The Visual Culture of Science: Imaging the Body in-between Art and Medicine

FS3520/4520
30 Credits
Fall 2016

University of Aberdeen
School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture

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Course Content
This course offers as an introduction to what is known as visual culture of science and its relationship with the body in the Western world. It provides students with a critical understanding of issues related to the human body and its status in modern and contemporary society, with particular regard to the representation, production and display of still and moving images/visualizations of the body in between art and medicine.

Contemporary art practices and new media will be studied with consideration of their continuities and discontinuities with the visual cultures of the body in the pre-modern and modern period. Students will be invited to produce a visual artefact (a photograph, a drawing, a video, a web page, etc.) in order to critically engage with a key concept discussed in the course and to critically reflect on the medium constraints and opportunities.

Methodologically, each week we will be guided by a different concept (e.g. anatomy, embodiment, neuroculture, posthumanism, etc.), a new constellation of questions and a new technique/technology for imaging the body (anatomical dissection, X-ray, brain imaging, biomedical interfaces), always accompanied by a close analysis of a visual object, moving image or artefact.

Meeting Times and Places
Lecture: Tuesday 14:00-15:00, Taylor A31
Seminar: Friday 13:00-15:00, Auris Lecture Theatre

Course Aims
This course aims to provide students with a critical understanding of issues related to the human body and its status in modern and contemporary society, with particular regard to the representation, production and display of images and visualizations of the body in between art and medicine. The cultural and societal implications of the techno-human interface will be explored through the lens of medical technologies, artworks and critical writings. Contemporary art practices and new media will be studied with consideration of their continuities and discontinuities with the visual cultures of the body in the pre-modern and modern period.

Students are encouraged to integrate their readings with materials coming from museum exhibitions, blogs (i.e. Wellcome Trust, Copenhagen Medical Museion, etc.) that will be introduced during the course.
Outcomes
1. Demonstrate an understanding of how the relationship between visual culture, medicine and art has shifted throughout history;
2. Expand the conceptual toolkit of visual culture through notions coming from science and technology studies (STS);
3. Explain how images construct concepts of evidence, knowledge and proof in medicine and science;
4. Explain how images construct concepts of evidence, knowledge and proof in medicine and science;
5. Demonstrate enhanced skills in written, oral and visual communications.

Course Requirements and Assessment
Assignment One: Essay 1,500-2,000 words 30%
Assignment Two: 3,000-4,000 words 50%
Student Presentation: 10%
Seminar Assessment Mark (SAM): 10%

Assignment One / 30%
The assignment is due on Friday 21st October at 5:00PM. You must submit one copy to Turnitin (via Myaberdeen).

Your essay should be word-processed using twelve-point Times or Times New Roman, double-spaced with one-inch margins. Your pages should be numbered. At the top of the first page, please include your name, the date, and the title of your essay. Please consult the conventions of reference detailed in the Good Writing Guide, as well as the contents of the Level 1 and 2 Student Handbook and the School Guidance on Avoiding Plagiarism.

Complete details of the first assignment will be distributed during WEEK FOUR.

Assignment Two / 50%
The assignment is due on Friday 16th December at 5:00 PM. You must submit one copy to Turnitin (via Myaberdeen).

The second assignment consists of a personal project on a topic chosen by the student. Each student must discuss the proposed topic with the lecturer. Details for this second assignment will be discussed during the first week of the course.

Student Presentation 10%

- Student Presentation: Students are required to produce a visual artifact (a photograph, a drawing, a diagram, a short video, a web page, a poster, etc.) in order to critically engage with a key concept discussed in the course and to critically reflect on the chosen medium constraints and opportunities. Students will have the opportunity to present their work in class. Each presentation should last 7 min maximum. Details for this assignment will be given in lecture.
General Outline Course Content
Themes explored in lectures are to include:

1. Intro to the course: Visual Culture of Science and Medicine
2. Bodily Anatomies and Dissections
3. X-Ray and the Invisible Body
4. Seeing the Insane I
5. READING WEEK
6. Seeing the Insane II
7. Brain and Neurocultures I
8. Brain and Neurocultures II
9. The Post-human Body and Bio Art
10. The Post-feminist Body: Desire, Virality and Reproduction
11. Production, Circulation and Impact of Art-Science Projects

Week One (Casini) Intro to the Course: Visual Culture of Science and Medicine
Presentation of the course contents and structure.
Definition of the field of study (visual culture of science and medicine) and methodology, and how this relates to cognate disciplines such as science and technology studies (STS).
Introducing the two cultures debate by Snow and which questions it raised for the contemporary relationship between art and science.

Essential Reading:

Screening
*The Refusal of Time* (Kentridge and Galison, video installation 2012) (selected clips)
*The Geography of the Body* (Willard Maas, USA 1943)
*Corps étranger* (Mona Hatoum, France/Palestine 1994) (selected clip and installation pictures)

Further Reading:

Week Two (Casini) Bodily Anatomies and Dissections
This week we examine how anatomical and dissection practices investigated and visually conveyed the human body in early modernity. What kind of reading and skills were required to make sense of the different bodily features? What remained hidden from view? Particular attention will be devoted to the close reading of the frontispiece image of Vesalius’ *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. We will also assess how those practices contributed to the contemporary never-ending quest to explore the notion of “selfhood” through art and science.

**Reading:**

**Seeing/Screening**
Images from Vesalius’ Atlas *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, Leonardo Da Vinci, Mantegna, Rembrandt
Images of works of art from the exhibition *Spectacular Bodies* (Hayward Gallery, 2000)
Images of works from Gunther von Hagens’s exhibition *Body Worlds. The Original Exhibition of Real Human Bodies* (travelling exhibition 1995)
*Anthem* (Bill Viola, USA 1983)

**Further Reading:**

**Week Three (Casini) X-Ray and the Invisible Body**
The new visual science culture introduced by the discovery of X rays. What kind of visual evidence do X-rays support? X-ray images opened up a new era to peer inside the human body, showing how radiography was connected to cinema both as entertainment and as a technological device. We shall also examine the creative possibilities of this new form of mechanical vision opened up for the arts.

**Readings:**
Akira Mizuta Lippit “Phenomenologies of the Surface: Radiation-Body-Image” in Gaines and Renov (eds.) *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minnesota Uni Press, 2009), pp. 65-84

**Seeing/Screening:**
*The X-Rays* (George Albert Smith, USA 1897)
An excerpt from *The Blood of the Poet* (Jean Cocteau, France 1930)
*Lichtspiel, Schwarz-Weiß-Grau* (*Lightplay: Black, White, Grey*) (Moholy-Nagy, Germany and former Soviet Union 1930)
A selection of images from Francis Bacon’s paintings
*The Girl with X-Ray Eyes* (Warnell, UK 2008)
Further Reading:

Week Four (Casini) Seeing the Insane I:
The photographic image has contributed to a (re)-conceptualization of the human body and its gestures in medicine and in the arts. However, although the authority of the photographic image rests on the indexical relationship with the object photographed, it is never simply “evidence” of a condition of “normality” or “insanity/illness”. We will focus, in particular, on bodily gestures in Depardon’s film *San Clemente*, a documentary shot in an asylum and in some other moving image works.

Readings:
Benjamin Noys, 'Gestural Cinema?: Giorgio Agamben on Film', *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 8 no. 22, 2004

Seeing/Screening:
*San Clemente* (Raymond Depardon, France/Italy 1982)
Excerpts from *La Neuropatologia* (1908) by Camillo Negro
Video excerpts and images from *The Passions* (Bill Viola, USA 2002)

Further Reading:

Week Five – READING WEEK

Week Six (Casini) - Seeing the Insane II
Georges Didi-Huberman’s cultural studies on the reciprocal relationship between the disciplines of psychiatry and photography in the late nineteenth century will provide us with the framework to assess the photographic archive of the Salpetriere hospital, the notorious Parisian asylum for insane and incurable women. Charcot’s studies on female patients showed the crucial role played by photography in the invention of the category of hysteria.

Reading:
**Seeing/Showing**
Charcot's photographs

**Week Seven (Casini) Brain and Neurocultures I**
This week we shall investigate the construction of identity put forth by brain imaging techniques and related pictures, with a particular emphasis on Magnetic Resonance Imaging. The theoretical framework will be mainly provided by the scholarship of Vidal, the first to call attention to the rise of the "cerebral subject," a conception of the self that proposes that identity and the brain are the same thing. His scholarship functions as a cure for the now widespread "neuro-frenzy" that started off during the so-called "Decade of the Brain". Thanks to fiction films where the cerebral subject appears, we shall explore the place of neurosciences and their stature in contemporary society.

**Reading**
Fernando Vidal, ‘Brainhood, Anthropological Figure of Modernity’, in *History of the Human Sciences* (22/1, 2009), pp. 5-36

**Seeing/Showing**
*Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, UK/USA 2015)
*The Man Who Changed His Mind* (Robert Stevenson, USA 1936)

**Further Reading:**

**Week Eight (Casini) Brain and Neurocultures II**
This week we shall examine in more depth the topic of last week. Lens or camera-based ethnographic fieldwork in scientific laboratories where brain imaging techniques are used can help to understand how brain images are created, interpreted and spread outside the circuit of experts. We shall re-assess the notion of selfhood through the works of artists in different media, asking whether those art practices challenge or not the neurocultural milieu of our age.

**Reading:**

**Seeing/Screening:**
Images from selected artists working with brain imaging techniques (Anker, Palmer, Dowson, de Menezes, Abramovich, Cooper, Caccavale, Didou, etc.)

*Weighing ... and Wanting* (William Kentridge, UK 1997)

**Further Reading:**

**Week Nine (Casini) The Post-human Body and Bio-Art**
The legacy of the 1970s performance art has been continued in bio-art and cyborg-art experiments in the 1990s. From prosthetics to implants, technologies are increasingly getting closer to or even under our skin. We shall explore the interplay and intimacy between bodies and technologies have been delineated through the cyborg (Haraway 1991) and the posthuman (Hayles 1999).

**Reading**

**Seeing/Screening**
*The CREMASTER Cycle* (Barney, USA 1994–2002) (extras)
MEART – The Semi-Living Artist (Symbiotica Laboratory, Australia)
Images by Paul Vanouse, Stelarc, Kac, Orlan and other bioartists

**Further Reading**

**Week Ten (Casini) The Post-feminist Body: Desire, Virality and Reproduction**
How bodies are transformed (or not) by technologies, how technologies actually become embodied (or not), and how the intimacy between gendered bodies and technologies is (un)done, are issues that will be tackled during this week. Particular attention will be given to the intertwining among technology, sexuality, virality and reproduction in examining the film *Teknolust*, a modern post-feminist retelling of Frankenstein.

**Reading**
Katherine Hayles, ‘Toward Embodied Virtuality’, in How We Became Posthuman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chapter 1
Jussi Parikka, Insects, Sex, and Biodigitality in Lynn Hershman Leeson’s Teknolust, Postmodern Culture, (2007, 17/2), available online

**Seeing/Screening**
*Teknolust* (Lynn Hershman Leeson, UK 2002)
**Week Eleven (Casini) Production, Circulation and Impact of Art-Science Projects**

Where are the places where art and science collide?
The last week of the course will be devoted to the examination of the concrete sites for the production and circulation of art-science projects, ranging from galleries to laboratories. Attention will be devoted to the question of what kind of impact (cultural, societal, even economical) the resulting art-science works produce.

**Seeing/Screening**
Images and video works from The Science Gallery (Dublin), Le Laboratoire (Paris), Ars Electronica (Linz), Symbiotica (Australia), etc.

**Reading**

**Further Reading**

**Late Essays, Extensions, and Medical Certification**
Three marks will be deducted for a late essay submission (up to a week late) without supportive medical evidence. Essays submitted after this date will receive a NIL mark.

Extensions can be granted for up to one week on medical grounds or other good reasons. Further extensions beyond one week can be granted only by the Head of School. For further information refer to the late submission guidelines contained within the *Guide to Honours and Level 4 English Studies* section on *Written Work and Assessment*.

Students who have been granted an extension on the grounds of disability must submit within one week of the normal submission deadline. Further extensions beyond one week can be granted only by the Head of School.

The university regulations state that students who believe that illness and/or other personal circumstances may have affected their performance in an element of assessment must submit written details to the Head of School no later than one week after the due date of the assessment. Self-certification is not valid.

**Attendance**
Attendance at all seminars is compulsory. Attendance registers will be taken at all class meetings and students’ attendance records will be reflected in their Seminar Assessment Marks.
Poor attendance is regarded very seriously, and will be penalised heavily through the Seminar Assessment Mark (see paragraph on SAM below). The penalties are likely to affect the overall degree classification of Honours students.

In addition, the University operates a system for monitoring students’ progress. In accordance with this, students who miss more than three classes without good cause in a 11-week course, will be deemed to have withdrawn from the course and will be reported to Senate. They will then be required to contact their Adviser of Studies to discuss their position.

**Seminar Assessment Mark**

1. **Regularity of Attendance:** Course Regulations state that attendance at each meeting of every course is compulsory. Students may miss no more than one class if they are to be awarded a first-class SAM, miss two classes and the maximum SAM will be 17 (B1), miss three classes and the maximum SAM will be 14 (C1), miss four classes and the maximum SAM will be 11 (D1), miss five classes and the maximum SAM will be 8 (E1). Further absences will result in a SAM of zero. In each of these cases allowance will be made for absence covered by a doctor’s medical certificate. Students who are persistently late for the class may, after warning, be considered as though they were absent.

2. **Frequency of participation:** It is expected that all students will participate voluntarily in open forum and in group work as appropriate. Participation includes asking questions of the course leader or of other students, exploring or contesting views expressed by others, summarising discussion, etc.

3. **Quality of participation:** The quality of participation will be measured by the nature of the arguments or perceptions or evidence offered to the seminar; relevant knowledge; evidence of the care with which the text or film has been read, or data interpreted; evidence of having prepared the assignments; willingness to initiate discussion; intellectual interaction with other members of the seminar.

**Other University Policies**

Students are asked to make themselves familiar with the information on key institutional policies which been made available within MyAberdeen. These policies are relevant to all students and will be useful to you throughout your studies. They contain important information and address issues such as what to do if you are absent, how to raise an appeal or a complaint, and how seriously the University takes your feedback.

These institutional policies should be read in conjunction with this programme and/or course handbook, in which School and College specific policies are detailed. Further information can be found on the Infohub webpage or by visiting the Infohub.