Department of Cultural & Religious Studies
CULS5412 Visual Research Method
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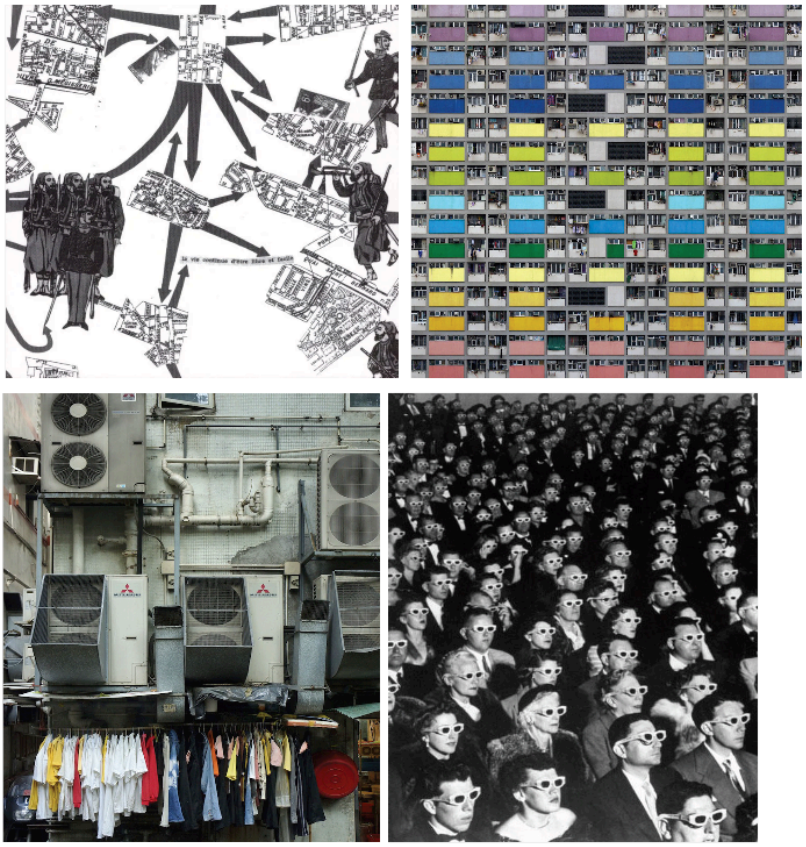
Chen Kou Bun Building - CKB UG04 (UG/F)
Sem 2: 8 Jan – 2 April 2026 Thursdays 6:45 - 9:30 pm

The practice(s) of everyday life



Images from top left clockwise: image cover on Situationist City by Simon Sadler, photograph by Michael Wolf in the Architecture of Density series, photograph by Michael Wolf in the Informal Solutions series, cover image from Society of the Spectacle by Guy Debord.

Introduction

This course introduces visual research methods through an everyday aspect that is paramount to civic and cultural life - *public space* – prompting students to explore and understand society and culture through the urban landscape of Hong Kong.

This course invites students to be curious and ***'look at from anew'*** the city they live in. Using foundational texts and philosophies from the Situationists City (Simon Sadler, 1999), Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle (1967), Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project (1982), to

stimulate an alternative way of *seeing* and *being* in public space. Combined with methodological precedents such as Rebecca Solnit's Wanderlust (2000), and her Atlases collaborative collection (2010-2016), Solomon, Wong and Frampton's Cities Without Ground: A Hong Kong Guidebook (2012), Jan Gehl's Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space (2011), this course introduces visual research methods by inspiring students to explore, appreciate and understand the city that they live in, the spaces they dwell in and move through, and the sensorial experiences of everyday life in ways that are foundational to cultural practices, public engagement, civic and global citizenship. Students will practice visual ethnography and use methods such as sketching, collaging, photography, videography and more to enhance their capacity in taking research projects in community and professional contexts.

Teaching and Learning in this Course:

Lectures and group discussions

Lectures related to the brief will be programmed at appropriate and strategic points in the throughout the course enhance student's learning. Lectures may take the form of briefings, panels or deliver information in a mode responsive to the needs and project with various themes on topics of reflexivity, positionality, ethnographic methodologies and related interdisciplinary topics concerning the urban environment and multimedia storytelling to enhance the students' project progress. These lectures are given to disseminate information, generate discussions and promote understanding and stimulate curiosity.

Tutorials: studio environment

Tutorial involves a range of teaching methods ranging from discussion of theory and demonstration of skills, serial instructions of a preferred work-flow to a potential series of interactions including one on one, one to groups. Borrowing from teaching and learning methodology in design practice and thinking, a studio environment will use small group, blended and reflective learning strategies following a flipped classroom model. The studio environment consists of independent/collaborative work and practice, discussion, questioning, briefings, peer and tutor critique, small group work, self-directed experimentation, reflection and review. Studio teaching is structured to develop disciplinary understanding and facilitate a range of philosophical, sociocultural, technical and interdisciplinary specialities, technologies and processes and situated sets of relationships pertinent to and embedded within the requirements of developing profession and industry ready understandings and capacities in students.

Course Learning Outcomes:

1. Develop analytical skills and conduct critical research.
2. Acquire skills and experience in visual and ethnographic research methodologies.
3. Develop skills in multiple media.
4. Cultivate cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, positionality and reflexivity.
5. Develop and deliver professional presentations that communicate interdisciplinary processes and outcomes.

Assessments:

1. Visual Essay + Online Archive
individual work
weighting: 30%
submission date: week 4

This task requires students to observe and analyse an aspect of Hong Kong's material culture in close detail. Each student will select one type of object from a provided list and document examples as they encounter them in public spaces. A range of documentation methods is required, including photographs, sketches, diagrams, writing, creating taxonomies and collecting found materials.

Students will first create a digital archive of all their documentation on a publicly accessible digital platform. The visual essay will be a consolidation of the items in the archive and be presented in an in-person presentation. Through the visual essay, students are tasked to critically reflect on their research process, showing how the chosen material is woven into the fabric of everyday life in Hong Kong.

submission requirements:
- a visual essay containing 20 images with 1000 word description and reflection
- an online archive containing no less than 50 images

Please note that 'images' can be still, video, sound recordings, objects, sketches, mappings etc.

assessment criteria:
- critical thinking in research process and analysis
- clarity in visual communication
- professionalism in presentation

2. Research + Presentation
working in groups
weighting: 50%
final submission date: week 11

Working in of groups of 3-4, students will respond to a research focus related to the ethnographic and research findings from their visual essays. Students will conduct interviews, sketch, map, film, photograph and undertake other forms of research to develop an understanding of the area of research. Working together, students will develop a research question and reflect on their research findings to develop a creative response. The response will clearly communicate at least one insight into the area of research and one response to the research question. The form that the creative response takes will be guided by the research process and is encouraged to contain multiple media that speak to an academic and community audience. Each group will be encouraged to develop an appropriate and imaginative form that reflects the unique character of the research theme and findings.

This task will be developed in stages:

stage one: proposal created by week 6
stage two: refined proposal and progress check at week 8
stage three: final presentation at week 11

submission requirements:
- 15 minute presentation demonstrating the research area/question, process and creative response.
- Documentation of the creative response, with an overview/introduction, research questions, clear methodology, analysis of research and relevant precedents of up to 3000 words.
- 20-page document with edited process work, including critical annotations outlining the group's insights at key stages in the development process.

assessment criteria:
- planning and management of group progress
- critical thinking in research process and analysis
- creativity and execution of creative outcome
- clarity in visual, textual and verbal communication
- professionalism in presentation

3. Reflection
individual work
weighting: 20%
submission date: week 13

This task requires students to demonstrate what they have learnt throughout the course and share their reflections in a considered manner. Students will be given prompts throughout the course and examples of how to write thoughtful reflections and be encouraged to engage in visual mediums to include into their reflections.

Submission requirements:
- 2000-word document that contains visual elements that clearly communicates the students reflections on their learning journey and process throughout the semester.
- 1 minute short film presentation consolidating their reflection and experience.

Assessment criteria:
- reflectivity and consideration
- clarity in documentation style and communication

Course timeline:

Week 1: 8 Jan
Introduction lecture: What are visual research methods and why?
introducing the course: methods and the urban environment
discussion and briefing of assessment 1 and week 2's fieldtrip

Week 2: 15 Jan
field trip, location TBD
observation, collecting data

Week 3: 22 Jan
sharing of collected data
drafting assessment 1

Week 4: 29 Jan
assessment 1 due
short presentations

Week 5: 5 Feb
brief assessment 2
lecture and discussion

Week 6: 12 Feb
proposal created for assessment 2
studio-based working and discussions

Week 7: 19 Feb
public holiday, no class

Week 8: 26 Feb
interim check and sharing
studio-based working and discussions

Week 9: 5 March
lecture
studio-based working and discussions

Week 10: 12 March
studio-based working and discussions

Week 11: 19 March
assessment 2 due
submissions and presentations

Week 12: 26 March
lecture

brief assessment 3
discussion

Week 13: 2 April
assessment 3 due
presentations and reflections

Suggested Readings:
(specific readings will be assigned each week during class)

Abbas, A. (1997). *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctttshbm.

Cassell, C. (2005). Creating the Interviewer: Identity Work in the Management Research Process. *Qualitative Research: QR*, *5*(2), 167–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794105050833.

Chen, C. (2010). Dancing in the Streets of Beijing: Improvised Uses within the Urban System. In J. Hou (Ed.), *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities* (pp. 21–35). Routledge.

Cunliffe, A. L. (2003). Reflexive Inquiry in Organizational Research: Questions and Possibilities. *Human Relations*, *56*(8), 983–1003. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267030568004.

De Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press.

Debord, G. (1970). *The Society of the Spectacle.* Black & Red.

Frampton, A., Wong, C. & Solomon, J. (2012). *Cities without Ground: A Hong Kong Guidebook*. Oro Editions.

Franck, K. A. & Stevens, Q. (Eds). (2007). *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*. Routledge.

Gehl, J. (2011). *Life between Buildings: Using Public Space* (Tran. J. Koch). Island Press.

Kwok, E. (2025), 'Used and Reused: Cardboard as the unlikely hero in creative space making in Hong Kong' , in Grasskamp, A (ed.), *(Re)Made in China: Material dis:connections, Art and Creative Resuse,* De Gruyter, Berlin, pp133-148

Kwok, E. (2025), 'The Messiness of Conducting Fieldwork in Spatial Design Research: a Case Study in Hong Kong' in Turan B.Y., Cate Christ m. & Cerulli. C. (eds.), *Getting Political in the Neoliberal City: Resistance, Transformation, and the Practice of Design for Social and Environmental Justice*, Routledge: Taylor and Francis, London, pp85-101.

Kwok, S. B. (2023). *Fading Neon Lights: An Archive of Hong Kong's Visual Culture,* City University of Hong Kong Press.

Sadler, S. (1999). *The Situationist City*, MIT Press.

Solnit, R. (2000). *Wanderlust: A history of Walking.* Verso.

Solnit, R. (2010). *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas,* University of California Press.

Solnit, R. & Snedeker, R. (2013). Unfathomable city: A New Orleans Atlas, University of California Press.

Solnit, R. & Jelly-Shapiro, J. (2016). Nonstop Metropolis: A New York city Atlas, University of California Press.

Whyte, W. H. (1980). *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces.* Conservation Foundation.