Proposed Syllabus: Visual Culture Forum

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Course Description

This course introduces the study of visual culture though the lens of a postmodern critical pedagogy, and seeks to interrogate students’ applicability to the teaching of Visual Arts/Visual Culture at the elementary and secondary levels. We will examine the current visual culture discourse in the Art and Humanities from postmodern perspectives through a series of questions as follows. How does our current visual culture function the way it does? How are all of our visual languages—from “high” art to TV, movies, and popular culture—organized by institutions of meaning? What is the study of "visual culture"? How is it related to the study of media and communications more generally? What are the recent intellectual contexts, debates, and conversations that have defined this field of study?

We will look at the interventions of art critics, art historians, academics and contemporary artists (broadly defined to include all art media), into the production and construction of modern visual culture. And, we will also explore the culture wars that have ensued within dominant patriarchal culture in reaction to women’s increased visibility as cultural producers and we will look at a variety of spaces and places in which these culture wars have been played out in visual culture across multiple media forms.

The construction of the class syllabus, including assignments, discussions, readings and collaborative projects are all consciously chosen by the instructor to reflect promising practices for understanding and teaching visual culture within a postmodern critical pedagogy framework.
Objectives

This class is aimed at giving graduate students an opportunity to become skilled in interpreting and directing the use of visual discourses strategically and intellectually. That is to guide students to become sensitive to visual culture, someone who is sophisticated, knowledgeable, and choosy about visual information that she consumes; who likes information to be presented meaningfully, economically, attractively; who understands how different visual media function, and what their possibilities and pitfalls are. As a sensitive visual person, the students do not have to be a producer or designer, but they must understand some basic practices of visual design.

More specific, detailed goals are listed in the following:

1. understanding principles of graphic design and functions of powerful images in visual culture.
2. creating projects that effectively combine visual and verbal discourses;
3. discussing graphic work in critically and historically informed ways;
4. working with teammates and clients in productive relationships;
5. engaging potential audiences of visual texts on a variety of levels;

Schedule for the class

Weeks 1~2: Introductions: Approaches to the study of Visual Culture
Weeks 3~5: Intellectual Traditions in Defining Visual Culture: Benjamin, Debord, Baudrillard
Weeks 6~7: Semiotics and the Study of Visual Language
Weeks 8~9: Mid-Term Presentation
Weeks 10~13: The Function of the Visual Arts and the Artworld as Institution
Weeks 14~16: The Impact of Cultural Industry to Visual Culture.
Weeks 17~18: Visual Culture and Gender Issues.

Requirements

Class discussion of current experiences of visual culture, a mid-term presentation, and a final short project (around 3 pages) on a topic that allows you to apply approaches or
theories discussed in the class.

Exercises and Projects: This course comprises a series of exercises and projects. We'll do the exercises together in class to learn particular critique skills or techniques, and you'll have opportunities to complete two projects after the class. These two projects are pieces of work that you'll complete individually over a period of two or three weeks using the skills you learned from the exercises and insights from the readings and class activities. One of them is visual work and the other is an essay about visual culture.

Expectations from these exercises and projects are listed as follows:

- show you understood and fulfilled the goals of the assignment, that
- you are especially pleased with, that
- show what you've learned in class, that
- you had trouble with, or that
- raise unanswered questions for you.

Grades

- Your work on the various exercises (weighed according to the size and complexity of the project): 65% total
- Participation in class generally, including in-class activities and contributions, attendance, peer workshop responses, class discussion, promptness: 35%

Readings: The package of journal articles.