Each type of power utilizes different types of images and different strategies to impact human behavior and societal practices.

Our deep-seated understanding of power affects how we relate to images, objects, and people.
EXPLORATION 2 > CULTURAL ARTIFACTS DUE October 1, 2015

PURPOSE & LEARNING GOALS

To investigate the role of visual culture as a means of communicating and perpetuating cultural values, including the ways in which visual culture affects your perception of self and the world.
To explore issues of power and privilege and its various forms in visual culture.
To analyze media, advertisements, photographs, alternative media, objects, spaces, places, signs and codes as sources of power.
To “decode” and “encode” the symbols that dominate society.

PROCESS: Start with the familiar and identify a significant cultural artifact. Take a photograph of the object, or select an image from a magazine or an online source. Begin your essay with a response to the question, “What are some contemporary meanings encoded in the cultural artifact that you selected?”

For example, students have discussed that a television remote control references an escape from reality, control of a space, an entrance into a different world with different customs, a device that unites physically distant societies, laziness, relaxation, and an easy way to learn about something. One student stated, “Television influences everything. The remote control helps us navigate this influence and, therefore, is a significant artifact.”

Palimpsest traces: To explode commonly held beliefs from a broad range of viewpoints, research and discussion are important. The following questions facilitate dialogue about different cultural meaning systems and the sources of the meanings that we assume others perceive, and they also help to expose oppressive meanings or damaging stereotypes. Respond next in your essay to these questions:

1. Where do the meanings you associate with these images come from?
2. Are they from knowledge you have gained from your own observations of life, are they from associations, or are they from society's ideas of the “true nature” of the objects?

Interactivity/collaboration/participation: Next, post in your blog an image of a selected cultural artifact and invite three others—whose social class, age, gender, sexual orientation, and/or ethnic background differ from your background—to provide a response to the question: What meanings do you associate with this image of an object, and from what experiences have you learned that meaning?

For example, one person wrote: “I chose the Listerine pocket pack as a significant artifact because it represents the fast-paced culture of today. It seems that we (as a culture) are continually trying to make things that are smaller and easier to use at any point in time. Everything seems as though it is made in the hand-held, pocket size so that you can take it on the run.” Another responded “I lived in Bosnia/Kosovo, where mouthwash is not a consumer product. When I gave a child Listerine minis, she cried that it burned her mouth and thought I was playing a mean joke on her.” Clearly, the speakers interpret the Listerine mini from their cultural perspectives. When they share their perspectives in the global space of a blog, it is evident that there are many different meanings associated with this seemingly straight-forward artifact.

In your essay, share the responses from a minimum of three other people, and then research to discover other cultural meanings ascribed to the object.

Palimpsest traces: To interpret a cultural artifact, it is important to look at conditions for its production as they relate to socioeconomic class structures, gender-role expectations, and specific visual codes of the time, as well as how those codes have changed over time. Research by doing a google image search to see how the object/artifact is used in a variety of visual media, and google websites to discover references to the artifact.
Alternative meanings/representations: Take one website that refers to the object frequently and put the URL to that website in the http://regender.com/index.html and read the revised regendered story to discern if and how the meaning has changed.

Multifaceted critical pastiche: Share in your essay the various meanings of the artifact paying particular attention in your discussion on issues of social class, gender, race, and sexual identity in relation to the privileging or devaluing of the artifact you have selected. Conclude your essay with a feminist or critical race interpretation of your selected cultural artifact.

REQUIREMENT: In your blog entry “Cultural Artifacts” present an intersectional and intertextual reading of visual culture using strategies of palimpsest traces, alternative meanings/representations, multifaceted critical pastiche, and interactivity/collaboration/participation. The essay should be between 1000-1500 words. The blog entry should include at the minimum one image of the cultural artifact and hyperlinks. It should include responses to the process components as described above, including reference to the two readings below and at least two of the videos linked on the assignment page at http://cyberhouse.arted.psu.edu/225/projects/2_artifact.html and listed below.

Required readings are linked at http://cyberhouse.arted.psu.edu/225/projects/2_artifact.html


Select at least two videos or readings to view by Oct. 1. They are linked at http://cyberhouse.arted.psu.edu/225/projects/2_artifact.html

Amoy, Sian (2012). Distaff (mute). Artfem.tv (2:56 min.)
Video: Berger, J. (1972). Ways of seeing. Episode 1, 2, 3, 4 (each episode is 30 minutes) & 2011 interview with John Berger.