

ARAB CULTURAL FIELDS IN CRISIS

Workshop organised by
CNMS (University of Marburg) and IREMAM (CNRS, AMU)
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The events which have taken place in many countries across the region since the beginning of the "Arab Spring" five years ago now, have been a central concern for research on contemporary Arab cultural production. Whether they are revisiting works produced before the uprisings or focus on what has appeared since, specialists of literature, visual arts, music and other expressions of contemporary Arab culture invariably find themselves dealing with the relations between cultural actors and cultural production and the ongoing political and social transformations, constantly running the danger of overemphasising the influence of one on the other¹.

This workshop is set to investigate the relations between culture and politics in Arab societies in a state of serious political crisis - war, occupation, revolution - by going back to the contribution of Bourdieu's sociology to the study of cultural fields. One of the major contributions of field theory was to go beyond an opposition of internal and external readings of texts (and, beyond that, all cultural production) by showing how these cultural goods (or works) and the social actors who produce them are also the product of the history and structure of a specific, social space more or less autonomous vis-à-vis the field of power, that is, more or less independent from constraints imposed from outside². But how is that in the context of war or revolution? How does internal conflict (Lebanese and Algerian Civil Wars), occupation (Palestine, Iraq) or revolution (Egypt, Tunisia, Syria from 2011-2012) affect the players in the cultural field and their products? How does the "desectorisation"³ characteristic of political crisis affect the cultural field and, conversely, how do the *forces of the field* play out in these exceptional circumstances⁴?

These questions cannot be approached independently of others, which are raised by Bourdieu's analytical model when applied in the contemporary Arab context⁵. How can the concept of the field, designed to analyse the genesis and history of a national, monolingual, central cultural space - the French literary field of the 19th century - be applied to a space stretching over more than twenty countries, multilingual (even though the usage of Arabic is a common trait) and in peripheral or dominated position in international cultural exchange? What are the effects of the international circulation of Arab cultural products and cultural producers and the development of Arab diasporas - a phenomenon which is driven by the various conflicts and wars - on the national Arab cultural fields and the transnational Arab cultural field, if such a space is a meaningful construct at all?

These are some of the questions we will explore workshop by gathering researchers who use and reflect on the theoretical framework developed by Pierre Bourdieu in their work on contemporary Arab cultural production in general, with special attention to the segment which developed under circumstances marked by conflict or acute political crisis.

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This workshop is a joint activity of the IREMAM (CNRS, AMU) and the Research Group "Turning Points | Figures of Thought. Cultural Practices and Social Change in the Arab World" (Leibniz, DFG), Center for Near and Middle East Studies, University of Marburg.

¹ Cf. Richard Jacquemond, « Un mai 68 arabe ? La révolution égyptienne au prisme du culturel », *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* n° 138, décembre 2015 ; Mona Abaza et Samia Mehrez, *Arts and the Uprising in Egypt, A Culture of Dissent*, Le Caire, American University in Cairo Press, to be published in 2016.

² Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1992.

³ Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques : la dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

⁴ Cf. pour le contexte français, Gisèle Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains, 1940-1953*, Paris, Fayard, 1999.

⁵ Cf. Gisèle Sapiro, « Le champ est-il national ? La théorie de la différenciation sociale au prisme de l'histoire globale », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* n° 200 (2013), p. 70-85.