In this course, we will examine prevalent and emerging themes, methods, and issues in critical theories of visual culture. Emphasizing the importance of practice, the course aims to acquaint students with different frameworks and strategies for analyzing various modes of media representation such as film, visual art, photography, and video gaming.

The course will start with a few seminal critical texts on the voyeuristic gaze, which will provide frames of reference for examining other ideas about the parameters and possibilities of cultural representation, historical memory, and political agency. Discussions will explore the resonances of predominant concepts about visual perception and surveillance in the digital modalities and global circulations of computer generated images and social media networks. Shifting the focus beyond North America, Australia, and Western Europe, the intent is to bring texts produced in these milieus into dialogue with critical theories about and media objects within Asia.

Each week, the lecturer will lead the discussion of the required text, which introduces a key theme in critical theories of visual culture. Working in groups, students will be assigned to present on the recommended text, which shares an affinity with it as an elaboration, exemplification, or complication of its arguments or categories. In an individual critical reflection to be submitted midway through the semester, students will use one of the theories discussed in class to analyze a media object of their choice. For their final project, students will work in groups to produce a proposal for a social media campaign or a visual art exhibition, which applies three or more theories in its conceptualization.
ASSESSMENT

Class attendance/participation – 15%
Students are expected to attend all the lectures and discussions. To be able to participate actively, students who attend class are expected to have thoroughly read the required text. In every session, different students will be asked to share their thoughts or raise questions during the discussion.

Individual critical reflection (400-600 words) – 10%
Working alone or in pairs, students will use one of the visual culture theories discussed in class, except for the theory they have been assigned to present on, to analyze a media object.
This requirement will be marked based on the depth and clarity of the understanding it demonstrates in its explanation of its theories and their application. The suitability of the chosen theory for its object of study will factor into the grade.

Group presentation/discussion of reading (30 mins.) – 30%
In every session, a group of students will be assigned to lead the discussion of the recommended text. For the discussion, the group should prepare a summary of the essay’s key concepts. It should explore their resonances with those of the required text. The group should explain how their theoretical ideas could be applied to examples of audiovisual representations from Asian contexts. Lastly, it should provide salient questions for further discussion.
This requirement will be marked based on the depth and clarity of understanding of the texts that the members of the group display during the discussion. The organization and coherence of the presentation will be taken as evidence of the group’s effort and preparedness. Part of the grade will also come from the quality of the discussion questions and examples provided. By the morning of the presentation, the group slideshow and individual notes should have been uploaded for grading.

Group project/paper (4000-5000 words) – 40%
Group presentation of final project (15 mins.) – 5%
As the final requirement for the course, students will work in groups to produce a detailed written proposal for a social media campaign or a visual art exhibition. The proposal should apply a selection of theories from at least three different class sessions in its conceptualization of the project. Depending on the genre chosen, it should describe: 1) how the project would be implemented, 2) what situation it is responding to, and 3) how it is unique in relation to similar projects. The proposal should include several sample images of the envisioned output.
This requirement will be graded based on the depth and clarity of the understanding it demonstrates in its explanation of its theories and their application. Credit will be given to the uniqueness of the project. Lastly, the presentation of the project will be marked for its organization and coherence.
By week 8, each group should submit a summary of 500-700 words, which concisely describes its plans for the project and the theories to be applied.
SCHEDULE

Week 1: Seeing Critically (Sep 5 & 6)

Week 2: Voyeurism (Sep 12 & 13)
Film viewing: Perfect Blue, Satoshi Kon (1997)

Week 3: From Surveillance to Citizenship (Sep 19 & 20)

Week 4: Autoethnography & Orientalism (Sep 26 & 27)

Week 5: Studium, Punctum, and Postmemory (Oct 3 & 4)

Week 6: Field trip (Oct 10 & 11)

Week 7: Ethics and Aesthetics of Precarity (Oct 17 & 18)
Submission of individual critical reflection

Week 8: From Optic to Haptic (Oct 24 & 25)


Submission of summary of final project proposal

Week 9: Virtual Realities & Animated Mutations (Oct 31 & Nov 1)


Week 10: Consultations on final group project (Nov 7 & 8)

Week 11: Media Mix & Participatory Culture (Nov 14 & 15)


Week 12: Database Logic & Informational Control (Nov 21 & 22)


Week 13: Presentation of final project (Nov 28 & 29)

Submission of final project and paper (early Dec)
ACADEMIC ETHICS

As a student of CUHK, you are expected to abide by the university’s principles and regulations on academic dishonesty. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the information on the following webpage: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

All written requirements must be accompanied by a VeriGuide receipt. Papers submitted without a VeriGuide receipt will not be accepted and marked.

Violations such as plagiarized work or multiple submissions will not be tolerated in any form, and will be subject to disciplinary action. Remember that all words, phrases, or ideas taken from sources other than your own submitted assignment must be properly cited.