

Art Power + Space in the Middle East

GSAPP Columbia University

SPRING 2014 SEMINAR

(Non-Western)

Instructor: Mario Gooden, Prof. of Practice

T: 11AM – 1PM

As Hossein Amirsadeghi states in *New Vision Arab Art in the 21st Century*, “One of the main challenges facing art practice in the twenty-first century Arab world is the persistence of a constructed oppositional binary between ‘traditional Islamic’ arts and ‘new’ art. This binary is based on a perceived historical discontinuity between the two... At the heart of this issue is the lack of a written historical context – an art historical context or discourse to place, view, articulate and evaluate this new production. Adding to the complexities the nature of the contemporary production itself. To start with, many of the region’s modern historical developments are contested on various levels. Second, contemporary productions reject their segregation as an ‘other’, as has been the case with Islamic art, and as essentially happened with modern Arab art, which was hijacked by the politics of identity.”

Yet the effect of the market on informing or misinforming knowledge of the art production of the region – particularly in view of the absence of a scholarly discourse – is problematic and alarming. All reports about the arts of the region assert the ‘booming’ state of affairs. The Middle East is seen as ‘a vast new source of goodies for the market’s limitless voracity’, luring the major auction houses – Sotheby’s, Christie’s and Bonham’s – to the region. Needless to say, the market hype has created positive situations for previously unappreciated artists but has equally created false hopes and valuations. In relation to the Saatchi Gallery’s recent Middle Eastern art exhibition, Brian Appleyard of *The Sunday Times* states: ‘It would be hard to classify anything in the Saatchi show as great art. But that is not really the point. What matters is the fact that it is art, and that it detonates our simple conceptions of the Middle East.’ Are we not to expect good art from the Middle East? He argues instead that the arts may be a sign of a new form of secularization.

So what exactly is the role of ‘Middle Eastern’ art? The region remains as it was in the early decades of the twentieth century --- beset with wars and colonization in its various guises -from imposed rules by foreign powers to military occupation and now globalization, These conditions do not prevent artists from producing art, but they do, however, influence the parameters of representation and reception of art. The new art boom in Arab countries is due to a confluence of factors: the newly established art organizations, the ambitious plans for art museums in the Gulf [to include Guggenheim and Louvre offshoots], new faculties for art and design, an unprecedented increase in artists’ residencies creating opportunities and exposure for Arab artists abroad and for international artists to work in the region, as well as the influences of diaspora artists.

The Arab world with its socio-political tensions and contradictions, and rising conservatism coupled with a chronic political turmoil provides a rich laboratory for such artists. Yet, young Arab artists are looking for answers to the ever more complex trajectories of postmodernity than one might find at these auction houses.

The ‘art boom’ started backwards in the Arab world. The art market flourished in the oil-rich Gulf states (where only a fraction of the Arab population resides) before the art support systems set in. The ‘boom’ euphoria spread before school curricula, museums, art critics or even art scholars began to grapple with the relevant questions.

For example, contrary to the common belief, what is new in Arab contemporary art is not just the mediums being employed but rather it is the image in all its forms that Arab artists have subverted while creating spaces for interpretation and engagement with the art.

PURPOSE

The seminar will examine the production, consumption, and dissemination of Middle Eastern art and the subversive strategies of artists to engage in new spaces for social and political critique. The seminar will uncover pedagogies and methodologies for artistic practices to locate new sites of meaning in contested territories and among contradictory landscapes.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Satisfactory completion of the course requires that students actively engage the course content and meaningfully contribute to expand the boundaries of knowledge and spatialize cultural theory.

Course Design:

The course will be divided into three sections:

The first section will present a brief critical overview of contemporary Arab art. The intention is to identify the general parameters of critical discourse in the art world and the roots of the linkages that will be discussed throughout the course.

The second section will entail weekly research seminar presentations by teams of students working in pairs. The presentations will be based upon a given topic and the students will examine the work of artists, curators, and writers and their engagement with new spaces for cultural discourse. The student shall prepare a thorough and detailed analysis of the topic and how the work manifests its agenda. The student should be prepared to lead the class discussion in an insightful manner.

In preparation for the research seminar presentation, the instructor will hold weekly individual tutorials.

The third section of the seminar will be a research paper:

Students will be required to complete a fifteen-page research paper based upon the research seminar presentation topic. The paper should include analyses, visual illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, etc.

Research Seminar Presentation:

40% - Preparation and in-class Presentation

In addition to the in-class presentation, each student will submit a rough draft of his / her research paper (minimum 1000 words) no later than one week following the presentation.

Research Paper:

45% - Including analytical drawings, visual illustrations, etc.

Participation, Progress, Effort:

15%

Amirsadeghi, Hossein (Editor) and Salwa Mikdadi, Nada Shabout. *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2009.

Bailey, David A. (Editor). *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.

Farjam, Lisa. *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East*. London: Booth-Clibborn, 2009.

Lloyd, Fran. *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present*. London: Women's Art Library. 1999.

Monem, Nadine (Editor). *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*. London: Blackdog Publishing, 2009.

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GSAPP Columbia University

SPRING 2014 SEMINAR

A4775 (Non-Western)

Instructor: Mario Gooden, Prof. of Practice

T: 11AM – 1PM

Seminar Presentation Topics

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|--|----------------|
| ▪ Place and Diaspora | March 25, 2014 |
| ▪ Art Production and Display as Nation Building | April 1, 2014 |
| ▪ Counter-Narrative: Archive and Performance | April 1, 2014 |
| ▪ Collective Histories and Personal Narratives | April 8, 2014 |
| ▪ Constructing Modernity: Social, Urban and Natural Environs | April 15, 2014 |
| ▪ Identity, Commodity, and Display | April 22, 2014 |

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SPRING 2014 SEMINAR

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Instructor: Mario Gooden, Prof. of Practice

T: 11AM – 1PM

Discussion January 28, 2014

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Said, Edward W. "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, No. 1. (Autumn, 1985), pp. 89-107.

Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays (Convergences: Inventories of the Present)*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001

Of particular concern has been the role of Western curators in the Middle East. Until recently, they were the absolute authority on what constituted Arab art and who its practitioners were. Many artists, understandably but unfortunately, accepted their terms and readily conformed to the criteria they charted for them, be it Arab, Middle Eastern or Islamic. Moreover, without previous knowledge of the region, its history and pertinent factors, the curators depended mostly on connections forged on first trips to the region. Their connections became their authenticating local informants. This limited vision resulted in repetition of specific artists, and an emphasis on artworks related to gender and religious issues. Today this has largely changed. And international art curators and museum directors are travelling to the Gulf states, and to Cairo, Rabat, Amman and Ramallah, on their own, teaching at Gulf universities, initiating local projects, meeting at art forums and investing more time in research. Western art institutions have also embraced the discourse on Arab and Middle Eastern art. Tate Britain, for example, organized a symposium on contemporary art from the Middle East to initiate an interdisciplinary debate between Western and regional scholars, curators and artists. Institutions are very important in creating spaces for negotiating, articulating and constructing narratives, contextualizing and historicizing. Nevertheless, there is a disparity of interest between local and Western institutions. Western ones follow their own criteria and philosophy, which at times seems to impose a discourse on the Arab world. The Tate symposium organized panels around overarching issues that included

the validity and meaning of the term 'Middle Eastern'. It revived discussion about the duality of modernity and tradition, which, although unresolved, was considered by some to be outdated. By contrast, the four editions of Home Works Forum organized by Ashkal Alwan have focused on local issues of immediate concern as opposed to wider ones of specific interest from a particularly Western perspective. This disparity is pronounced: the West struggles to theorize the Arab world, while the Arab world only wants to 'be'. Initiatives such as Ashkal Alwan, Darat al-Funun and Townhouse, among others, are changing the paradigm of representations. Others, such as the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran and Turkey [AM Cal] are meanwhile advancing the study of this emerging field through the creation of a network of interested scholars and organizations and by mentoring graduate students to encourage research-based scholarship that would eventually lead to professional curators with a specialty in the field. Presently there are no universities that award degrees in this area of study, and very few courses taught on the subject in the Arab world or elsewhere. It would be inconceivable for any major museum to hire a curator to organize an Islamic art exhibition without proper credentials and at least a graduate degree and dissertation on the subject. Yet this is not the case for contemporary Arab art.

Today there remain many questions unanswered. For example, what meanings transpire when the art travels from its location of production to be viewed by international audiences? Is seeing Arab art in a gallery in Chelsea, the same as viewing the art in the Sharjah Museum or the future Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar, where it is contextualized among other Arab art? What is the definition of a 'boom' in Arab art? Who are the collectors of Arab art? Which Arab art is destined for Western museums and how does it differ from the art sold in local markets? Does an art organization driven by one individual have the agency to safeguard the national patrimony?

"The new generation of artists and intellectuals in the Middle East are breaking the mould in creative circles, They reject all attempts to categorize them collectively and are as critical of the Western conception of the Orient as they are of the social conditions encountered in the region, The new art is political, one which reflects on moral values and the dominant religious and political codes. Arab artists and intellectuals ponder

intensively over how to dismantle the West's Image of the Orient; meanwhile the stereotypical conceptions prevalent in the West live on.”

The statement provides a good general description of how the few examples of Arab art that reach the West are presented and perceived. Nevertheless, a quick review of Arab art of the twentieth century reveals that it has always been political and engaged with the dynamic forces of its time, local and global. In spite of the increasing number of Western exhibitions dedicated to the visual production of the Middle East or of the Arab world, there is a fundamental lack of knowledge of what preceded this contemporary art production. What is Arab art? How should its production be analyzed, evaluated, critiqued? How should we write and talk about it, and in what context does it fit? This confusion stems from many years of refusing to acknowledge that the Arab world has contemporary art --- at the heart of this problem lie the issues of Orientalism and Euro-American centrism.

Unfortunately, the Arab world suffers from the same confusion. In contemplating how we can assess today's visual production of the Arab world within a global context, as well as advance some ideas on how to establish a relevant discourse about this contemporary moment, inevitably one has to evaluate today's art world in separate, albeit sometimes overlapping spaces. At one end, there is the traditional Western space of production that has dominated for the last two centuries or so. It is a space not without its own contemporary crisis --- a crisis; it has been argued that may have triggered the search for renewed creativity and difference outside the center. At the other end, there is the local scene that is largely struggling for acceptance. And in between there is the oscillating third space of diaspora art.

Postcolonial writers and thinkers have celebrated the third space as the hope for inclusion of 'others' in the dominant discourse. It has been theorized as a space that is capable of protecting particularities while claiming universality. However, we should be wary of universalisms as the concept was used to justify colonialism as well as U.S. intervention in the Middle East as universal values are always set by the dominant hegemonic power and their essence always embodies a leveling of the other.

Now these three spaces have been joined by a fourth --- the new market carved on the fringes of both the Arab world and the West. It is a different space to that of diaspora art. It is a space that thrives not on aesthetics or art values but rather on money. Its complete mobility makes it truly global and transnational.

1. Said states in the introduction to *Orientalism*, "Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other." Discuss the relationship between the Occident and the Orient and how do the two reflect each other.
2. What are Said's three qualifications for discussing the phenomenon of Orientalism?
3. What is the role of power and hegemony within the phenomenon of Orientalism and the relationship between the Occident and the Orient?
4. Drawing on the Foucauldian notion of 'discourse,' rather than the familiar Marxist distinction between ideology or 'false consciousness' and scientific knowledge, Said stresses that Orientalism should not be thought of as a "structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away". Said's point is that Orientalism is not merely some "airy European fantasy about the Orient". It is, rather, a "system of knowledge about the Orient", a created body of theory and practice in which . . . there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism . . . an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied . . . the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. Said underscores Orientalism's "close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions".
5. Discuss the following:
 - a. The distinction between pure and political knowledge.
 - b. The methodological question.
 - c. The personal dimension.
6. Discuss Sir Arthur James Balfour's argument for the British occupation of Egypt? What is the basis for his argument and how is this argument reflected in Cromer's *Modern Egypt*?
7. Said queries in *Reflections on Exile* that, "But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?" Discuss the conditions of exile and the potentialities for artistic production.
8. What is the interplay between nationalism and exile?

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T: 11AM – 1PM

Discussion February 4, 2014

Innab, Saba. *No- Sheep's Land*. Amman: The Khalid Shoman Foundation – Darat al Funun. 2012.

Innab, Saba. "On-Longing". *Ibraaz: Contemporary Visual Culture in North Africa and the Middle East*. <http://www.ibraaz.org/projects/20>

Salhi, Zahia Smail and Ian Richard Netton. "Defining the Arab Diaspora". *The Arab Diaspora: Voices of an Anguished Scream*. New York: Routledge Press, 2006, pp. 1 – 10.

Sulaf, Zakharia. "Shifting Boundaries: Art of the Arab Diaspora". *Nukta Art*. Vol. 5, Issue 2, (December 2010), pp. 8 – 10.

Notes:

1. Discuss the definition of "Diaspora" and its difference from "Exile."
2. Diaspora derives from the Greek word for being scatter (in Arabic al-shatat), whereas 'exile' is Latin and means to be banned from one's place of origin. "Diaspora" is less inclined towards suffering and "longing" than exile; the "homing desire" produced by migration leads to physical and / or symbolic acts which establish sites promising a certain existential security away from one's "foundation." The concept of Diaspora thus "places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins."
3. What are the distinctions Said makes among exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés?
4. Discuss the creative tension (according to Salhi) of "coming near home."
5. What is the third space of the Diaspora?
6. What is the dichotomy of qalb versus qalib? How do each of these inform identity?

INTRODUCTION

The urban realm no longer carries with it all those aspirations of individuals and the collective experience. Those aspirations have been absorbed in the increased

accumulation of capital and the materialization of dominant spaces of consumption – spaces where the experience of place and places of experience withdraw into commodity signs promising the 'good' life. A question therefore arises: for whom exactly is the city being planned? This is the question posed by artist and architect Saba Innab in her project *On-longing* (2011), which investigates the urban makeup of Amman through the use of aerial photographs, AutoCAD maps and tracing paper to, in her words, 'highlight certain spaces to create a parallel narrative of the city and construct another 'reality' or situation through collage, re-tracing and diagrammatic accounts of the city'.

ON-LONGING, A PROJECT BY SABA INNAB

The urban realm no longer carries with it all those aspirations of individuals and the collective experience. Those aspirations have been absorbed in the increased accumulation of capital and the materialization of dominant spaces of consumption – spaces where the experience of place and places of experience withdraw into an image of commodity signs promising the 'good' life. A question therefore arises: for whom exactly is the city being planned?

Cities grow towards patterns of urban living that are stationed around capital accumulation and their capacity for consumption. Those patterns put the city on display as a field of opportunities, by creating a free market liberated from the state. Cities generate a fully commoditized form of social life through large-scale development practices and regeneration projects that reflect procedures enforced from 'above'; targeting highly significant and meaningful places in the city; and promoting a 'theme' that exceeds the intended design and producing images of privatized public landscapes speaking to a customer rather than a user.

Gradually, the city turns into a commoditized experience, an image that triggers an excessive degree of marginalization, gentrification, and dislocation, and increases the spatial/social segregation in the city.

In a city like Amman, a city that portrays itself as a temporary/permanent reality, such developmental practices enhance the dramatic schism between the 'domestic' and the 'urban'. The temporal factor plays a significant role here in how people 'domesticate' their

urban experience, by limiting it to their basic needs of dwelling, and restricting their movement to boundaries of inclusion and exclusion imposed from above.

This relation is further complicated by how Amman was and is growing. This growth has always been subject to events enforced upon it by regional economic and political conditions, which were all reflected in the morphology of the city when it was in its formative years. Urgent needs called for fast, arbitrary solutions that caused confusion in the city's overall structure. This was followed by efforts to redeem the fallout: a reaction, and then a re-reaction. The city was thus shaped by these reciprocal actions, creating a multi-centered, spatial reality that is infinitely shifting.

The issue here is not to criticize such projects and what effects are generated from the twin processes of gentrification and displacement, because they are a natural consequence of capital accumulation everywhere. However, in the case of Amman, a political dimension reveals itself in parallel to these practices, where a layer of 'targeted' gentrification appears as a form of reclamation of places after abandonment, public spaces in particular.

To be able to understand the failure of the 'public' in carrying out the aspirations of a certain milieu, we have to map history onto places and understand the genesis, the shifts, the abandonments and the 'comebacks' in the urban configuration, and those patterns somehow explain or scan the relation between power, the political power or the ruler from one side, and the spaces and their representations and identifications on the other. Mapping history onto space leads us to recognize the centrality of cities, particularly those that are in the process of constructing 'nationhood', as well as other forms of political domination.

The map becomes a tool for tracing centers in relation to power and the different representations along a time span, making use of aerial photographs, AutoCAD maps and tracing paper to highlight certain spaces to create a parallel narrative of the city and construct another 'reality' or situation through collage, re-tracing and diagrammatic accounts of the city.

This project, *On-longing*, has involved me working with photographs I took of the city's edge, an area that reveals so much about the city and its centre. These are enlarged images in which I erase all signs of habitation and replace them with mega-structures, Utopian constructions, or even perhaps a dystopian facade. I am working with the contradictions that we have normalized over time; the imagined versus the real, the inflated versus the rural, and the permanent versus the temporary.

Image

The inscriptions of the relationship between the ruling and the public space: the Roman Temple and the Agora, the Royal Palaces and the Hashemite Saha. This diagram is one of the attempts that tries to map this replica, and failure of this plaza as a public space.

Image

A mixed-media map made out of 8 A3 modules tracing the dislocation of public transportation hubs in two locations that are framing the downtown area, and relocating them on the periphery of the city. This is trying to analyze the impact of these shifts, bearing in mind the proposed developments for these particular areas that are being voided of their daily users.

Images

Al Saha al hashemeyeh and Raghadan Bus terminal at the eastern end of downtown, the City Hall building in Ras el Ain at the western end of downtown, and Al Abdali bus terminal at the end of Salt Street linking downtown to west Amman and other places in the city. This triangle defines, or maybe confines, the downtown area, and is a representation of this 'return' or reclamation of these centers by the political power in a way that emphasizes the complete denial of the accumulation of certain stories and representations. This return is constructed through three development projects and large-scale urban regeneration projects that focus on the idea of 'heritage' as a frozen material image and avoid dealing with the space as a social product. Those targeted areas are extracted from the map, thus the interruptions in movement, dwelling, and exclusion in the city is further visually highlighted.

Image

The camps and the royal palaces: a map of the eastern edge of downtown Amman showing the location of the first royal palace – Raghadan Palace – built in 1927. Another royal palace was built by 1957 towards the west of downtown, gradually abandoning the old royal/institutional centre. In a city that is constructing itself in the framework of nation building as a whole, every 'ruler' has come with a new palace location, a mosque in the name of the late king, a public space and even a museum! The most recent shift of the seat of power, to the far west of the city (Hummar), is a shift that appears to be turning its back on the whole city. It also defines the class of its nearest dwellers. Close to this new location, a new centre has emerged that revolves around extreme patterns of consumption.

Ahmed Alsoudani

Baghdad I

2008

Acrylic on canvas

210 x 370 cm

"The falling statue of a despot in the centre of *Baghdad I* recalls the toppling of the statue of Saddam. The rooster-like figure symbolizes America. Here the rooster is not only a figure of control but is injured as well and constrained. The basket of eggs to the left side of its neck represents ideas - unhatched ideas in this case; an armory of fragile potential. Alsoudani's fascination with molecules and cellular references are apparent in the central egg-shaped object in the center of the rooster's belly. The flood bursting through on the bottom center of the canvas carries Biblical associations and references the fractured nature of daily life in Baghdad – nothing works, pipes burst, the city is tacked together, evoked by the large nails depicted in different parts of the canvas. A figure on the upper right of the canvas bursts forth in a flourish of pageantry, representing the new Iraqi government, sprung forth from the chaos, compromised, bandaged and standing precariously on a teetering stool." *Robert Goff*

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Discussion February 11, 2014

Schulze, Kirsten E, and Martin Stokes and Colm Campbell.. *Nationalism, minorities and diasporas : identities and rights in the Middle East*. London ; New York : Tauris Academic Studies, 1996.

As'ad Ghanem. "Palestinian Nationalism: An Overview." *Israel Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Shared Narratives—A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue / Guest. (Summer 2013), pp. 11-29

al-Husseini, Jalal. "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), pp. 51-64.
<http://www.contemporarypractices.net/index.html>

Bshara, Khaldun. "The Palestinian Spaces of Memory's Role in the Reconstruction of New Collective Narrative in the Nation Building Process." <http://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/75/files/2009/04/palestinian-spaces-of-memory-and-collective-narrative2.pdf>

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/04/palestinian-museum-history-culture.html>

<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11728/the-palestinian-museum-an-agent-of-empowerment-and>

archrecord.construction.com/news/2013/06/130614-Palestinian-Museum-Heneghan-Peng-Architects.asp

<http://www.palmuseum.org/>

Notes:

1. What is the need to construct areas of political, legal and cultural consensus across a population which is widely dispersed?
2. Discuss the two types of nationalism and the ways in which suppression and discrimination give rise to the development of ethnic or religious nationalism.
3. Discuss the role of collective narrative construction in the nation building process.

4. What is the “re-collecting” architectural strategy for new narrative construction in Palestine?
5. According to Jack Persekian, Director of the Palestinian Museum, “The idea, however, transformed from establishing a museum to serve and preserve the collective memory into a museum that uses history, heritage and memory to develop a contemporary message that addresses the situation of Palestine and its diaspora.”
6. In “Art Without History” Nada Shabout discusses the theoretical implications of defining the field of art criticism in the Middle East on the premise of art as an element of national rhetoric and as a unifying cultural agent. How does the Palestinian Museum (a museum without art) construct its national rhetoric?
7. According to the architects Heneghan Peng:
 - “The approach to the Palestinian Museum is to draw on this history of the terraced landscape, embedding the museum into its immediate site and drawing from this site to tell a larger story of a diverse culture,” said a statement from the practice.
 - “The site is formed through a series of cascading terraces, created by field stone walls which recall the agricultural terraces of the area.
 - “The theme of the landscape, from the cultural to the native landscape, unfolds across the terraces with the more cultured and domesticated terraces close to the building. The planting changes gradually as one moves down the terraces to the west.
 - “The cascade of terraces tells a diversity of stories, citrus brought in through trade routes, native aromatic herbs, a rich and varied landscape with connections east and west.
 - “The building itself emerges from the landscape to create a strong profile for the hilltop both integrated into the landscape yet creating an assertive form that has a distinctive identity. The building is sited to take maximum advantage of the view to the west and is clad in a local limestone.
 - “The masterplan and building are designed to both draw from the place and be transformative. The design embodies building traditions but is projective with this knowledge to imagine a 21st century tradition.”

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Discussion February 18, 2014

Counter-Narrative: Archive and Performance

Dadi, Iftikhar. "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories" *Signs*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 125-150.

Danto, Arthur C. "Shirin Neshat" Interview *BOMB*, No. 73 (Fall, 2000), pp. 60-67.

Lepecki, Andre. "'After All, This Terror Was Not without Reason': Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive" *TDR The Drama Review* (1988-), Vol. 50, No. 3 (Autumn, 2006), pp. 88-99.

Skurvida, Sandra. "Victory Against Time: Demonstrative Urgency of Performance in the State of Resistance." *Art Papers Magazine*; Sep/Oct2013, Vol. 37 Issue 5, p22-26, 5p.

Zaatari, Akram and Hannah Feldman. "Mining War: Fragments from a Conversation Already Passed." *Art Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 48-67

The Atlas Group: <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/>

Walid Raad Interview: <http://bombsite.com/issues/81/articles/2504>

Shirin Neshat TED Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YS3gGpnPe8>

National memory is often less about its subject and more about the frame that surrounds and presents it, formed more by its retelling, by the fraction of a scene captured in a photograph, or the bolded terms in a school textbook than an actual recollection of events. However, as the basis for historical truth, collective memory remains one of the most deeply contested terrains of modern politics and culture. National governments and elderly citizens, maps and diaries, news images and internet blogs all contend with one another to control the ways in which memory and thus history are produced, given authority, and transformed over time. In the Middle East, where many nations have relatively recently come to independently control their own national narrative these issues are at the forefront of governmental and scholarly discourse and art – whether formal or vernacular – is essential to these debates.

1. Shirin Neshat describes the condition of being an artist in exile as a condition of “longing;” however, at the same time Neshat describes the space of exile as a collapse of distance in terms of the moral, emotional, psychological, political spaces and social responsibility. How does this condition relate to Salhi’s concept of the creative tension of “coming near home?”
2. What are the counter-narratives in Neshat’s work? How do these counter-narratives offer forms of resistance not only to the national narrative of the current Iranian government but also to the Western narrative regarding Iranian culture?
3. Discuss the performative qualities of Neshat’s photographic collection *Women of Allah* in terms of allegory, appropriation, and subject – object relationships.
4. Examine the use of abstraction in the archive of the Atlas Group. Discuss the use of abstraction and the construction of a the “hysterical documents.”
5. Ra’ad states, “It is important to note that Dr. Fadl Fakhouri’s Notebook Volume 72, titled “Missing Lebanese Wars,” raised for us troubling questions about the possibilities and limits of writing any history of the recent wars in Lebanon.” How does this relate to Lepecki’s analysis of Benjamin’s construction of history?
6. Examine the differences and / or similarities between Ra’ad methodology of historicity and archive construction and the work of Zaatari and Feldman.

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Discussion February 25, 2014

Collective Histories and Personal Narratives

Ingram, Alan. "Experimental geopolitics: Wafaa Bilal's Domestic tension." *The Geographical Journal*. 6/2012, ISSN: 0016-7398, Volume 178, Issue 2, p. 123-133.

Kamat, Anjali And Wafaa Bilal. "Interview with Iraqi Artist Wafaa Bilal." *The Arab Studies Journal* , Vol. 18, No. 1, Visual Arts and Practices in the Middle East. (Spring 2010) , pp. 316-329

Rawlings, Ashley. "Remote Repercussions: Wafaa Bilal." *Art and Asia Pacific*. No. 72. <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/72/RemoteRepercussionsWafaaBilal/>

Said, Edward. "Narrative and Social Space". *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books. 1993. pp. 62 – 80.

Younis, Ala and Kasla Redzisz. *Out of Place*. Collaborative Exhibition between Darat al Funun, Amman and the Tate Modern, London, 2011.
<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/project-space-out-place>

Younis, Ala. "What Is Overpowers What Has Been, And Sends It There, Onto A Different Path". Tate Modern. 2011
<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/level-2-gallery-out-place/out-place-ala-younis>

Younis, Ala. "A Manual for Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Times." *Art and Asia Pacific*. No. 77 (Mar/Apr 2012): 45,27.

Redzisz, Kasla. "When buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction." Tate Modern. 2011
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1. Describe the pervasive presence of empire in the 19th century narratives. How do these narratives reinforce Orientalist perceptions of the "other"?
2. Discuss Said's critique of the lack of consideration of the relationships between culture and imperialism in early to mid-20th century literary criticism.

3. How do the works of certain contemporary Middle East artists seek to fill the void of anti-imperialist resistance or interpretations of a post-colonial culture?
4. Discuss representations of the “middle East” in comparison to Said’s critique of Joseph Conrad’s “Africa” in *Heart of Darkness*?
5. How does Ala Younis attempt to register the relationships between dominant political forces and personal narratives in such works as “Tin Soldiers” and curatorial projects such as “Out of Place”?
6. In contrast, how does performance artist Wafaa Bilal use the body to register collective narratives and personal experiences?
7. How does Bilal’s use of gaming and simulation collapse the space between the collective and the personal and confront the disengagement between subject and object?

Tin Soldiers- Ala Younis

Two soldiers intricately sculpted together as one piece. Colored from both sides, the model has two heads but one body. Apparently one is supporting the other to walk, as one figure’s arm comes from under the other’s underarm. The colored backside of the figure would confirm this too. There is only one weapon, half-hidden under the strong soldier’s jacket. “Regarding your project, I have to say Ala, that I grew up with unfulfilled fighters from the communist party in the south, fighters that fought against Israel, and especially two brothers, one of whom was the head of the resistance during the eighties... a man who has lost most of his friends. Well it is very emotional when it comes to this subject, the idea of losing and how to continue life. In the south there are many fighters who felt lost after 1990 because they had spent 15 years fighting.* But the weird thing is that all these films talking about those fighters; filmed them from the back or with covered faces. Now we can see those faces, but how? I do not know which soldiers you are talking about and where? You mean soldiers who were fighting in the army or fighters who had an ideological project?” Ahmad Ghossein

I mean fighters who do not fight any more, fighters who never managed to fight in real battles, those who fight futilely for or through an ideology, and those who were “born into a time of conflict and have inherited a moral commitment to aggression. Their own experience around violence becomes the framework by which they condition and refine their subscription to militarism.” Motaz Attalla This publication project explores persistent realities of formal and informal fighters. It attempts to look at the fragility of individuals, and the continuing allure of notions of nationalism and agency. It shares stories of individuals who have the mind-set, upbringing, context, or readiness to become a fighter, and stories of other’s escape to and from soldiery. The fragility of the lives tackled in this research is haunting.

The book focuses on the transformations with(in) incomplete, pale, hesitant, or aspiring fighters living the strain of political shifts. Following their military practices in real or virtual alternative spaces, till the day the new Arab revolutions broke out, the research had identified four specific types of fighters and their levels of presence and reality, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled:

The Reflexive; the one who was born and raised in the time of war, ready to fight at any moment, then came of age at the time of peace, where his ideals are no longer valid. He struggles to choose or adapt.

The Fantastical; the one who happens to create and fight his own battles in the imaginative or virtual worlds. He constructs a world in which he controls the powers and destinies of his friends and enemies.

The Simulated; the one who lives the difficulties of the life of a soldier except he never arrives to the battle.

The Broken; the one who was defeated by his own self or by failed ideals. Broken by either going to war or never going to war.

You will meet these fighters and other variations of them throughout the book's invited collaborations, concise research, and found material and objects. This is not a comprehensive guide, yet, one would never know if this would be possible in any case. It does not cover all, or even many, geographic locations. It navigates maps copied from other maps, tracing issues of heart and mind, of geography and politics, of confusion, paranoia, aspiration, and abandonment. It seeks to verify given promises, from a man to himself, from past to present, and from present to past.

A fighter is offered a head change, when he borrows another head from a following page in the drawings of Nicolas Paris.

Images by Hani Jawharieh of fighters in training camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, were published by the Palestinian Cinema Institution. They are presented here in the context of Rasha Salti's text; on the rise and demise of the image of the fida'i. Salti returns to the appearance of the term in Palestinian poetry and posters, and the new meanings it acquires in Divine Intervention (2003), the feature film by Elia Suleiman.

Fouad Elkoury was invited to board the ferry Atlantis, along with Arafat and other fida'is, in their flight from Beirut in 1982. The images do not comply with the myth of heroic aura of the exit, except for one thing: the possible presence and absence of Arafat in the very same image. Imagining the image sans Arafat, allows to see the accompanying sculpted fighters.

A script is compiled from an open call to suggest plans for an invasion. The call was posted in 2008 on al-Muntada al-Arabi; an open online forum created by laymen with an interest in militarism. The forum's content of military news, images, and comments are contributed by registered users. The call triggered a mass of thirty pages of plans and ideas, varying from the absurd to the very serious.

From an infinite numbers of extremely accurate miniatures of soldiers, machines and vehicles from all over the world, selections of Iraqi soldiers, police officers, and fighters are presented here. These illustrations, found on the open resource Junior General website, are contributed by illustrators from the United States of America, and other parts of the world, to simulate all possible historical and fantastical wars. www.juniorgeneral.org.

Through her talk Gardening a pitiless mountain dreamed of faraway with its owner only a passing shadow, Oraib Toukan ponders the cinematic representation of a Palestinian revolution filmed in neighboring landscapes. Probing and borrowing scenes from films by Abdallah Kawash, Masao Adachi, and Jean-Luc Godard that were partly shot in Jordan, the talk is structured on the three-part scene of roaring war planes, flying to Bach's Violin Concerto in E major, in Mustapha Abu Ali's film They Do Not Exist (1974).

Adania Shibli's journey through the Qalandia checkpoint is a composite of two worlds, a physical journey that raises a lot of dust, and a psychological one where she ponders over looks, signs,

and language as well as her own interpretations, decisions, and cowardliness vis-à-vis the subjects who appear in her way.

Motaz Attalla reports from the ground on a night of lawlessness in post-revolution Cairo; on the formation of civilian checkpoints and guarding shifts, their weapons, costumes, and how they circulated news of expected looting attacks.

Mario Cuesta Hernando sets out to better know Hezbollah in its hometown of Baalbek. The story develops from humor, to suspicion, to suspense, to friendliness, to a heartbreak, with an image of a martyr on a wall and another eligible fighter.

In his Moderate Enlightenment, Imran Qureishi depicts art students in fragments of camouflage outfits in Pakistan. Their dress, and the stereotypes thereof, can mistakenly lead to their identification by others as terrorists.

Ahmed Hefnawy follows the second lives of disposed military uniforms, in props and spare part shops. He studies, collects, wears and photographs himself in these uniforms, and recounts some of the stories that have survived with these outfits.

Camouflage patterns are investigated in the published images of Libyan revolts. Each Camo relates to a country and a time of production, and is moved to new locations through military deals, coalitions, occupations, and landings. The appearance of different camouflage patterns amongst fighters reveals local genealogies of power.

Mohamed Sadek speaks of his experience in compulsory military training with disenchantment, except when he boasts a skill that he learned in this process, and when he remembers where he saw the stars before.

Cevdet Ereğ has also taken refuge in his music and notes during compulsory military training in 2007. "From Notebooks of a Drummer in Joy Division," Ereğ shares his time charts or calendars of the remaining days of service, thoughts on gardens, music playlists, drums beat patterns, and depictions of colleagues and spaces.

Doa Aly's text collage explores images of physical, emotional, and sexual perfection, mutation and disfiguration.

Rita Ponce de Leon uses anecdotes told by friends to draw tiny ink miniatures depicting the remains of soldiers' assaults on individuals.

Abdul Hay Mosallam grew a tree from words by his captured son. Mosallam worked in the Jordanian Air Forces, before he resigned to join the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) forces, which moved him and his family between Amman, Damascus, Libya, and Beirut. Mosallam worked in Beirut under siege in 1982 and left with its Palestinian fighters.

Rayanne Tabet came across an unassembled Merkava toy model in a thrift market in New York in 2012. Made in 1983, the toy came complete with guides and info sheets on the history of the Israeli tank and its extensively proven qualities "in the recent Lebanon conflict." The tank comes in many small parts, in a state of deconstruction similar to the artist's local experience of it.

The email letters published here came at the time where Mehmetcik's (pseudonym) heart was changing regarding his decision to professionally join the army. He wrote to a friend he never saw on his strains and hopes, and the colors of the places where he is, without referring explicitly to

his profession. Mehmetçik (literally Little Mehmet) is a general term used affectionately to refer to soldiers of the Ottoman Army and Turkish Army.

Kamal Mufti's appearance as a 5-year old boy on top of a military rover, in the company of two of Glubb Pasha's guards, anticipates a life dedicated to military service.

Francis Alÿs' drawings depict a fighter who has stopped at the sea, while another fighter in an Afghan outfit continues to walk to the mountains.

Over the course of two years, Maha Maamoun has forwarded what has captured her attention as material relevant to this project; links to facebook pages of civilian-cum-fighters, a depiction of Iranian martyrs looking from the sky at fighters on earth, a picture message of a sculpture of a soldier with wings from the Berlin airport, funny tweets from a mother to her soldier son, and two books on "How to Write the Most Beautiful Letters." Some of these forwards appear in this book.

Finally, what started off as an exploration through text and image of unvisited territories of struggle with one's own world / self / ideals / upbringing became a scan of the region's recent transformations, and of its effects on its inhabitants, across generations. It is a search for one's own position within, and as a result of, all these contexts.

- Year 1990 marks the end of a 15-year Lebanese Civil war, after which many former fighters remain unemployed and are left to deal with the psychosocial effects of the war.

Heart of Darkness and Apocalypse Now!

Francis Ford Coppola based *Apocalypse Now!* on Joseph Conrad's turn-of-the-twentieth-century novella, *Heart of Darkness*. While changing many details, most notably the time period, setting, and characters, Coppola retained the thematic content. Both depict a protagonist's (Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness*, Willard in *Apocalypse Now!*) struggle to commandeer a vessel upstream in search of a man named Kurtz. Conrad focuses on British imperialism in Africa; Coppola films American involvement in Vietnam. As Marlowe and Willard travel further upstream they face a Darwinian battleground of humanity, giving to the savage nature of the jungle. By choosing to translate salient details in time and place, while leaving thematic elements in tact, Coppola creates an allegory between British imperial behavior in the late 1800s and American foreign policy in the 1960s. Examining the parallels between these two works, one must seek to understand each author's purpose as it informs his audience about his views toward war.

The only characters that appear in both works are the narrator and Kurtz. Willard plays the narrator in *Apocalypse Now!*; Conrad's narrator's identity is unknown. As such, his stories are one degree of separation removed from Marlowe. Ironically named considering his great physical height, Kurtz is the same character in both works: a man of great military stature and acclaim whose behavior comes under question for excessively brutal behavior. In *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator comments that "all of Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz." One could question whether, by comparison, Coppola intends Kurtz to be viewed as the product or representation of America in Vietnam. If so, his insanity and killing could be considered the ultimate personal consequence of war. Willard comments, "I felt like I knew one or two things about Kurtz that weren't in the dossier. Nolon Bridge was the last outpost of the Nung River. Beyond it there was only Kurtz." Thus, his experience travelling the river places Kurtz's behavior in the context of his environment. His comparison of the uncharted territory to Kurtz suggests the inhuman characteristics he ascribes to Kurtz. As Willard faces his own mental struggles on the river, his personal understanding of Kurtz' actions generalizes the connection between war scenarios and savagery.

Another important connection is the Russian trader from *Heart of Darkness*, who becomes the photojournalist (Dennis Hopper) in *Apocalypse Now!* This character in both works introduces the protagonist to Kurtz, explaining how the natives worship him as a god. While in *Heart of Darkness*, the trader says that he has become “bad, very bad,” the photojournalist in *Apocalypse Now!* worships Kurtz, relating “I am a little man, he’s a great man.” One can interpret this choice as a testament to Coppola’s faith in Kurtz’s brainwashing abilities. The effect is that Willard views every living thing in Kurtz’s “kingdom,” as beyond salvation. This provides a true example of Coppola’s “heart of darkness,” and justifies Willard’s decision to leave following his assassination of Kurtz.

Readers often question the racist intent of Conrad’s work, citing that he depicts Africans as speechless inhuman devils. Some scholars have argued that his depiction of natives foils civilized European behavior and serves as the counterpoint to European existence. Others contend that the views of Conrad’s narrator cannot be interpreted as consistent with his own. Perhaps Conrad intended the work to elucidate imperialist behavior without extolling it. Coppola’s choices are equally difficult to interpret. During Kilgore’s bombing sequence (see Ride of the Valkyries), he chooses to dress the Vietnamese in white, and shows children evacuating a school. When the troop stops to investigate a passing boat, against Willard’s orders, Chef promptly and erratically shoots the civilians. Conversely, Coppola films the natives at Kurtz’ encampment as subservient; they treat Kurtz like a god until Willard assassinates him, and then begin to worship Willard. With every choice in which Coppola appears to glorify war, one can view his choice satirically. For example, during the helicopter montage in which Kilgore plays Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries*, Coppola takes a shot of the invading fleet and eliminates the background noise. This establishes the Wagner playing as Coppola’s tribute to Kilgore’s actions. In the context of film history however, this sequence is preceded by *Birth of a Nation* (1915), in which Wagner accompanies the Ku Klux Klan on the hunt for a black man in love with a white woman. Thus, it could be easily argued, that Coppola’s intention for the sequence is to establish not only Kilgore’s disregard for human life, but also the racial impulses motivating his actions.

Coppola’s choice to base *Apocalypse Now!* on *Heart of Darkness* reveals the underlying purpose for his work. Intended to conjure the parallels to imperialism and the Vietnam war, *Apocalypse Now!* also succeeds in portraying the inhumane conditions to which soldiers are reduced as a result of war. While these messages may have been possible without the literary allusion to Conrad’s work, Coppola’s choice leaves no question of his intent. Just as Marlowe began his journey into the heart of darkness, Willard finds himself at grips with the Vietnamese jungle. As Kurtz was the manifestation of imperial ideology to Conrad, he becomes Coppola’s emblem of a soldier driven by insanity to senseless killing. Conrad’s contributions to Coppola’s work by proxy are unmistakable; without them *Apocalypse Now!* would simply not carry the same meaning.

–Dylan Flye, Duke University

Art Power + Space in the Middle East

GSAPP Columbia University

SPRING 2014 SEMINAR

A4775 (Non-Western)

Instructor: Mario Gooden, Prof. of Practice

T: 11AM – 1PM

Discussion March 4, 2014

Constructing Modernity / Identity Commodity and Display

People with a taste for periodization or even a mania for periodization, tell us that modernism is over, and we are now in the epoch of post-modernism. What do you think of that?

I suppose it's true to people who think exclusively in terms of American and advertising culture and the media, pastiche, and that sort of thing. But if you are aware of other worlds than, say, Madison Avenue and high-tech architecture, you will realize that the battle for the modern, and therefore modern as in "modernity," is for example, in parts of the world that I am familiar and affiliated with, like the Middle East, a very important one. It is, indeed, *the* battle. Don't forget, we live in an age where the whole question of what the tradition is, and what the Prophet said, and the Holy Book said, and what God said, and Jesus said, etc., are issues that people go to war over, as in the case of Salman Rushdie, who was condemned to death for what he wrote. That is for us the battle --- the battle over what the modern is, and what the interpretation of the past is. It is very important in the Arab and Islamic worlds. There is a school of writers, poets, essayists, and intellectuals, who are fighting a battle for the right to *be* modern, because our history is governed by *turath*, or heritage. But the question is, who designates what the heritage is. That is the problem. For us, the crisis of "modernism" and "modernity" is a crisis over authority, and the right of the individual, and the writer, the thinker, to express himself, or herself, for it is also the battle over women's rights. So the whole question of postmodernism to us is an interesting sort of Candidean question in the West. But for us, modernism, as in modernity, is the issue of the moment.

Edward Said Interview with Gauri Viswanathan,
Colgate University,

Hamilton, New York, 1996

From "Language, History, and Knowledge"

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Thompson, Seth. *Globalization, Economics and Museums: Saadiyat Island's Cultural District*. Originally published in the Journal for Arts in Society (Volume 3, Number 3, 2008). Posted January 28, 2009. <http://seththompson.info/essays/globalization-economics-and-museums-saadiyat-islands-cultural-district/>

1. Discuss the difficulty of settling modernism and "modernity" with respect to the former French colonies of North Africa and the Middle East.
2. How is this difficulty related to the past desires of the Pan-Arab and Arab Nationalists movements?
3. What is the bind in which the colonized find themselves vis-à-vis modernism?
4. Examine Porterfield's thesis that art played a crucial role in the development of the French empire (and French Nationalism not only through art but museums such as the Louvre) and the differently impetuses for Saadiyat Islands Cultural District.
5. How does the development of Saadiyat Islands Cultural District conform or not conform to Scheid's analysis of the agency of art and Arab modernity?