Knowledge: Studies in Visual Culture
The 1950s with Dr. Meredith Browne

John Abbott College
Humanities/Philosophy/Religion Department

COURSE NUMBER: 345-101-MQ section 21 and section 22
PONDERATION: 3-1-3 CREDITS: 2.33 credits SEMESTER: Autumn 2014
COMPETENCY: 00B2: apply logical analytical process to how knowledge is organized/used

TEACHER: Dr. Meredith Browne
CLASS TIME & ROOM: Mon. and Wed. 12:30-2:30 (sec. 21) and 2:30-4:30 (sec. 22) HO 101
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Introduction: Visual Culture is a relatively new field of study which draws on ideas from cultural studies, art and art history, sociology and anthropology, among other disciplines. Visual Culture is a way of studying the contemporary or historical world through photographs, pictures, and images, rather than only through texts and words. (See full details of objectives and the course’s role in General Education at the end of this document.)

Content: The kinds of documents which can be studied in the field of Visual Culture are widely varied, including images ranging across the spectrum of high and low culture, artistic and commercial, and professional and amateur. This means that images from the Eaton’s catalogue, family snapshots, high modernist paintings, covers of books, and advertisements painted on the sides of barns are all potential objects of study. With such a diverse range of subjects, the question of methodology – that is, how you go about studying these images in a way which produces useful knowledge about their culture of origin – is of the utmost importance. As such, models from different fields, including history, sociology and art history will be introduced, before we move on to analysing a select body of images.

To narrow the scope of the course, we will focus on a particular decade, using images from the period as a means of gaining knowledge about it. This knowledge will be grounded in an introduction to the decade under study via more traditional textual sources. See tentative schedule of topics to be covered below.
**Required Texts:** Course Pack is available at the bookstore. Assigned readings for class total 350 pages.

**METHODS:** Methods include in-class discussion, presentations, films, group work, and projects online. This course requires regular, active attendance in class and attention to assignments. Reading and writing, as well as listening and speaking in class (including asking questions) are all major aspects of exploring and understanding ideas about the study of visual culture. If you must miss a class, notify me and use the schedule to keep up with assignments.

**College and Departmental Policies:**

**Attendance Policy:**
Students’ regular, active presence is vital to success in the course. Since attendance is an integral part of understanding and mastering competencies in Humanities, Philosophy, and Religion courses, students who miss more than 20% of class time can fail unless there are legitimate reasons. Participation consists of active, respectful listening, reading and viewing as well as appropriate and thoughtful contributions to class discussion.

**Late Submission Policy:**
Assignments submitted late will be penalized 10% of the assignment mark per day after the submission deadline for the assignment. Assignments that are intended as preparation for class activities will not be accepted late.

**Classroom Behaviour:** To maintain a good learning environment for all concerned, certain conditions must be maintained: The classes start on time and last 110 minutes. You are expected to arrive on time and remain for the duration. If you wish to speak, raise your hand and wait to be acknowledged. Disruptive behaviour in class will not be tolerated. Some behaviours which are not acceptable are sleeping, texting, surfing, or talking while the teacher or another student has the floor. Use of cell phones or other devices is not allowed. Laptops and tablets are only permitted for certain course-related activities. Offending students will be asked to leave and counted as absent.

**Religious Holidays:** Students who plan to be absent to observe religious holidays must inform the teacher in writing (MIO is fine) within the first two weeks of the semester so that arrangements can be made.

**Changes to Evaluation Plan in Course Outline:**
Changes to the evaluation plan, during the semester, requires unanimous consent.

**Mid-Semester Assessment (MSA):** All students will receive an MSA in accordance with College procedures.

**College Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism:**
Cheating and/or plagiarism are serious offences (Consult your "Agenda" and IPESA.) and could result in failure of the course. This will also be discussed in class.
Note: It is the responsibility of students to keep all assessed material returned to them for at least one semester in the event of a grade review.

**EVALUATION:**

5% – Star Gazing (Present a person of your choice.)
25% – LIFE magazine analysis
15% – Presentation on an aspect of 1950s Visual Culture using primary sources
20% – Test One
20% – Test Two
(3%x5) 15% – Homework Completion. These points are awarded for showing up prepared and ready to participate in class activities. This can include showing notes you took on a reading, bringing in images for a class discussion, doing in-class writing, posting material on the class blog, etc. Checks will be random and worth three points. There will be at least six opportunities. (See tentative schedule of deadlines below.)

Optional Field Trip with Assignment which can replace up to three Homework Completions.

**Course Costs:** Course Pack for this course costs $20.00. You will also need to budget for photocopying or printing out images for some of your projects. This should cost $5-$10.

**ROLE IN GENERAL EDUCATION:**
"World Views" and "Knowledge" courses together constitute the A-block component of Humanities courses which are concerned with the most basic and general aspects of being human. These courses provide the background to the B-block course on "Ethical Issues."

**OBJECTIVES:** to apply a logical analytical process to how knowledge is organized and used. An appropriate field can be any serious body of knowledge relating to education, law, psychology, creativity, social behaviour, or other disciplines. Humanities approaches each from an interdisciplinary perspective.

**Elements or "knowledge objectives"**
1. to recognize the basic elements of a field of knowledge
2. to define the modes of organization and utilization of a field of knowledge
3. to situate a field of knowledge within its historical context
4. to organize the main components into coherent patterns
5. to produce a synthesis of the main components

**Performance criteria or "ability objectives"**
1.1 appropriate description of the basic elements
1.2 appropriate use of terminology relevant to fields of knowledge
2.1 adequate definition of the dimensions, limits, and uses of fields of knowledge
3.1 accurate identification of the main components in the historical development of fields of human knowledge
3.2 accurate description of the effects of historical development and societal milieu on the limitations and uses of a field of knowledge
4.1 coherent organization of the main components
5.1 appropriate analysis of the components
5.2 coherent synthesis of the main components
5.3 appropriate expression, including a significant individual written component, of an analysis of the context, importance and implications of the organization and uses of knowledge
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

Week of August 25  Alien Anthropologists and Archaeologists of the Future  
- Bring in pictures of the visual culture of your childhood.

Week of Sept. 1  Introduce the 1950s  
(no class Monday)  
- "Star-Gazing" Assigned  
- READ Horace Miner’s "Body Ritual Among the Nacerima"

Week of Sept. 8  Seeing Stars and Understanding MLA Citation  
- READ Richard Meyer's "Rock Hudson's Body"  
- READ Thomas Hine's "The Luckiest Generation"

Week of Sept. 15  1950s Cont’d "Star Gazing" Due and LIFE Analysis Assigned  
(drop deadline)  
- READ Ronald Oakley's "Entering the Fifties"

Week of Sept. 22  As Seen on TV! Family Life in the 1950s  
- READ "Television Families"

Teen Angel  Teen Angel  
- LIFE draft due  
- READ Ronald Oakley's "Generation in a Spotlight"

Week of Sept. 29  Rock and Roll  
- LIFE Analysis Due  
- READ "The Naturalized Gender Order of Rock and Rock"

Week of Oct. 6  Home Sweet Home  
- READ Marling’s "Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book"  
- READ "Good Times"

Week of Oct. 13  Test One  
(Tues. is a "Monday")  
- Choose Topics

Week of Oct. 20  Ladies and Gentlemen  
- Possible Field Trip  
- READ Oakley’s "Women, Sex and Love"

Week of Oct. 27  Autoeroticism: Our Love Affair with the Automobile  
- READ Karal Ann Marling’s "Autoeroticism"

Week of Nov. 3  Other Aspects of the Fifties  
- Presentations

Week of Nov. 10  Other Aspects of the Fifties  
- Presentations

Week of Nov. 17  The Cinema as a Window to the 1950s

Week of Nov. 24  Cinema Continued and Review

Week of Dec. 1  Test Two

Week of Dec. 8  Return Tests and Celebrate the End of Term
Here are the bibliographic references for the readings in the course pack. If you are citing from one of the readings that doesn’t have a title (only a chapter number) then it is from Halberstam’s book.


Projects

The Visual and Material Culture of My Childhood.

For this exercise you will have to find two images which you believe are representative of the culture you were a child in. These images can be representations of objects (toys, appliances, cars, etc.), images of people (celebrities, politicians, your family, or even yourself!), printed material (advertisements, posters, greeting cards, books covers, CD covers, etc.). Choose two different kinds of images (not two of the same kind).

Put the images on one sheet of paper. We will be displaying and discussing the images.

But before we do that, you will write a one to two page paper about the images. Tell the reader very briefly why you chose these images and then proceed with your analysis. Here are some questions to consider:
What do these images say about the culture that produced them? If an archaeologist from the future were to stumble across these some time in the distant future, what would he or she be able to figure out about the world you grew up in? Do the two images reflect similar or different aspects of the culture?

Remember to proof-read. This is your first chance to show me what you can do as a writer. Impress me!

Some rules about image quality:

If your images are not of good quality you will have to fix and resubmit your assignment. Images that are blurred, stretched, distorted, or whose colours are strange (usually due to running out of ink) are not acceptable.

If you wish to include some archival material (such as family photographs or other original images) please either scan or colour photocopy the images rather than submitting the originals.

Do you best to make sure that your images are not like tiny little postage stamps. Make them as large as the paper will allow.

Star-Gazing

Choose a prominent public figure from the 1950s. This person can be an artist, scientist, author, poet, musician, designer, inventor, politician, military or religious figure, businessman or woman, movie star, television personality, or the spouse of an important person. Every student will have a different topic.

Begin by collecting about ten images of your chosen person, keeping careful records of where you found the images. Do your best to discover the original context of each image. Most importantly, you have to find images that were made during the decade of the 1950s. For people who had short careers (like James Dean who died in 1955 at the age of 24) this will be easy. For those who had long careers (like John Wayne) this will require more attention. After all, an image of Elizabeth Taylor from 1958 means something entirely different than an image of her from 2008.

From your initial collection, choose the three images to discuss.

Your assignment.

Short explanation (maximum one paragraph) of who this person is and why he or she is significant. All information must be properly cited.
Three images printed out or photocopied. Quality counts. Images that were originally in colour should be reprinted in colour. Black and white images should be clear and not pixel-y and or distorted in any way. Colour photocopying produces a better quality image (even if the original is black and white.)

A three page paper which discusses the three images. To the best of your ability, identify the kind of image, the reason it was originally made, where it originally circulated, and who would have seen it. As you know from the course, images can be personal snapshots, formal portraits, journalistic images, staged publicity or promotional images, or idealized glamour images. What kind of images have you found? What do these images say about the person depicted? What do they say about the era of the 1950s?

All information which you get from any source must be properly cited. Do this when you put information in your own words and when you quote.

Include an MLA style bibliography. In this you will give the sources of the three images you are discussing and any other source material you used for biographical or background information.

Papers should be proof-read before they are submitted.

Grading - 15 points total
5 for bibliography 10 for analysis
Assignments

20 points - Star-Gazing
Politicians
Prime Ministers
Presidents
First Ladies
Scientists, Thinkers, Authors and Artists
Alfred Kinsey
Simone de Beauvoir
Martin Luther King
Sports Heroes
Movie Stars
Audrey Hepburn
Shirley MacLaine
Marilyn Monroe
James Dean
Marlon Brando
Jean Harlow
Milton Bearle
Vivian Leigh
Lucille Ball
Desi Arnaz
Sam Phillips
Elvis Presley
Pat Boone
Pasty Cline
Lester B. Pearson
Louis St. Laurent
Deifnbaker
Eisenhower
Adlai Stevenson
Nixon
Duplessis
Maurice Richard
Bernard Geoffreon
Gordie Howe Ed Sullivan
JAckie Gleason
Dick Clarke
Sid Caesar
Cyd Charisse
Rock Hudson
James Dean
Marlon Brando
Robert Frost
Yousef Karsh
Grace Metalious
Joe DiMaggio
Liberace
Don Messer
Howdy Doody
Roy Rogers
Dale Evans
Gene Autry
John Wayne
Yehudi Menuin
Leonard Bernstein
Rogers and Hammerstein
Rocky Marciano
Sterling Moss
Juan Fangeo
Gaston Miron
Edward Teller
Robert Oppenheimer
Tennessee Williams
William S. Burroughs
John Foster Dulles
Isaac Asimov
Ray Bradbury
Betty Freidan
Rosa Parks
Martin Luther King
Barbara Ann Scott
Micky Mantle
Marilyn Bell
Natalie Wood
Louella Parsons
Vivian Leigh
Mickey Spillane

10 points - Visual Culture of My Childhood
15 points Star-Gazing
25 points - Thematic Project and Essay on an aspect of 1950s culture
10 points - Presentation
30 points - Test One (15 points) Test Two (15 points)
10 points - Contributions to Online Community

Life Magazine Website Project (20%)
10 Things I Learned About the 1950s From LIFE magazine advertisements.
Issue # and date:
Technology, Automobiles, Architecture, Interior Design, Gender Roles, Childhood and Family Life, Fashion, Diet and Nutrition,

Write a Nacerima-style satire (5%)

328 pages
August 25 and 29 - Introduction to the Study of Visual Culture - Understanding Images - Kinds of Images - Descriptive and Prescriptive - It could mean anything! Contextualizing Images

Sept. 1 (no class) and Sept. 5 - Centuries and Decades - Decades Descrambled - Assign Visual Culture of My Childhood

Sept. 8 and 12 Centuries and Decades Continued Childhood Visual Culture Assignment due
The Alien Archaeologist - Advertising and the End of the World - Nacerima Body Ritual

Sept. 15 and 19 Introduce the 1950s Assign Star-Gazing
Sources - Primary and Secondary - The Importance of Citations
READ Entering the Fifties
READ Rock Hudson's Body

Sept. 22 (course drop deadline) and Sept. 26
1950s Continued Citations Continued - Star-Gazing due
READ - Home Sweet Home
Breakfast for Harriet

Sept. 29 and Oct. 3
READ Women, Sex and Love
Women in the 40s and 50s

Oct. 6 and 10
READ Betty Crocker

Oct. 13 (no class) Oct. 14 and 17
READ Autoeroticism

Oct. 20 and 24 - Test One
READ

Oct. 27 and 31 (Halloween!) 
READ Blue Jeans? Generation in the Spotlight
Nov. 3 (change of program deadline) and 7 Presentations
READ Sputnik and the Bomb

Nov. 10 and 14 Presentations
Watch The Pill

Nov. 17 and 21 Presentations
READ

Nov. 24 and 28 The Cinema as a Window to the 1950s
Celluloid Closet and Rebel Without a Cause

Dec. 1 and 5 Cinema Continued Test Two

Dec. 8 (last day of classes)

Readings
Nacerima Body Ritual
Luckiest Generation
Entering the Fifties 3-21
Good Times
Rock Hudson's Body
Generation in a Spotlight 267-290
Women, Love and Sex in Eisenhower’s America 291-310
Television families
Elvis and James Dean
Betty Crocker’s Picture Book 203-240
Autoerotism 129-162

Home Sweet Home 111-127
Fighting Jim Crow 187-205
The Leisure Society 248-266
Sputnik 343-354
Living with the Bomb 355-371

Chapter 34 television
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