

Periodic Course Evaluation for KUN 2560/4560, Autumn 2017

Topics in Visual Studies: Visual Studies, Aesthetics, and Capitalism

Professor Aron Vinegar

“Visual Studies, Aesthetics, and Capitalism” is both an introduction and in-depth exploration of the relationships between visibility, aesthetics and politics in the 21st century. This course investigates how visibility and aesthetics are being reconfigured within the particular forms of capitalism that dominate our time and existence, often characterized by terms such as late capitalism, absolute capitalism, capital realism, neoliberalism, and globalisation. How are issues of desire, love, sexuality, identity, ontology, connectivity, and collectivity marked by the new rhythms and intertwinings of aesthetics, visibility, and capitalism? Are the classical approaches to and categories of aesthetics and visual culture up to the task of making sense of these new reconfigurations?

The course aims to develop students’ awareness of and criticality towards our current socio-political environment, particularly in regards to how visibility and aesthetics is central to our contemporary world. The class is mostly conducted in seminar style, where we address a different topic each week, with assigned readings posted on Fronter, and visual materials that are discussed collectively in class. Students read assigned essays before class, and discuss them in groups and collectively as a class. The class takes place once a week for three hours. The main compulsory activities are centred around the final assignment, which is 10-page essay based on a topic of the student’s choosing that grapples with intersections of visibility, aesthetics, and politics. Students are required to meet with me to discuss their topics halfway through the course, and also to submit a short draft of their papers towards the end of the class.

From the student evaluations of the course, I am confident that the learning outcomes provided in the course descriptions provide a good description of what the students should be able to derive from the course after its completion:

- The students will demonstrate a better understanding of the intersections between visibility, aesthetics, and capitalism in the last 20 years
- Students will learn to work across and through disciplines in concrete and creative ways.
- Present their ideas in a clear, compelling, and thorough manner in both writing and public speaking.
- Identify and present the most important critical and theoretical positions in visual studies and aesthetics dealing with this period, and define the key terms and concepts in this literature.
- Analyze visual forms from this period using the terms and concepts presented in the course literature
- Have improved writing skills in academic English.

From the feedback I have received from the Student Evaluations I believe the course description for this course works satisfactorily. All of the student evaluations for the course indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with how the teaching covered the course content. Furthermore, all of the student evaluations also indicated they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the course overall. 27 students started the course, and 22 completed

it with no registered complaints. KUN 2560/4560 is placed as an “elevator” course, which includes both BA and MA students. 16 BA students and 6 MA students completed all the requirements for the final grade, with most distributed within the A-C range.

This is the first time I have taught this course, and believe it was quite successful in terms of content and student satisfaction. In the future, I might consider changing some of the topics, and also assigning a group presentation as one of the requirements.