
MEDIA AESTHETICS in Fall 2019 (CM3075)

Course Code	CM3075	Professor(s)	Jessica Feldman
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	305 Grenelle
Class Schedule	W: 13:45-16:40 in Q-509	Office Hours	Thursday 1:15-3:15 or by appointment (subject to change during class trips and travel)
Credits	4	Email	jfeldman@aup.edu
Semester	Fall 2019	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

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This Schedule is Subject to Change

Week 1: September 4

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

Overview of key terms, ideas of habitus, distinction, modernism, postmodernism

Scheduling

Readings due: None

Week 2: September 11

Traditions & Foundations (non-Western)

VISIT to Musée Quai Branly permanent collection & Félix Fénéon exhibit

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:

- Weekly reading response.
- Bring a notebook to the museum and jot down thoughts.

Week 3: September 18

Traditions & Foundations (Western)

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

Assignment due:

- Weekly reading response.
- One page *notes format* write up of reflections and questions from the museum.

Professor will give in-class presentation demo.

Week 4: September 25

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*

Assignment due: Weekly reading response.

Week 5: October 2

Visual Culture: Photography

VISIT to Third Biennial of Photographers of the Contemporary Arab World

Readings due:

- Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
- Erving Goffman, excerpts from *Gender Advertisements*

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- Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

Assignment due:

- Weekly reading response.
- **First short essay.**

Week 6: October 9

Visual Culture: Film & Cinema Studies

Readings due:

- Braudy & Cohen, eds., excerpts from *Film Theory & Criticism*
- Jack K. Shaheen: "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People"
- Laura Mulvey: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Assignment due:

- Weekly reading response.
- One page *notes format* reflections and questions from the museum.

Week 7: October 16

Sound & Music Studies: Sound Art & Listening Practices, Relational Practices

VISIT to La Gaîté Lyrique & Sound Walk in Paris with Christina Kubisch

- Michel Chion, "Three Listening Modes"
- Nicholas Bourriaud, excerpts from *Relational Aesthetics*
- TBD reading on environmental listening & field recording

Assignment due: Weekly reading response.

Week 8: October 23

Sound & Music Studies: Music, Metaphysics, Gender

Readings due:

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

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"

Assignment due:

- Weekly reading response.
- One page *notes format* reflections and questions from the soundwalk.

(Potential field trip to Theatre Nationale de la Danse for Cunningham performances)

Week 9: October 30

No Class – Fall Break!

Week 10: Nov 6

Sound & Music Studies: Taste-Makers, Institutions, Commodities

VISIT to IRCAM

Readings due:

- Martin Scherzinger, "Music, Spirit Possession and the Copyright Law: Cross-Cultural Comparisons and Strategic Speculations"
- Theodor Adorno, excerpts from *The Culture Industry*
- Georgina Born, excerpts from *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*

Assignment due:

- Weekly reading response
- **Second short essay**

Week 11: Nov 13

Gaming & Using the Lab

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: Weekly reading response [Lab training?]

Week 12: Nov 20

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"

Assignment due:

- Weekly reading response
- Final project proposals; short individual meetings with me to discuss.

Week 13: Nov 27

Working in the Lab

Assignment Due: Report-back on final project

Week 14: Dec 4

Workshopping Projects

Assignment Due: In class workshopping of final projects, gentle crits.

Final Exam: Dec 18

Presentation of Final Projects, crits.

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: 12.5%

Presentation: 10%

Weekly reading responses and visit notes: 12.5%

Pop quizzes of key concepts/terms from readings: 4 @ 5% = 20%

Short essays: 10% each = 20%

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

Assignments

All assignments will be uploaded to blackboard by the specified due date & time in the "assignment" page on the class blackboard site.

Attendance & Participation (12.5%)

Students are expected to attend all classes, including field trips. Our course is centered on in-depth discussions of ideas, texts, and media objects. We will take time to work through the arguments presented in the readings collaboratively and to give each other help and feedback on projects. Strong participation means not only demonstrating your effort to understand the work, but also offering contributions that further the understanding of everyone in our class. Asking questions and listening attentively are also part of thoughtful participation. If you have a question, ask it. It helps the teacher teach and the students learn!

Attendance is important. Out of respect for each other, please arrive to class on time. Notify me in advance about a planned absence, and as soon as possible in the case of exceptional circumstances (illness, family emergency, etc.).

In-Class Presentations (10%)

You will be asked to deliver a brief (5 minute) individual presentation once during our course. Think of this presentation as a “show-and-tell” inspired by the week’s readings. Your goal is to:

- a) Summarize the THESIS of the day’s reading. In other words, what is the most important thing this reading can teach us? Write it out in no more than three sentences in your own words. You do not need to summarize the whole reading. Assume everyone has read it and is ready to talk about it!
- b) Bring in one MEDIA EXAMPLE that exemplifies, illustrates, problematizes, or otherwise speaks to the article’s thesis. For example, you could bring in a current news article, a clip from a documentary, an object from an archive, a photograph, a YouTube video, a work of art, an exhibition, an advertisement, a book, a website, an audio clip, etc. Use your media object to help unpack the reading and to spark an interesting discussion with your peers.
- c) Bring at least TWO QUESTIONS about your reading/object, and use these to ignite our discussion. Your job is not to lecture. Instead, your job is to start a compelling discussion, and help guide it throughout the class. Questions might address concepts you found confusing, provocative passages in the readings, or problems you have with the author’s arguments. You could ask how a particular reading relates or compares with another reading from the class syllabus.

Weekly Reading Responses & Visit Notes (12.5%)

A reflection on the readings will be due at 9 am the day of class. This should take you about 30-45 minutes to complete. Summarize in 1-2 sentences what you think the thesis/primary argument of each reading is (“key takeaways”) and one or two critical question(s) you have for discussion. What are aspects you found interesting and would like to discuss? What was confusing that you would like to spend more time on? You are also encouraged to share related articles, videos or applications you’d encourage the rest of the class to know about.

You will be expected to take notes (by hand) at all field trips/visits. Afterwards, please synthesize your notes into one page, with some key questions and take aways. What stood out for you? What shocked you? What bothered you? What are some new ideas you have, or new things you learned? What are some lingering questions? This page can be in “notes” format.

Pop Quizzes (20%)

I will give a few short quizzes in class to solidify and clarify your understanding of key terms and concepts from the readings. Do the readings! As long as you do the readings and make

notes/underline/etc., you should be fine for this.

Short Essays (10% each x 2 = 20%)

The 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, and should reference at least 3 different texts.

Final Project or Paper (25%)

The final project will be EITHER:

- An essay that applies concepts learned in class to contemporary media of your choice (a Netflix show, an app, a concert you have attended, an advertisement, etc.) 7-10 pages, referencing at least 8 texts.

OR

- A creative media/artwork that applies concepts learned in class in project's aesthetics, accompanied by a 2 page explanation of project, citing 3 sources. You can work on this project using the civic media lab software and tools. I will save one class to spend time learning our way around the lab.

We will workshop the in-progress final projects in our last class, and you will give a short presentation of the project in class on the final exam day. Both papers and projects will have to be proposed, workshopped, and approved. MLA, APA, or Chicago style are all acceptable for papers, as long as you are correct and consistent throughout.

Other

Other

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