GWS 950 Topics in Graduate Study

Visualizing Vulnerability:
Transnational Feminist Inquiry on Humanitarian Representations and Disability

Spring 2011

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This seminar course examines the intersections of the study of visual culture, humanitarian politics, and vulnerability, a theoretical concept for understanding the human condition situated within the international contexts of disability construction and its gendered formulations. Visual representations created and promoted for human rights agendas and humanitarian projects will be analyzed throughout the course. Discussions in the class will involve multiple minority subject positions based on disability/ability, class, race, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and other markers. Intersectionality theories and disability studies will be introduced to reexamine identity politics and antidiscrimination based human rights. Particular focus will be placed on gendered injustice in societies outside the “West” and their historical backgrounds, scrutinizing the constructions of “vulnerable bodies” along with ideas about global capitalism, violence, armed conflicts, overdevelopment and underdevelopment, public health and disease surveillance, and the commodification of sexed bodies. The course does not survey the status quo of humanitarian interventions and aid but aims to develop critical perspectives to think beyond national borders and single minority identity frameworks. The course will cover cultural studies methodology including discourse and visual analysis. The key goal of the course is formulating new agendas and strategies that involve intersectional subjects and incorporate situational and historical differences into the consideration of social justice with visual methodology.

Required Readings

All readings will be made available electronically on Learn@UW under Content except chapters from one book in which assigned readings exceed copyright allowance. Students are required to bring the hardcopies or electronic copies of the readings to class.

Susan Sontag. Regarding the Pain of Others. (on reserve)


Recommended Book for Purchase

Gillian Rose, Visual Methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials 2nd edition (on reserve) * will be referenced during lectures on methodology. Students are not required to read the chapters from this book but encouraged to use it to supplement lecture notes.

Course Requirements

- Attendance and participation 10%
- Discussion Facilitation (10% x 2) 20%
- NGO Communication Analysis 10%
- Textual Analysis (Visual or discursive analysis) 10%
- Final Analytical Essay (Visual, discursive, political, theoretical analysis combined) 40%
- Peer commentary (2-3 pages) 10%

Disability Access Statement

Ensuring access for all students is taken very seriously in this course. It is the instructor’s intention to support the full participation of all students in the learning process. The course involves visual and
auditory aspects in addition to theoretical and narrative aspects and the instruction will incorporate access for individuals with different levels of visual, aural, and theoretical understandings. Evaluations will be conducted with appropriate accommodations as needed. Students in the course are also responsible for collaborating to make accessible and safe environments for all. In order to do so, I encourage students not to wear strong perfume or chemical products that might affect others with chemical sensitivity. Please be considerate in bringing food and beverage into the classroom so that it does not affect anyone’s ability to fully engage. In spite of these efforts, situations may occur in which the learning style of individual students is not fully met by the instructional climate. I encourage students who require specific or additional support to understand the course contents or fulfill the course requirement to inform me as soon as possible.

1/24  Vulnerability and Visual Culture


Lecture: *Visual Methodologies* Ch. 1, 3, 5

1. 1/31 Vulnerability as the Human Condition or Precarious Identities


Lecture: *Visual Methodologies* Ch 6, 7, 8

2. 2/7 Cultural Hierarchy and the Body


Lecture: *Visual Methodologies* Ch. 10

3. 2/14 Humanitarian Paradox


4. 2/21 The Politics of Saving and Suffering


Collective Analysis: *Princess Mononoke* (clips) *The Kids Are Alright*


5. 2/28 Visibility and Citizenship


6. 3/7 Metaphor and Human Rights Imagery


7. 3/14 The Desire of Invulnerability and Eugenics


Triumph of the Will. Dir. Leni Riefenstahl. 1977[1934] (52min)

Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity. Dir. Sut Jhally, 2002[1999](abridged, 56min)

8. 3/21 SPRING RECESS
9. 3/28 Representing Sex Work

Watch before the class: *Born into Brothels: Calcutta’s Red Light Kids*. Dir. Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman. ThinkFilm, Inc., 2004


Film screening in class: *Tales of the Night Fairies*. Dir. Shohini Ghosh. Produced with support from the Center for Feminist Legal Research (Delhi) and MAMACASH (Amsterdam), 2002.


10. 4/4 Anti-Trafficking Campaigns and the Mobilization of Terror


11. 4/11 Pain, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the Pathology of Victimhood

Susan Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others*.


12. 4/18 Art, Aesthetics, and the Geographies of Vulnerability


*Nina Berman, *Purple Hearts: Back from Iraq*

http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0412/purplehearts_intro.html
*Banksy http://www.banksy.co.uk/

*Ana Mendieta. *Earth Body*

### 13. 4/25 Advocacy Beyond Compassion Fatigue


### 14. 5/2 Peer Commentary and Strategies for Change