Humanities Center Seeking Faculty Fellows for 2020-2021

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTIVISM

The Humanities Center of the University of Hartford requests applications from full-time faculty interested in becoming one of the distinguished Faculty Fellows of the Humanities Center for the 2020-2021 academic year, by offering a lecture focused on their own project related to the seminar topic of “Lights, Camera Activism” during the Spring 2021 Humanities Lecture Series.

Mala Matacin, Associate Professor of Psychology, will lead the Humanities Center Seminar for this next year. The seminar is a two-semester course, HON 389 in the fall (a traditional seminar-style course) and HON 390 in the spring, which doubles as a class for the students and a lecture series open to the general public. Mala has selected the theme of “Lights, Camera, Activism” for the seminar and lecture series and requests, in collaboration with the Humanities Center, applications for faculty fellows from all disciplines and colleges in the University. Here is a description of the philosophy behind the seminar and lecture series:

The proverb, “a picture is worth a thousand words” expresses the idea that a picture may offer a quicker way to convey an idea than the written word. Photojournalists and documentary photographers have used photos to shed light on a variety of social problems as a means to bring about public awareness and change; many consider the activist/advocacy part of their work essential. For example, Johnathon Torgovnik, award winning photographer most known for his work about the massive rape of Tutsi women in Rwanda stated that “...it is the responsibility of the photographer to make a call for action.” Advocacy journalist Stephen Shames was one of the first to create a model for focusing on solutions. He said, “we need to think about what will change the world.” As founder of L.E.A.D. Uganda, his nonprofit searches for forgotten children (e.g., former child soldiers, AIDS orphans, abducted girls) and provides them with an education.

Documentary photographers have been criticized for manipulation (e.g., staging, using lighting for effect) and perpetrating a visual form of colonialism. In the words of Martha Rosler, “photography doesn’t change anything.” Yet, there is evidence that it has. Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, photographers from the American Progressive Era (1890-1920s), helped to institute tenement housing reforms and end child labor. The photographers of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) were part of President Roosevelt’s efforts to fight depression and they documented the lives of poor Americans in the 1930s. War photographers, like those in Vietnam, are credited with helping to change public opinion and the course of the war with iconic images such as The Napalm Girl, The Burning Monk, and Saigon Execution. Most recently the images of the immigrant crisis has spurred social and political outrage.

With the proliferation and ease of access to images in our contemporary culture, photos continue to serve as a means for awareness and social change. Whether large and coordinated,
like the “NOH8” Campaign or small and individual, like Rupi Kaur’s Instagram “photo of [her] period,” photo activism can be a powerful way to resist dominant ideologies of those who are marginalized based on a variety of social identities (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ability status). Some have questioned whether “hashtag activism” (using social media to make others aware of issues) has an impact on real political change. But, Yang argued that the #BlackLivesMatter movement, for example, was able to leverage social media to raise visibility of race issues that mainstream media did not. Culture jamming, a cultural resistance technique, allows individuals to use the tools of mass media to critique and subvert dominant ideologies, particularly about consumerism.

Scientists are also interested in the ways that images can be used to communicate their academic work to the general public. One example is The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research that partners with universities in the UK to address climate change. Researchers from the University of East Anglia are specifically addressing how visual material can be effectively used to communicate climate change data to non-academics. Their MADE model (message, audience, design, and evaluation) is based on psychological and cognitive research for how we understand visual material and their guide for data visuals provides a framework to help create images from complex issues/data. Other scholars argue that change can only happen when we see the images produced by those with lived experience of an issue (often those who are from vulnerable populations). Participatory photography, such as photovoice, is one research methodology that requires the inclusion from communities directly affected.

The seminar during the Fall 2020 semester (leading into the Spring 2021 lecture series) will analyze the role of photography/images as a means for social change. Some of the topics it will grapple with are: 1) whether it is our duty to engage in advocacy/activism (what philosopher John Locke calls the “citizen trustor” and Jürgen Habermas’s claim that political morality is redemptive); 2) the nature of documentary photography (subjectivity vs. objectivity); 3) the outsider vs. insider voice of photography (those embedded within vulnerable communities vs. those who are not); and 4) whether current forms of activism (e.g., hashtag activism, culture jamming) can impact social change. The seminar will also examine various photographers (both from an “outsider” and “insider” perspective), projects, photographic techniques, and various forms of photo activism.

**We would be looking for proposals from faculty in art, art history, architecture, communication, music, dance, cinema, theatre, psychology, business, history, sociology, philosophy, literature, politics, education and the sciences.**

**Possible topics might be (but are certainly not limited to):**

- Photography and Photographic Techniques (rule of thirds, frame, composition, manipulation/editing).
- Activism/Advocacy (our role as engaged citizens)
- Social Media/Hashtag Activism/Hashtag Feminism
- Human cognition (how we process visual material/heuristics)
• Social movements
• The politics of seeing
• Ethics (taking photos of others, photo manipulation/staging)
• Power dynamics (when working with vulnerable groups)
• Documentary Photography/Photojournalism/War Photography/FSA Photographers/Street Photography. This includes photography covering a variety of subjects (e.g., environmental sustainability, scientific data, human rights, animal welfare, poverty, violence), organizations/NGOs (e.g., Human Rights Watch, Environmental Justice Foundation, Global Witness, PhotoVoice, War on Want), and places (e.g., Balkans, Rwanda, Congo, Afghanistan)
• Visual literacy and working with text (captioning)
• Participatory Action Research/Photography (PhotoVoice)
• Culture Jamming

The advantages and responsibilities of being a Faculty Fellow include the following:

- Faculty Fellows will be working on a scholarly or pedagogical project in a context that will offer encouragement and a testing site for the development of their ideas. The Humanities Center expects that the project will lay the groundwork for a future publication or equivalent dissemination of scholarship or artistic product.

- Each Faculty Fellow will give a talk as part of the Spring 2021 series of lectures associated with the theme. The lecture will give each Fellow an opportunity to present the results of their research on the project.

- Fellows receive a stipend of $1,500 to enable them to read, write, do research, and prepare their spring lecture.

- Faculty Fellows are encouraged to participate in the honors course in the fall term, and are expected to attend the Tuesday evening talks by other Fellows during the Spring lecture series.

All full-time faculty interested in becoming a Faculty Fellow of the Humanities Center for the 2020-2021 academic year, please email a one-page proposal that describes the focus of your interest as it is related to the course topic, “Lights, Camera, Activism,” and the material to be addressed in your spring talk, along with a CV, to Nicholas Ealy (ealy@hartford.edu) and Mala Matacin (matacin@hartford.edu) no later than Friday, March 27, 2020.

The Humanities Center at the University of Hartford supports interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on the humanities through arts, sciences, technology, media, music, psychology, history, film, philosophy and literature. For more information, contact Nicholas Ealy, Director, at ealy@hartford.edu, visit our webpage here or follow us on Facebook at “University of Hartford Humanities Center.”