

Critical Cultures

Elective

Programme

Spring Trimester

24
NCAD

The deadline to sign up for an elective is 4pm Wednesday 17th January 2024.

Confirmation of your elective by Monday 22nd January 2024.

Classes start on Wednesday 24th January 2024.

An elective is an on-site 90-120 minute class offered by the Critical Cultures programme by the School of Visual Culture.

You will be sent a link to sign up for your Critical Cultures Elective.

If you have not received the link, please email visualculture@staff.ncad.ie

The invite to sign up is sent to your NCAD email address.

Students sign up for one elective **unless** they are Joint Course year 2 or year 2 BA Visual Culture. (These students sign up for two).

Final year Joint Course and Final Year BA Visual Culture students sign up for one elective.

Some electives will be over-subscribed. We cannot guarantee your first or second choice of elective but we will do our best.

Please do not sign up for an elective you have already studied before.

Details of times and summaries appear on the following pages.

The rooms will be announced later.

Times

Algorithms as Culture
Rachel O'Dwyer
9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Genderama
Denis Kehoe
9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Visual Fictions
Jennie Taylor
9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

**Critical Ecologies and
Contemporary Art Practice**
Seoidín O'Sullivan
9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Design (as) Activism
Kate Buckley
9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Profane Spaces
Vaari Claffey
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Fashion and the Archive
Hilary O Kelly
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Navigating the Art System
Emma Mahony
11.30 -13.30 Wednesdays

Queering The Post-Natural
Jye Benjamin O'Sullivan
11.30 -13.30 Wednesdays

Critical Race Theory
John Wilkins
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

**Making Judgements: Politics,
Aesthetics, Pragmatics**
Francis Halsall
13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

Words, Images and Messages
Wendy Williams
13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

Documentary Effects
David Crowley
13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

Sensitive Objects
Donna Rose
13.30 -15.30 Wednesdays

**Who Cares? On the politics of
how we live**
Anne Kelly and SPACEX
15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

Radical Exhibitions
Sarah Pierce
15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

Pop Art and Its Afterlives
Larissa Vilhena
15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

Colour and Emotion
Silvia Loeffler
15.30-17.30 Wednesdays

Algorithms as Culture

Rachel O'Dwyer

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Algorithms are central to contemporary culture in ways that are sometimes obvious and sometimes almost invisible. Today, coded interfaces, including software, machine learning and big data increasingly structure and shape political, economic and cultural life. In this class we will explore the role of algorithms in everyday life, examine the impact of algorithms on visual and auditory culture, examine issues of bias and ethics in AI and machine learning systems and think about coding as aesthetic and political expression. In class we will be looking at the work of the AI Now Institute and the Algorithmic Justice League who are working to raise awareness of the impact of AI; working together to examine the algorithms governing machine learning models, machine vision, music streaming and content moderation on social media; and exploring the work of artist researchers who are engaged with algorithms, such as Vladan Joler who maps complex sociotechnical systems, or Winnie Soon, who writes queer and feminist code.



Crosslucid

Genderama

Denis Kehoe

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

This elective will explore incidences of gender divergence and diversity from Shakespearean times to the present day. Figures such as Claude Cahun, Grayson Perry, James Miranda Barry and Albert D.J. Cashier will be studied, focusing on issues of gender identity and expression and how these are formulated in the individuals' lives and work. The elective will trace how such forms of gender expression and identity can be read as potentially liberating, subversive, enriching, dangerous and creative. It will also explore the question of the categorisation of gender and its usefulness, or not. The articulation and representation of gender diversity across cultures and languages, from the South American film *Kiss of the Spider Woman* to the sworn virgins of the Balkans, will be discussed. Examples from popular culture such as the television series *Pose* and the Amazon series *Transparent* will also be investigated. Each week a key theoretical text from writers such as Jack/Judith Halberstam, Judith Butler, Susan Stryker and Magnus Hirschfeld will be applied to the chosen figure/film/series under discussion.



Untitled (I am in training, don't kiss...), Claude Cahun, 1929

Visual Fictions Jennie Taylor 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

Fiction can ventilate, record and generate invisible or unchecked elements of art, design, ideas and discourses. This elective examines the agency of fiction within and around fine art and design practice.

We will cover strategies including feminist narrative form, conceptual metaphor and fiction as imaginative material. Through discussion, reading and occasional writing exercises we will look at work by artists and writers including Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Travis Jeppesen and Maria Fusco. To underpin the intersection of art and writing, we will also spend time with literary works by Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Lydia Davis and Ursula K. Le Guin. We will consider the use of speculative thinking within fine art and design practices supported in a session on Design Fictions.

Set reading will be supplied each week.



'A Culmination', Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, 2016

Critical Ecologies and Contemporary Art Practice Seoidín O'Sullivan 9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

In what ways are contemporary artists responding to our many earth crises?

We will explore a range of current visual, design and spatial practices that critically and creatively respond to earth crises and system change. You will learn the histories and emergence of these practices and connect to key theories. It's a field that is gaining greater visibility and attention as the world turns its head towards recognising that we need to urgently rethink our collective multi-species futures.

Together we will critically examine ideas of 'Nature' and 'Ecology' and problematise the inherited histories of modern environmentalism. We will focus on artists and designers who 'stay with the trouble' and focus on creatives that are attempting to think otherwise in order to reveal and problematise normative western hegemonies and build just ecological futures. How do artists navigate and work across this complex multidisciplinary field? What and whose temporalities and timescales are we speaking to? In exploring the complex intersections between creative practice, ecological crisis and spatial justice, students will discover an inspiring array of creative practices and become equipped with current theory and debate in the field.



Otobong Nkanga, *Revelations*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist

Design (as) Activism

Kate Buckley

9.30-11.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores the capacity of design to entice progress and change within society. We will investigate how designers have become agents of change and how design practice has evolved as a result.

Through image and video-based lectures the purpose, intention and outcome of socially engaged and radical practices will be explored. Projects that will be discussed may be situated outside of commercially driven practice so we will question how designers have and can integrate personal beliefs with their professional practice.

Students will be expected to read assigned texts and participate in class discussions on a weekly basis.



Santiago Cirugeda: Taking back the street / Recuperar la calle

Profane Spaces

Vaari Claffey

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

This elective explores how artists, designers and architects 'make profane' those spaces, artefacts and materials that may hold some 'sacred' value in relation to historically dominant ideologies. It will also consider the reverse process, when objects or practices once regarded as profane are made 'sacred'.

The art and design worlds have long been invested in ascribing value and preciousness to steady objects: what is the potential of making materials and objects behave unexpectedly, changing their previous use and context?

We will look at how buildings and sites are adapted - disrupting, overwriting and absorbing their previous ritualised use to become, for instance, night clubs, galleries or farms. Museums and galleries - including Palazzo Fortuny Arsenale, Venice, Tate Modern, London and the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin - will feature too, to consider how systems of display and organised publicness borrow from the idea of the temple or palace. We consider art and design-strategies of adaptation including collage and assemblage, 'post-production' as described by Nicolas Bourriaud and ruination. Key concepts will include gentrification as well as queering and reclaiming (particularly around class and race).

Key artists and practices in this elective include Zineb Sedira, Hito Steyerl, Roman Signer, P. Staff, Marcel Broodthaers and the Ghetto Biennale.

Installation view of Ghetto Biennale by Atis Rezistans at documenta 15.



Fashion and the Archive

Hilary O Kelly
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

Through exploring collections of dress, photographs, film and published material in this elective, we will think about fashion using the object as a starting point. To animate or activate, the archived garment we will complement object-analysis with other research methods using visual, literary, film and historical sources. The elective aims to develop the critical and analytical skills for fashion studies. The aim is to study historical garments as a source for contemporary design and fashion thinking. Today, students commonly claim the two-dimensional images on Instagram and social media as sources for fashion research, this object-based study will highlight the cultural riches of the real object. Evidence embedded in garments will be used to develop design ideas, and to support or contest received histories and theories of fashion and dress.



Ricerca Mazzini Archive, a collaboration partner of Bologna University, Italy <http://www.archividiricercamazzeni.it>

Navigating the Art System

Emma Mahony
11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

When you graduate from NCAD you will need the knowledge, tools and skills to navigate the art system, which includes a thorough understanding of how it operates, and the values and inequalities that shape it. This elective offers a critical overview of the art system and the various public and private institutions that comprise it, including the art museum, the commercial gallery, the global biennial, the art fair, and the auction house, as well as the forces that attempt to resist its instrumentalising focus including the artist-run space and art activist collectives that forge relationships with social movements. *This class is suitable for anyone interested in cultural politics and the public sector.*

It begins by exploring the birth and evolution of the public art museum from the role it played as a mechanism for governing citizens and driving nationalist and capitalist narratives. It then considers evolutions in exhibition display from the birth of the White Cube in the 1930s, to more recent challenges to this rigid display format. Jumping forward to the 1990s it examines how the art system begins internalising the values and practices of neoliberalism and globalisation, resulting in the emergence of a proliferation of global biennales, art fairs, megamonster museums, corporate sponsorship and an all-consuming art market. In light of these developments, it then considers how artists, collectives and activists are fighting back and attempting to either “liberate” the neoliberal museum through a combination of strikes, boycotts and occupations, or to prefigure alternatives to it centered on the principles of commoning, radical care and interdependence.



Liberate Tate, Human Cost (2011). Tate Britain.



Yong Xiang Li *I'm Not in Love (How to Feed on Humans)*, 2020
single-channel video,

Queering The Post-Natural **Jye Benjamin O'Sullivan** **11.30-13.30 Wednesdays**

Queering The Post-Natural traces, the complex relationship between queer theory and discourses on the “Natural” and “Post-Natural” through a wide range of artistic, design-based, and theoretical practices. From European Shamanic practices as explored by Rick Dolphijn to the queer vampiric subject of artists such as Yong Xiang Li, this elective aims to firstly give participants a grounding in elective Theory. Secondly, it aims to explore the way that the category of “Natural” has been formed in relation to Euromodernity. Finally, we will bring these two discourses together in a discussion of the post-natural, grounding participants in the discourses that contextualise contemporary Queer Ecological artistic practices.

By the end of the elective, participants will be not only familiar with contemporary discourses on the intersection between queer theory and the post-natural, but will also be equipped to use this intersection as a lens to analyse varying different mediums, including video, text, painting, installation, textiles and performance.



Critical Race Theory: Race and Gender

John Wilkins

11.30-13.30 Wednesdays

The image below is of a medallion struck by Josiah Wedgwood to raise funds for the abolition of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Arguably, the binary of race, black and white, was constructed to rationalise chattel slavery. Moving on from 1787, and Wedgwood's problematic visual representation of Black male identity, Critical Race Theory (CRT) interrogates the Law to pinpoint how present day legislation in the United States and Europe promotes racial binaries that were engendered by the institution of chattel slavery. Moreover, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of "Intersectionality" opens the discussion of oppression, discrimination, cultural representation, and marginalisation to gender. This elective looks how the Law influences culture. Themes in class will include the analysis of media images and the design of cities, as well as the work of contemporary artists, designers and film-makers who have made critical interventions into the representation of race and gender.



And Justice for All, Stephen and Roger Gorman, (1989)

Making Judgements: Politics, Aesthetics, Pragmatics

Francis Halsall

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

As attendees at an art and design school you are all, presumably, developing practices that involve making critical and aesthetic judgements. You might also be making things or statements that others may judge. In this seminar we'll consider some of the things at stake in making such judgements. In doing so we'll begin to interrogate the complex relationships between judgements of:

Politics/ethics: what is the right thing to do?

Aesthetics: what is beautiful?

Pragmatics: what is practical or useful?

These are crucial considerations for practitioners, as you aim to put your ideas, objects and designs into the world.

Students are expected to have reviewed all material (texts, recordings) in advance and come prepared to engage in discussion.

Indicative Topics

- Bullshit & Banter: when concern for the truth is suspended
- Discernment, Copies and Fakes: from Readymades to Taylor's Versions
- Horror, jokes, erotics and bad taste: affective responses vs. reflective judgements
- Can bad people make good art/ design?

Words, Images and Messages

Wendy Williams

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

This elective looks at the ways in which words and images are produced, combined and used to inform, to persuade and to entertain. Signification, the making of signs is central to human communication, and semiology proposes the theoretical analysis of the relationship between image and meaning. This elective starts with a step-by-step introduction to semiological analysis (Saussure, Barthes) and develops this as a tool to understand uses of word and image within their times and cultural contexts. Topics include typographic legibility and the plasticity of letterforms; political cartoons and eighteenth century Japanese woodblock prints; early twentieth century developments in ideographic communication and IKEA assembly instructions; fantasy illustration and ideas of childhood; subliminal advertising, 1960s music posters and representations of COVID statistics.

Sensitive Objects

Donna Rose

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

Can working with the material remains of sensitive histories have the potential to be transformative, harmful, and/or healing?

What can we, as artists, designers, researchers, and cultural heritage workers, do to care for and respond to objects that are the material remnants of slavery, oppression, war, imprisonment, and other harms?

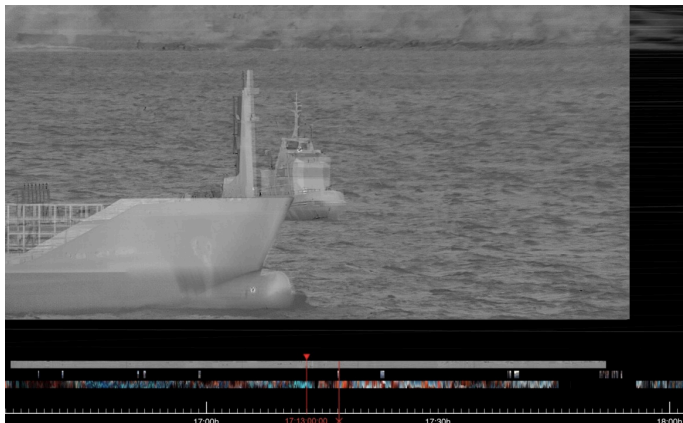
This elective examines both national and international case studies as a jumping-off point to explore topics such as the ethics of display, restitution and repatriation, representation, nationalism, and the appropriate recontextualising of historical figures.

Please note that classes will be discussion-based, and students can choose objects to consider together in an open forum.



The statue of Francis Scott Key hits the ground after a group of more than one hundred protestors used ropes to pull it down in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, Calif., on Friday, June 19, 2020. Jungho Kim / Special to The Chronicle

Bonnie Maclean, poster, The Yardbirds, The Doors, 1967



Still from Forensic Architecture's online documentary *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea, 2020*

Documentary Effects

David Crowley

13.30-15.30 Wednesdays

Documentary has a high profile. Cinemas today screen documentary films which only a few years ago would have struggled to find a slot on late-night television; art has colonised the medium with documentary film becoming the subject of engaged discussion in the art press, newspapers like the New York Times now have their own online documentary channels and Vice has gathered enormous on-line audiences for its self-consciously edgy films; and documentary is now a well-established in animation and graphic novels.

Perhaps this 'success' is also a problem: documentary film-making and photography once had a set of well-defined visual conventions and a moral agenda; now it is now a loose term describing diverse phenomena.

In this elective we will explore the many faces of documentary to explore questions of reality; of the ethics of making images of others and of viewing them; and the potential offered by ubiquitous digital technology including the rapid rise of AI (deep fakes, voice clones, etc)..

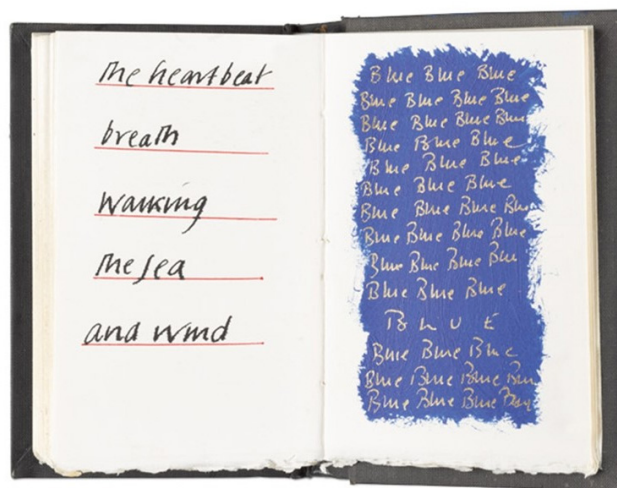
Colour and Emotion

Silvia Loeffler

15.30 - 17.30 Wednesdays

What feelings are being expressed when we feel blue, see red, or move between shadow and light? This seminar series explores a variety of conceptual, psychological and cultural meanings of colour in art, design and cinematography. We will elaborate on the language of colour in installations such as Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* and Bruce Nauman's *Green Light Corridor* and films like Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours* trilogy and Derek Jarman's meditation of *Blue*.

We will analyse historical and social shifts; cultural perceptions and expressions; sacredness and controversy; ideology and ambivalence; claustrophobia and openness; and how the use of colour is the embodiment of emotions that shape our memories and dreams.



"Epitaph" in Derek Jarman's *Sketchbooks*, published by Thames & Hudson (2013)



Andy Warhol, Liz, 1964, offset lithograph, 55.9 x 55.9 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Pop Art and Its Afterlives Larissa Vilhena 15.30 - 17.30 Wednesdays

In 1968, when Andy Warhol stated that “in the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes,” he was not only referring to his own popularity but also foreseeing the rise of reality TV and social media.

The success of the Warhol exhibition at the Hugh Lane in Dublin shows that the Pop artist’s work and the socio-political commentary in Pop Art are still as relevant today as they were in the 1960s.

This elective will explore critical themes surrounding Pop Art and its afterlives, including fame, consumerism and popular culture. It starts with the origins of Pop Art in the UK and moves on to its widespread dissemination in America and beyond, drawing from key artists, such as Evelyne Axell, Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton, David Hockney, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Marisol, Martha Rosler, Ed Ruscha, as well as Warhol himself.

Photograph: NCAD FIELD, SpaceX Training Event 3, 2023

Who Cares? On the politics of how we live Anne Kelly, Gareth Kennedy, Emma Mahony, Paul O’Neill and Seoidín O’Sullivan 15.30 - 17.30 Wednesdays

At a time when critical global issues are at the forefront of the collective imagination, the quest for the ‘livable life’ has seen a renewed interest in practices that challenge the status quo and promote systemic change in institutions and social relationships, social norms and values, and relationships of power. Through an examination of how society works under the dominant contemporary political economy of neoliberalism, this elective will consider some potential alternatives to ways of living and being together. It will interrogate the practices and principles of ‘commoning’, ‘radical care’, ‘eco-feminism’ and ‘critical ecologies’.

Who Cares? On the politics of how we live will be co-taught by NCAD staff members involved in the SpaceX-Rise (Spatial Practices in Art and Architecture for Empathetic Exchange) research project and will explore topics drawn from their research, including: Commoning the art institution; Feminist readings of the commons, Digital networks and collective dependency, Radical hospitality, Critical ecologies, and The Rights of Nature.





Brook Andrews, Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tic, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2017.

Radical Exhibitions

Sarah Pierce

15.30 - 17.30 Wednesdays

This elective looks at historical exhibitions to consider how gestures from activism to institutional critique, spectacle to propaganda exploit conventions of exhibition-making. Exhibitions do more than 'show' art; they engage a highly observational rhetorics to persuade audiences. We will look at exhibition design, display mechanisms, and scenic arrangements, with less focus on individual artworks and more on the overall 'staging' of exhibitions.

During the trimester will visit exhibitions in Dublin to meet curators and hear how 'radical' ideas translate (or not) into radical exhibitions. This class will help you think about exhibitions as politically charged social spaces beyond the artworks they involve.

