

# PS298 Ways of Seeing: Visual Politics and the Middle East

Prof. Hanan Toukan  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1-2:30  
Seminar times: 10:45-12:15  
Seminar venue: TBD

## **Course Description:**

This course examines visual politics and the politics of seeing in and about the Middle East. It contextualizes visual material produced about the region within wider debates and scholarship on the construction of subjectivities, the distribution of power and the formation of identity and belonging. This advanced module will place particular emphasis on decolonization theory, gender theory and postcoloniality to study issues of image-making, circulation, translation and reception, in a global context and transnational frame. Thematic areas of focus include the aesthetics and politics of identity, states and security, violence and memory, dispossession, displacement, revolution and war.

## **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

## **Attendance**

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Also please consult the BCB Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

## **Class Conduct**

“**Active**” participation is a significant component of your grade; you should come to class prepared to discuss the readings.

This means bringing a copy of your weekly diary response as well as any questions you may have.

Your contribution to the discussion should be based on the material you have read (and thought about). Identify important passages while reading for closer examination in class.

Do not take out your cell phones, laptops or other devices and do not allow them to interrupt class.

## **Assessment and Grade Breakdown**

**Class Participation**\_(20%): Participation will be evaluated at the end of each session. Students will be assessed based on the general enthusiasm, frequency and quality of the

questions they raise. Regular attendance and completion of all reading assignments is also required. Recurrent absences will substantially decrease the final grade. (up to two unexcused absences are allowed).

**Class Presentations (20%):** Each student will be expected to make one 15-20 minute presentation about a particular week's readings of their own choice. Presentations should address the author, central question and argument of the work, methodology used, and three critically engaging questions and concluding thoughts posed to the class to spark discussion. Presentations should include visual material, such as, advertisements, photography, artworks, news clips, movies, short film in their analyses. Class presentations will take place in the **Tuesday** class and students can sign up to present on the week of their choice in the first week of classes.

**Radio Segment: (20%):**

Students are expected to produce in groups a short radio segment based on the theories covered in the first 3 weeks of the semester. This segment will be featured in the Bard Annendale Human Rights Radio project. <https://hrp.bard.edu/human-rights-radio/>

**Visual essay: ( 40%)**

The final paper for the class consists of a 5000 word paper that addresses a particular theme or concept related to the readings and/or artworks discussed. Late assignments will be penalized per day. Written assignments should include a creative title followed by your name, date, and course number. Pages should be double- spaced with 12-pt. font and one-inch margins. **DUE: May 12, 2020.**

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Any essay submitted within four weeks of the deadline cannot receive a grade of higher than C. *Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

**1. WEEK 1- January 28, 30**

Can visual production be used to study the culture, society and politics of the Middle East, or any society for that matter? How does one 'see' through an interdisciplinary framework? What does it mean to 'see' politics visually?

***Tuesday Seminar***

- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. (London: Penguin, 1972). Chapter 1.
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture," in *The Visual Culture Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), edited by Mirzoeff. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Pages 3-24.

***Thursday Seminar***

- Gruber, Christiane and Haugbolle, Sune ed. *Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). Introduction.

➤ View the Everyday Middle East site: <https://www.instagram.com/everydaymiddleeast/>

## 2. WEEK 2- February 4, 6

**Week's Questions:** Critiquing Visual Culture

### **Tuesday Seminar**

- W.T.J Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture." *Journal of Visual Culture* 1.2 (2002): 165-181.
- El Zein, Rayya, "Resisting Resistance: On Political Feeling in Arabic Rap Concerts" in *Arab Subcultures: Transformations in Theory and Practice*, Tarek Sabry and Layal Ftouni ed (London IB Tauris, 2015). Chapter 4.

### **Thursday Seminar**

HAMBURGER BANHOF VISIT (Lawrence Abu Hamdan: The Voice Before the Law)

## 3. WEEK 3- February 11, 13

Is there a distinction between the political and the aesthetic? How can we define each of these terms within the context of visual politics and visuality more specifically?

### **Tuesday Seminar**

- Wolff, Janet (2012) "After Cultural Theory: The Power of Images, the Lure of Immediacy" in *Journal of Visual Culture* 11 (1): 1 3-19
- \*Ranciere, Jacques, "The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible (London: Continuum, 2006). Pages 12-19 and 47-49.

### **Thursday Seminar**

- Azoulay, Ariella, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, Louise Bethelmen tr. Chapter 2, Rethinking the Political

## 4. WEEK 4- February 18, 20

Are we active or passive spectators of images? Can we be both? What does this say about the act of witnessing suffering in our time? What role does the culture industry play in ordering how we relate to the pain of others?

### **Tuesday Seminar**

- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. (1977) chapter: The Image-World
- Benjamin, Walter. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, tr by Harry Zohn, from the 1935 essay New York: Schocken Books, 1969. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf>

### **Thursday Seminar**

- Adorno, Theodore and Horkheimer, Max (1944) *The Culture Industry: Industry as Mass Deception in the Dialectic of Enlightenment*. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Adorno-Horkheimer-Culture-Industry.pdf>
  - Debord, Guy (1968). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Sections 2 and 3 (small chapters written in note form). [http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The\\_Society%20Of%20The%20Spectacle.pdf](http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The_Society%20Of%20The%20Spectacle.pdf)
- *Case Study: Abunaddara film collective. (Syrian Film Collective)*

### **5. WEEK 5- February 25, 27**

What is the role of historical images, ideas and imagination in how we visualise and represent the Middle East and how we think it visualises and represents itself today?

#### **Tuesday Seminar**

- Said, Edward (1981) *Covering Islam*. Chapter 1.
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonizing Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Chapter 1.

### **Thursday Seminar**

- McAlister, Melani , *Epic Encounters Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*. (University of California Press, 2005). Chapter 3
  - Rastegar, Kamran, *Surviving Images: Cinema, War and Cultural Memory in the Middle East*. (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Chapter 2.
- *Essay Film: Introduction to the end of an argument (1990), Jayce Salloum and Elia Suleiman.* <https://vimeo.com/72835443>

### **6. WEEK 6- March 3, 5.**

What changes have occurred in representing histories of colonial and postcolonial violence with the media revolution?

#### **Tuesday Seminar**

- Mirzoeff, Nicholas, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press), Chapter 6.
  - Stam, Robert “Fanon, Algeria and the Cinema: The Politics of Identification” in Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy eds. *Empires of Vision: A Reader* (Duke University Press, 2014) pp. 503-5
- **Film: Battle of Algiers, Gillo Potecorvo-** Please watch the full film before class and come to class with questions about the scenes in the film you would like to discuss against the backdrop of the readings and questions of the Tuesday seminar.

### **Thursday Seminar**

- Zoller, Maxa, "The Appropriation of Images, Commercial Media and Activist Practices in Egypt Today" in *Uncommon Ground: New Media and Critical Practices in North African and the Middle East* (London IB Tauris 2014)
- Film: Have you Ever Killed a bear-Or Becoming Jamila, 2014. Marwa Arsanios. <https://vimeo.com/110263850>.

### **7. WEEK 7- March 10, 12**

How does visual media and its systems of mediation allow for a self-representation that was previously not so visible in the same way? Does the culture industry at the same time dictate how. Is it possible to resist these rooted structures of power?

### **Tuesday Seminar**

- Marks, Laura U. (2003) "What is that Between Arab Women and Video?: The Case of Beirut" in *Camera Obscura* 54 volume 18, no. 4. <http://www.sfu.ca/~lmarks/writings/files/Arab%20Women%20Video.pdf>
- Westmoreland, MR. "Post-Orientalist Aesthetics: Experimental Film and Video in Lebanon" [http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/Issue\\_13\\_/westmoreland/index.html](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_13_/westmoreland/index.html)

### **Thursday Seminar**

TBD

### **8. WEEK 8- March 17, 19**

### **Tuesday Seminar**

What role can the archive play in developing and sustaining a critical and culturally located history and its visual representation? Can the archive be both a "project" and a "process"? What are the different shapes, forms and discursive practices that a visual archive can take?

- Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Chapter 2. The Pulse of the Archive.
- Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1998). Pages 9-25.

### **Thursday Seminar**

- Hal Folster. "An Archival Impulse" *October* 110 (110): 3-22. October 2004

Fieldtrip to KW: Mophradat's Comissions: Jasmina Metwaly and Yazan Khalili

**9. WEEK 9- March 24, 26**

**Independence: Identity, Memory, Citizenship**

How does visual cultural production negotiate the relationship between state and citizen? How have States and political parties in the Middle East used visual branding techniques to redefine and reposition themselves within the master narrative of globalization? How has the public sphere responded?

***Tuesday Seminar***

**Required:**

- Rastegar, Kamran, *Surviving Images: Cinema, War and Cultural Memory in the Middle East*. (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Chapter 5. Sacred defenses: Treacherous memory in post-war Iran.
- Winegar, Jessica, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford university Press, 2006). Chapte 4.

***Thursday Seminar***

- Suner, Asuman, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory* (London: IB Tauris, 2010)
- Khatib, Lina. *Visual Politics in the Middle East. The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*. (London: IB Tauris, 2013). Chapter 6

**10. WEEK 10- March 31, April 2**

***Tuesday***

- Jankovic, Colleen, and Nadia Awad. "Queer/Palestinian Cinema: A Critical Conversation on Palestinian Queer and Women's Filmmaking." *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 27.80 (2012): 134-43.

***Thursday***

- Ritchie, Jason. "How Do You Say 'Come Out of the Closet' in Arabic?: Queer Activism and the Politics of Visibility in Israel-Palestine." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.4 (2010): 557-76.

**NO CLASSES SPRING BREAK: April 7-April 10**

11. Week 11 APRIL 14, 16

**Torture and the Global War on Terror**

How has the visual culture of the War on Terror been remapped and extended in to multiple manifestations, such as our bodies, geographies, identities? How has the visual been rendered pervasive in the war on terror?

**Tuesday Seminar**

- Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, "Spectacle and surveillance", pp. 264–270.
- Butler, Judith, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*, (London Verso, 2009) Chapter 2.

**Thursday Seminar**

- Amore, Louise, *Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror in Security Dialogue* 38:2 pp. 215-232 (2007)
- Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others" *New York Times Magazine*, 5/23/2004
- View and discuss the Abu-Ghraib photos on <http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=8560>

12. Week 12-April 21, 23

**Borders, Walls, Fences**

Under what circumstances can walls, borders, boundaries and their material and symbolic architectures of division and exclusion engender their very opposite? How are the crossing, permeations and constructions of cultural and political borders between peoples and territories intensified or reduced by the visual dimension of walls, borders and boundaries? How are these manifestations experienced visually?

**Tuesday Seminar**

- Ball, Anna, "Impossible Intimacies: Towards a Visual Politics of "Touch" at the Israeli-Palestinian Border in Valassopoulos Anastasia ed. *Arab Cultural Studies: History, Politics and the Popular* (London: Routledge, 2013)

*Experimental Novel and Film: On Love and Other Landscapes*, Yazan Khalili.

**Thursday Seminar**

*Guest Lecture-on Segregation Walls in the US, Latin America and the Middle East.*

### 13. Week 13- April 28, 30

#### **Tuesday**

Weizmann, Eyal (2007). *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso). Chapter 5

#### **Thursday**

Weizmann, Eyal (2007). *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso). Chapter 6

- Documentary-*Drone* directed by Tonje Hessen 2014

### 14. Week 14-May 5,7

#### **Displacement**

How do technologies of the visual, such as photography, video, or digital media, render displacement (in)visible in the global field in different ways than the written word might? Can displaced persons participate on their own terms in the production of visual knowledge about themselves because of the accessibility of the material needed to do so? What, if any, is the relationships between global capitalism and the visual economies of production related to the representation of migrant communities and the displacement they undergo?

#### **Tuesday Seminar**

- Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience, the Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times." *Daedalus* 125.1(1996): 1-23
- Terrence Wright, "Collateral Damage: Media Images of Afghan Refugees, 2001." *Visual Studies* 19.1 (2004): 97-111

#### **Thursday Seminar**

- *Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Representations of Displacement from the Middle East and North Africa. Public Culture* 28.3 (2016): 457-473
- Film: *Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), Werner Fassbinder
- Washington Post article: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/03/04/the-identity-politics-of-displacement-in-the-middle-east/>

### 15. NO CLASSES