Course Description
The course traces the cultural history of rapid and uneven development in the modern Asia, predominantly based on the experiences of 19th- and 20th-century Iran. Topics cover a wide range of debates on the constructs of high culture, aesthetic values, archeological policies, colonial rivalry, local resistance, gendered metaphors, racist rhetorics, secular nationalism, and national historiography. The readings and discussions are focused on the following themes: Asia before the birth of the Orient; Imperial structures and the politics of archeological digs in the 1890s; the development of an Aryan theory and its origin in Iran at the turn of the century; Iran’s Constitutional Revolution and the invention of a universalistic cultural expressions in the 1910s; the climax of nationalism and the crystallization of Cultural Heritage in the 1920s; the revolusion of antiquity as a form of political legalization in the 1930s; the pathology of destruction and the appeal to the avant-garde; the arrival of tourism and its impact on conservation tactics of historical sites in the 1940s; state-sponsored racism and the fetish with museums and displays in the 1950s; the Algerian War and the origins of anti-West movement in the 1960s; and feminism as a manifest myth of masculine modernity in the 1970s. The problematic of self-Orientalism that was followed by the Iranian (r)Evolution of 1979 will be central to the inquiries into current events such as postmodern cultural tropes and veiling; fundamentalism and claims to cultural purity; as well as post-9/11 neo-imperialism and its manifestations in western cultural milieus.

The viewing of selected local and western films and the reading of primary sources, as differing (re)presentations of the West/non-West, constitute a critical component of the course. Through a close examination of the built environment and material culture, the course reveals the perils of Iran’s rapid modernization and the ensuing social tensions of its modernity. Their investigation hints at the often unbridgeable gulf between how things worked and how they looked in modern Iran. For in 20th-century Iran, aesthetics was not only a mere allegory of modernity, but also the supreme (re)presentation of the image of an unevenly developed modern nation, that would eventually succumb to a popular (cultural) revolution.

- McClintock, A. “Post colonialism and the Angel of Progress,” Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (NY 1995) 1-17
Third World

- Film: Brazil (Terry Gilliam 1985)
- Said, E. Culture and Imperialism (NY 1994) 3-14

Archeology . Imperialism

- Schnapp, A, “The Invention of Archeology,” The Discovery of the Past (NY 1997) 275-315

Universalism . proto-Hybridity

- Kristeva, J. “Might not Universality Be…Our Own Foreignness?” Strangers to Ourselves (NY 1991) 169-92

Anxiety . Modernity

- Nochlin, L. The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity (NY 2001)

Tourism . Historicity

- Choay, F. “Historic Heritage and the Contemporary Culture Industry” & “Epilogue,” The Invention of the Historic Monument (NY 2001) 138-78
Race . Taste

- Hedayat, S. Blind Owl (1935)
- Film: Turn Left at the End of the World (Avi Nesher 2004)
- Pezeshkzad, I. My Uncle Napoleon (Tehran c. 1970)

Avant-garde . Utopia

- hooks, b. “this is the oppressor’s language / yet I need it to talk to you”: language, a place of struggle,” Between Languages and Cultures (Pittsburg 1995) 295-301

Cinema . Pathology

- Friedberg, A. “The Passage from Arcade to Cinema,” Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (CA 1993) 47-94
- Naficy, H. “Islamizing Film Culture in Iran,” Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic (London 1992) 178-213
- Film: The Cow . Gaav (Dariush Mehrjui 1969)

Self-Orientalism . Camp

- Sontag, S. “Notes on ‘Camp’,” Against Interpretation (1964) 275-92
- Lowe, J. Celebration at Persepolis (Geneva c. 1971) 33, 41, 95
Feminism . Myth

- McClintock, A. “No Longer in a Future Heaven,” Imperial Leather, 352-89
- Film: Live from Tehran (ABC 1999)

Architecture (r)Evolution

- Buck-Morss, S. “Dream and Awakening,” Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of
- Mass Utopia in East and West (MA 2000) 174-211

Iconography . Repression

- Sreberny, A. “The Islamic Republic and the Process of Islamicization,”

unVeiling . disObedience

- Adelkhah, F. Being Modern in Iran (NY, 2000)

Diasporas . Fragmentation

- Satrapi, M. Persepolis (Paris 2004)
- Film: Vodka Lemon (Hiner Saleem 2003)
- Zizek, S. “The Seven Veils of Fantasy,” The Plague of Fantasies (London 1997) 3-44