IDSEM-UG1810
Art and Politics in the City: New York and Buenos Aires
New York University
Gallatin School of Individualized Study

Instructors: Profs. Florencia Malbrán and Alejandro Velasco
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Fall 2015: Term
Bobst LL 141: Location
TH 2:00-4:45PM: NYC Time
TH 3:30-6:15PM: BA Time pre 11/12
TH 4:00-6:45PM: BA Time post 11/12

Course Description

This course brings together students in New York and Buenos Aires to examine how urban arts and politics intersect in the Americas: How are art and politics understood and expressed differently and similarly in these two American metropolises and why? How do shared aesthetic features of public art in the city reflect the global circulation of urban creative modes? What do we learn about local politics from looking at the art and writing on a city’s public spaces? Teams of students in both cities will conduct field work in selected neighborhoods to help create an archive of murals, graffiti, performances, and installations. Then, drawing from readings in history, art criticism, and urban studies, as well as from census and electoral data and using GIS technology, we will analyze how social and political processes like gentrification, inequality, and planning generate and reflect creative political expression as captured in our database, culminating in transnational, collaborative projects that explore what the art and writing of city streets reveals about urban life in 21st century America.

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about the contested meanings of “public art,” examining through both an aesthetic perspective and a place-based perspective what constitutes art and how specific contexts inform different appreciations of the works in question.
- By engaging with art criticism and developing a practice of discussing public art pieces through layers of production, location, context, medium, intent, and others, students will learn how to “read” public art.
- By reading contemporary histories of both New York and Buenos Aires, in particular how both government and non-government actors have made use – whether through cooptation or elimination – of public art, students will learn to integrate historical process into their analysis of contemporary phenomena.
- In reading urban political theory, students will learn about the politicization of space and how “right to the city” language has come to shape contemporary debates on the balance between public and private, and how artistic expression contributes to that debate.
- Students will also learn about the impact on public expression of laws and planning priorities on what constitutes “public space,” and how legality alternately constrains some forms of creative expression and promotes others, while providing new opportunities for political engagement and understandings of citizenship in urban contexts.
Students will learn to use social scientific methods of collecting and interpreting demographic and electoral data, as well as data visualization tools for the purposes of conducting multi-layered analyses of place, politics, and population.

**Grading/Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Attendance</td>
<td>throughout</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street/Public Art Documentation</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Art Analysis essay (individual)</td>
<td>varies per student</td>
<td>30% (10% x3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art Historical Analysis (group)</td>
<td>9 March</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>7 May</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparative Analytic Essay (group)</td>
<td>14 May</td>
<td>20%</td>
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The full class (both the NYC and BA sections) will meet via internet once weekly, and each session will consist of two parts. One part will be devoted to discussing shared reading assignments in a plenary session, and students will be graded on their individual participation in these plenary discussions.

During the other part of the weekly class session, five student groups of four people each – two students in both NYC and BA respectively – will meet in the assigned classroom via skype, google chat or a comparable platform and spend about 45 minutes collaborating on the major research project for the course. Namely, students will produce a course website cataloging street art and graffiti and analyzing their intersections with local politics in both cities. The final 20-30 minutes of each session will be reserved for the groups to provide updates to, summarize findings for, raise questions to, or solicit feedback from the plenary.

Each group will choose a geographically finite area, previously determined by the instructors, in both NYC and BA. (So that each group will be responsible for two areas, one in each city; these may be neighborhoods or parts of neighborhoods.) Once they have determined their area of focus, each group will generate the following content and be assessed both as a group and individually based on the strength of their contributions:

- **Art historical analysis**: This 10-12 page paper asks each group to conduct research on the areas or neighborhoods that they have selected (so each four person group will produce two 10-12 page essays). It will include locating and reading city guides, sections of monographs, academic journal articles, or newspaper/magazine articles specifically addressing that neighborhood/area, if available. In addition, students will also engage in unstructured, casual conversations with area residents, businesses, and visitors to develop a sense of the area as it currently exists, as well as to develop an idea of what major or minor issues seem to be most in the minds of area residents and others. Finally, by conducting web searches of city newspapers about their area or neighborhood, and by developing a habit of periodically reading local press, students will report on both city wide political context and any local political happenings. In particular, by researching the most recent local elections, students will identify the various political parties, candidates, and issues at stake. The idea is for the pair of students who is not in either NYC or Buenos Aires to serve as the target for...
audience/reference/peer reviewer for the other pair of students. So while the entire group will be responsible for both essays and be graded collectively as a group, each paper will be mainly researched and written by the pair of students in the respective city.

- **Street/Public Art documentation:** Student pairs in each group (one in NYC and one in BA) will alternate bi-weekly to discuss with the other pair of students time-stamped images of street art/graffiti that they will periodically upload onto the web based platform above. This will require students to habitually walk around their selected area/neighborhood not just documenting street art/graffiti that they see, but registering (through updates on the platform) any changes to street art/graffiti they have seen. For instance, if an item is painted over, or a new one goes up they had not seen before in the same area. Additionally, students will research past public art projects that were installed on their selected area/neighborhood but are no longer on view due to their ephemeral nature (e.g. Rachel Whiteread’s *Water Tower* in SoHo – 1998; Pipilotti Rist’s *Open my Glade* in Times Square 2000; Marta Minujín’s *Partenón de Libros* in downtown Buenos Aires – 1983; and Leandro Tartaglia’s *La esquina indicada* in Chacarita, Buenos Aires – 2010-12).

- **Individual essays:** Over the course of the semester, students will individually produce three short (approx three-page) analytic essays on a piece of street or public art that they have documented in their area, considering in particular its aesthetic features vis-à-vis others in the area, its production (authored or anonymous), its status (legal or illegal), its message (abstract or direct), its political content (explicit or implicit), and its context (demographic, political, etc). Students will also ask passers-by for their opinion on the piece, and incorporate those reflections into their analysis as pertinent.

- **Group Presentation:** On May 7, each team of four students will have 20 minutes to present to the class as a whole, and to receive feedback on, their preliminary analyses of how art and politics intersect in their respective geographic areas. This presentation should draw on the various elements that have gone into the construction of the database corresponding to your designated city area – street/public art documentation, history/culture/politics essay, individual essays. What connections, relationships, correlations do you see when you visualize the data? What patterns if any did you find? What proved surprising in the data? What proved predictable? Also, what questions linger in your mind (and in particular, what advice do you have for the next group of students who will document your designated area focus on)? Indeed, you should frame your presentation less as a finished product and more as an invitation to pose questions to your fellow classmates, and to solicit feedback about what the data may reveal. You will be able to take that feedback and turn it into your final, comparative essay, due a week later.

- **Comparative analytic essay** (NYC and Buenos Aires): This approx 15-page essay asks each of the five groups of four people to compare and contrasts the street/public art in their two areas, making use of the historical, cultural, political, and demographic information they will have collected, as well as drawing on the reading materials and discussions they will have engaged to that point. In particular, these essays will aim to answer – based on their specific case study – the major questions of the course: How is street art understood and expressed differently and similarly in these two spaces and why? Are there any shared aesthetic
features, and if so how do they reflect the global circulation of creative modes? What do we learn about local politics from looking at the art and writing in both areas?

Ultimately, all of this content will be uploaded onto a platform based on interactive maps of each city that will allow users to navigate between layers of demographic data, pindrop site locations (with pictures and accompanying brief, critical reflection essays) of specific street/public art, the introductory, student group-generated essays on the area overall, and the analytic essays.

**Required Readings**

The following books are required and available at Bluestockings Bookstore, 172 Allen St.


NOTE: Instructors will provide you with copies of required book chapters, as permitted by relevant copyright law, as well as links to electronically available journal articles and other material.

**Academic Integrity**

Students in Gallatin courses belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website ([www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)) for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

**Late Submissions/Incompletes**

Students can ask for extensions and will receive them at the instructor’s discretion, though any late submission will incur a half grade drop unless the delay results from documented medical reasons or family emergencies. **Only requests made in advance of the deadline will be considered.** Assignments submitted late without previously alerting the instructor will not be graded. The last day to submit any pending work granted an extension is **17 December**. If you anticipate being unable to meet this deadline, you should contact the instructor immediately and request to receive an Incomplete, which will be granted at the instructor’s discretion and only with a previously approved plan to complete outstanding work.
**Extra Credit**

Over the course of the semester, the instructors may make extra credit opportunities available to students. These may include attending relevant talks, performances, films, expositions, etc. Students are also encouraged to recommend any events that strike them as relevant to the course. Each extra credit opportunity will add one point to a student’s final grade, with no more than three points possible.

**Religious Observance**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Office of Academic Support in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Academic Accommodations**

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information. Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.
CLASS SCHEDULE

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE; GUEST DATES ARE TENTATIVE AND MAY NEED REARRANGING TO ACCOMMODATE THE AVAILABILITY OF OUR SPEAKERS; ADDITIONAL GUESTS MAY BE ADDED TO THE SCHEDULE AS PERTINENT)

3 September (NYC/BA): Course Intro

10 September (NYC/BA): The City as Imaginary

3. Julio Cortázar, “Graffiti”

Hands-on training with geospatial software

Team/Beat assignments

17 September (NYC/BA): The City as Struggle


24 September (NYC/BA): The City as Canvas

1 October (NYC/BA): Focus Buenos Aires


**2 October (BA ONLY): Graffiti Tour

8 October (NYC/BA): Focus New York


**15 October (NYC ONLY): High Line Tour

22 October (NYC/BA): Policing Art and the City


   Guest Presentation: Michelle Thompson, John Jay College

29 October (NYC/BA): Art(ists) in Motion


**Guest Presentation: Amy Hausmann, MTA Curator, New York**

**5 November (NYC ONLY): Tenement Museum / LES Walking Tour**

**12 November (NYC/BA): Visit to Parque de la Memoria/ 9/11 Museum**


**19 November (NYC/BA): Street Art and Politics**


**26 November (BA ONLY): Zona Sur**

**3 December (NYC/BA): Group Presentations**

**10 December (NYC/BA): Group Presentations**