The Nature of Representation

Representation: an image, likeness, or reproduction in some manner of a thing… the action of presenting to the mind or imagination; an image thus presented; a clearly conceived idea or concept...

John Ruskin, the 19th century writer, wrote that it is a “curious and paradoxical relationship” that we shape the way we represent things by our understanding, while shaping our understanding through the way we represent things.

3 credits

Th 6:15 to 9:15 p.m., room B9 and 258
(lab time in B9 tbd and by appointment)

Instructor James Boyd Brent, Associate Professor, 246e McNeal Hall, 612 624 1731 jboydbre@umn.edu

Office hour Th 2:00 to 3:00 p.m., and by appointment

Course description This course will look at visual representation—the way images are made, what their intention is, how they are used, and how they are received. The main purpose of this is to help each of you zero in on your own graduate thesis concepts and creative practice related to your thesis, by encouraging you to focus on your own design sensibilities in relation to imagery, and to stimulate critical thought and engagement with imagery. During this course I will be expecting you to bring to the class your own interests and to develop your own ideas, hopefully stimulated by the subject of the course and by your classmates.

We are immersed in images and, as John Berger points out, “every image embodies a way of seeing.” We will look, therefore, at the relationship between representation and meaning, and also how an enriched understanding of visual representation relates to the practice of visual communication.

Learning Outcomes You will have developed concrete ideas related to your visual and conceptual exploration of design

Coursework will hinge around three related projects during the semester, in which the following ideas will be explored through readings, writing assignments, and creative production:

· theories of representation
· the practice of the dynamics of visual representation
· cultural forms of representation
· the role of the image maker and the viewer in the creation of meaning
· integrating research and design process around the subject of visual representation.

Class format Class periods will be made up of lecture/demonstrations, group reviews of work, discussions of readings, in-class reading and writing, generation of project ideas, critiques of in-process projects, as well as in-class studio work.
The expectation is that everyone will generate particular directions related to their area of interest, thesis interests, etc..

Assignments will include readings, response papers, analyses of examples of visual representation (your own work and work of others), and the creation of images in a variety of mediums and formats.

There are three sections:
2. Representation of time and space: the language of representation
3. Representation in the public domain: place, culture and meaning

For the first two sections, participants will be asked to:
1. produce a written and a visual project (each person can decide the proportion of written to visual, in the project)
2. do a class presentation of the project

For all three sections participants will be asked to do short response papers to readings, lectures, and visits: these responses will be on the class blog: Representation.

There will be one term project (part written, part visual). Ideas will be discussed and proposals made at the end of the second section. This major project will be handed in the last week of the semester, and each participant will do a presentation at this time.

Percentages of final grade:
- first project 25%
- second project 25%
- third project 50%

Class Schedule:
1/24 Introduction
1/31 First section: The nature of representation
2/7
2/14 first project presentations/project due
2/21 Second section: Time and space
2/28
3/7 second project presentations/project due
3/14 Third section: Representation in the public domain/representation of place
3/21 spring break
3/28 Third section continued
4/4
4/11
4/18
4/25
5/2
5/9 Third project presentations/project due

Readings:
“Language of Vision” p 62 to 65 Design Writing Research Ellen Lupton Abbott Miller
“The Design History of Deconstruction” p 3 to 23 Design Writing Research Ellen Lupton Abbott Miller
“White on Black on Gray” p 103 to 120 Design Writing Research Ellen Lupton Abbott Miller
“Icon or Idol? The Iconoclast Controversy” p147 to 184 Early Christian and Byzantine Art John Lowden
“The Decay of Lying: An Observation” Oscar Wilde
“Photography, Vision, and Representation” Joel Snyder, Neil Walsh Allen
“Symbolism” Monroe Beardsley
“Looking at Pictures and Looking at Things” Kendall Walton
“Reality Remade—A Denotation Theory of Representation”
“The Artworld” Arthur Danto
“Art and Thought” Rudolf Arnheim —psychology
“Mythologies” Roland Barthes
“On Looking” John Berger

Other readings will be assigned throughout the course.

Expectations
You are expected to attend all class sessions, be punctual and not leave class early, present your work at critiques, participate in critiques of your own and others' work, and show respect for your colleagues at all times, and to be pro-active in your learning. You are expected to contribute to the class—your final grade will reflect your contribution to the class as well as the quality of your work.

Grading policy
You will be graded throughout the semester in four projects, including a final project handed in at the end of the semester.

Visual work is graded according to the following criteria:
- **technique** — neatness, care in the making and execution of work, and excellence in its final presentation, specifications of the assignment.
- **concept** — ideas behind the work, creativity, creative problem solving.
- **objectives** — how successfully the criteria of the project have been fulfilled.
- **design** — layout, use of design principles, composition.

Each criterion accounts for roughly a quarter of the grade for each project.

Written work:
- **clarity** — transparency of expression, style, expressiveness
- **ideas** — concepts and ideas thought out, understood, reinterpreted, original thought

Each criterion accounts for a half of the grade for each project. The overall grade for the semester is determined by adding up the points accrued in each project. 10% of the final grade will be for class participation, which, as mentioned above, will be determined by how much you contribute to the class.

University grading standards
A = outstanding, B = very good, C= good/average - meets course requirements,
D= meets course requirements, but work below average, F= fails to meet course requirements

Attendance
Attendance, punctuality and not leaving before the end of class are all required, and have a bearing on the final grade. This is particularly important since we meet only once a week in class. I will need to schedule individual meetings with you all throughout the semester.