignments

These three essays apply concepts learned in class to contemporary media of your choice (a Netflix show, an app, a concert you have attended, an advertisement, etc.) In all of these essays you should reference and incorporate class readings in order to enrich your analyses. The first two studies will be about 3 pages long. The final study will be 7-10 pages, or will be a new media work that you make on your own. This will include a short presentation in class on the final exam day. Both papers and projects will have to be proposed, workshopped, and approved.

Other

All readings are available online or will be uploaded to Blackboard as pdfs.