Thinking About Seeing

Course Description: In this course we will look at the way visual communication functions within the context of contemporary society. This approach will include the formal and aesthetic aspects of works of art and visual communication as well as the socio-political and ideological aspects inherent in the act of looking. We will analyze modes of communicative gestures focusing on the way we speak (in images and otherwise) and how that language is understood. Through a close look at media images and texts from the past and present it will be the student's goal to develop a personal and thoughtful understanding of how the various media work and how we take part in that interaction. The function of social and historical factors will be central to this discussion.

On a practical level this class will attempt to understand, for the designer, artist or theoretical observer, how to use and understand the tools used each day as a means of reaching an audience, as well as understanding what we mean by an audience.

Course objectives/Learning goals: The student will work to gain a depth of knowledge addressing works of visual culture and art and the ability to articulate this in spoken and written form. A part of this will include integration of theory, history, formal characteristics and stylistic affinities with other works. Since this is not an art history class it is not required that the student be conversant in the many elements of the art history field, but they should be able to look at any work carefully, thoughtfully, and with personal specificity.

Requirements

Required text
• Panofsky, Erwin, Perspective as symbolic form
• Course Packet – Available at Unique Copy Center 252 Greene St www.uniquecopycenter.com

For the contents of the course packet see the bibliography below. Please refer to the Blackboard site for other links and readings.

Papers:
• All papers are to be handed in via email as an attachment and should be received no later than the beginning of class on the due date. To hand in the paper via email:
  The email subject should have your name and the paper. For example, the subject should say: Your last name_paper1_TAS (e.g. smith_paper1_TAS)
  The document should be titled as follows:
  Your last name_paper1.doc (e.g. smith_paper1.doc)
• The papers must be sent in Microsoft Word format: Other formats ARE NOT acceptable
• All papers are to be printed in standard fonts (Arial, Helvetica, Times New Roman, etc.) in standard size (10 - 12) and margins (1" – 1.25").
• All papers are required to use at least two book sources (this means real paper books, not just the internet). All sources used should be properly footnoted.
• Assigned writing will generally be given in words and not pages. Word count should be placed at the end of the paper. If you do not know how to use the word count feature of your word processor program, please ask.
• Late papers will be accepted only under extreme situations. Grading will be discussed in each case.

  • Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstance. •
Copying more than three words without making clear the source is plagiarism. Any papers found to contain unlisted sources from the internet or extended quotes without footnotes will be immediately failed.

As a Gallatin student you 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] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Presentation:
Students will be broken up into groups to present on the topics listed each week. The presentations should be 5-10 minutes. Therefore, the presentations should represent a lot of organizing and clarifying of the often complex ideas in the readings, as well as a thoughtful and engaging way to present those ideas.

The goal of the presentation is to present historical context and/or biographical context of the author or text to be addressed that day.

Students should plan to work together either virtually or in person. You are encouraged to make the presentations original and creative.

The presentation will be graded on the following points:
- Creativity
- Historical background
- Information and depth
- Entertainment

The presentations should be accompanied by images (slide, books, or otherwise) and an outline. A handout for the rest of the class can also be helpful. If you will need any extra AV help (projector, etc.) talk with the professor.

• The course packet should be brought to each class.
• Students are responsible for all missed assignments and in-class work.

Grading

Reading, Attendance and Participation (10%)
Reading notes (5%)
Class presentation (15%)
Paper #1 (20%)
Paper #2 (20%)
Final Paper/ Presentation (30%)

Reading, Attendance and Participation (10%) - this includes punctuality, in class quizzes and all assignments.
Reading notes (5%) – Students must hand in electronically notes for all readings. (i.e. via email, word doc) These need be only one page per reading. To be handed in December 10.
Class presentation (20%) - Each student will be responsible for a presentation on a theme of his or her choice relating to the topic and reading of the class.
The presentation will be graded on the following points:
- Creativity
- Historical background
- Information and depth
- Entertainment
The presentations should be accompanied by images (slide, books, or otherwise) and an outline to be handed in. A handout for the rest of the class can also be helpful. If you will need any extra AV help (projector, etc.) talk with the professor.
Bibliography- Included in the course packet


Gablik, Suzi "Individualism: Art for Art’s Sake, or Art for Society’s sake?”, from Has Modernism failed? (New York: Thames and Hudson, ‘95) 20-35


McLuhan, Marshall "The medium is the message", from Understanding Media (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 7-21

Panofsky, “Perspective as Symbolic Form


Servetar, Stuart "Icons 97", from Art Issues (Nov/Dec 1997)


Sontag Susan Ch. 7 from Regarding the pain of others (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003) 104-113

LINKS:
- Critical Art Ensemble: The Electronic Disturbance, Video and Resistance: Against Documentaries
  - http://www.critical-art.net/books/ted/
- Clement Greenberg: Modernist Painting
  - http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html
- Vertov
  - http://www.archive.org/details/ChelovekskinoapparatomManWithAMovieCamera
- James Elkins, Master narratives and their Discontents, Chapter 1
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Presentation topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>Choose one of the topics to present</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>9/16</td>
<td>Representing Space</td>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> Go to a museum (Frick, Met, Brooklyn Museum, Morgan Library, etc) and find a European work of art from between 1300 and 1700. It must be at least 60 inches wide (or about the span of your arms). Write NO MORE THAN 50 words of general description and NO LESS THAN 200 words on a section of the work no larger than 4 inches square. Think of material, color, texture, light, etc. Be clear, expressive and engaging!</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9/23</td>
<td>Rhetoric of the Image</td>
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<td><strong>Presentation topic:</strong> Bring in an ad from a magazine or newspaper and be prepared to analyze it for the class.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>Photography</td>
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<td><strong>Presentation topic(s):</strong> One of these: Goebbels's and Propaganda, Maoist Propaganda, Soviet Propaganda</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>Field trip to Galleries/Museums</td>
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<td>10/14</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10/21</td>
<td>Politics and Art: Propaganda</td>
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<td><strong>Presentation topic(s):</strong> One of these: Goebbels's and Propaganda, Maoist Propaganda, Soviet Propaganda</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/28</td>
<td>What is Modernism?</td>
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<td><strong>Reading:</strong> Charles Baudelaire: <em>The Painter of Modern Life</em> (Sections I-IV) Gablik, Ch. 2 from &quot;Has Modernism&quot;</td>
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failed?”
The futurist manifesto (Blackboard)
Wikipedia entry “Avant-garde”
Greenberg: Avant-garde and Kitsch

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<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Presentation topic</th>
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| 8    | 11/4 | Mechanical Reproduction | “The man with the Camera”
Reading (suggested order):
Suggested: John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, Chapter 1
Benjamin, *The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* | Walter Benjamin
Adorno: *On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening*
Or
Greenberg: *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*

| 9    | 11/11 | Field trip to Galleries/Museums | | Paper #2 Due November 11 |
| 10   | 11/18 | McLuhan and The Present | Reading:
McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*
McLuhan, *The Playboy Interview* (Link) | An historical overview of Marshall McLuhan
McLuhan (Understanding Media
Introduction by Lewis Lapham, among other sources)

| 11   | 11/25 | Post Modernism (part 1) | Reading:
Jameson, *Post Modernism and Consumer Society*
Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1-34 and 180-192)
James Elkins, *Master narratives and their Discontents*, Chapter 1
Proposal due (11/20):
One-page proposal of your final paper.
This should include:
• One paragraph description with the central theme and question of your paper
• Image, artists, etc you plan to look at
• Book and other sources | Paris 1968
Jean Luc Godard’s Breathless

| 12   | 12/2 | Post Modernism Part 2 | Reading:
Rancière: *The emancipation of the spectator*
Baudrillard
*The Implosion of Meaning in the Media*
Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising | Jacques Rancière, The Ignorant
Schoolmaster (Ch. 1)
Or
Artaud “Theater of Cruelty”
And/or
Brecht “The modern theater is epic theater”

| 13   | 12/9 | To be decided! |
READING NOTES DUE DECEMBER 10 |

| 14   | 12/11 | Final Papers Due 12/11 at 3pm | This class is on a Wednesday as per the NYU schedule. |
Presentations for those who choose not to do a final paper.
Paper #1 Due 10/7
Choose an image to which you respond to strongly (hate/love/etc). Use the tools seen in Barthes’ essay to look for a meaning in the image that is not immediately apparent. The other texts should also figure in the essay. Be VERY careful to avoid unsubstantiated speculative comments. If you say it, support with text or image.

The central goals of the essay are:
- To make a compelling argument for a reading of the image with a view to ideology, style and context.
- To substantiate and contextualize the reading you suggest.
- To offer a larger context for the image (through historical and critical sources).
- To lead the viewer through the image in an engaging and informed manner.

This paper should be no less than 1200 words and no more than 2000 words.

Paper #2 Due 11/11
Look at two manifestations of Visual Communication (art, graphic design, video games, etc.): one from after 1950 and one from before 1820. Discuss the ideas in Benjamin’s essay in relation to the works chosen: how does mechanical reproduction change the meaning of the works? How would Gablik understand one as Modern and the other as not? If applicable, take into account Sontag and Levi-Strauss’ discussion of photography and propaganda.

This paper should be no less than 1200 words and no more than 2000 words.

Helpful text:
Ways of Seeing, John Berger

Final Paper or Project: Due December 11
The final grade of the semester will be either a final paper or a final project.

Final Paper
Modern, Postmodern
No less than 2000 words and no more than 3000 words.

Choose a work or a number of works and do a detailed discussion and analysis trying to break down the elements within the work and how they are manifest. Through this discussion articulate the elements which can be understood within the context at least some of the following: Jameson’s idea of the postmodern, Benjamin’s ideas, Debord’s ideas of the spectacle, McLuhan (Hot and Cold, Medium, etc), and Baudrillard.

The goals of the paper are:
- To develop a personal language to address the context, ideology and formal discussion of works of art.
- To utilize your range of experience and learning (your area of concentration) along with the tools and texts seen throughout this semester.
- To offer the reader a nuanced insight into the mechanics of meaning materially (formally), contextually and historically.

Final Project
The final project is only for those students who have a specific idea and capacity to produce it on their own. The projects will be self-initiated. While I will work with the students on any technical advice and assistance I can give, the work here is the responsibility of the student.

The Final Project must:
- Be directly related to the topics and themes of the class.
- Include a one page description or statement articulating those connections and ideas behind
the project.
- Represent the initiative and work of the student. Collaboration is permitted, but it must be clear that the student is, in essence, the Director of any collaboration, not a co-collaborator. If two students in the class work together this can be discussed.
- Be a product of at minimum the same amount of time that might be spent on the paper.
- Be finished by the end of the last class.

Grading of the final Project:
The final project will be graded on the seriousness of its execution and the clarity of its statement. Hours spent (above the minimum required) do not add in any way to the quality of the grade.

In the past final projects have taken the form of books, videos, installations, radio projects, etc. You are encouraged to challenge the classes (and my) expectations of what form the project can take.