

Class Meeting 3 - MFA Field Trip

Everyone takes MFA Field Trip: "In search of quality"

One of the main aims of this exercise is to provide everyone in the class with a chance to share lessons of experience acquired through first person, hands-on and collaborative involvement in a reasonably constrained, time-limited, value-laden exercise. Quite literally, we embark on a further "inquiry into values" in the form of a field-trip to an institution that serves, in effect, as a repository of objects ostensibly exemplifying "quality in the fine arts".

NOTE: The point here is both to search for QUALITY and to reflect on the process – in a particular context. Take note along the way of any noteworthy mental and behavioral reactions on your own part. The 30 or so significant objects we've selected as visual models for this purpose comprise a minuscule subset of the several million objects of various kinds on display at the MFA and an even smaller fraction of the entire collection.

In preparation for Field Trip:

READ: 3.1 Developmental Schemes Handout (on the Lecture notes page.)

BEFORE GOING: COMPLETE ALL OF THE FOREGOING ASSIGNMENTS: Keep introductory terms and concepts and considerations in mind as you prepare to participate in and reflect upon the field trip.

THEN

READ: 3.2 **MFA Field Trip Guide and Workbook.** On Lecture notes page. (Please download and print out your own copy.) You are expected to carefully and thoroughly work your way through the entire document before embarking on the field trip.

On the actual field trip: Please adhere to stipulated methods of procedure, including the indicated ordering and overall sequencing of objects. Follow the pathways described in the Guide. Compare/contrast facial expressions and postures or gestures of affective significance in artworks from different traditions/cultures. What similarities and differences are observed? Any evidence here either for or against the idea that there are cross-cultural "affective universals"? Feel free to discuss in some depth and detail any relevant cognitive and affective aspects of your encounter(s) with specific object(s) as well as with each other from the time you board the bus to the time it drops you off back at MIT.

The first part of our search at the MFA proceeds in a roughly chronological way through a number of genres and styles and cross-cultural contexts. In the second part, you will be asked to return to something previously encountered that you found moving or which evoked in you something at least vaguely approaching a noteworthy "emotional response" (this might be among the initially assigned objects or something else noted briefly in passing).

After the Field Trip but before the class discussion next time, share the contents of your MFA reaction form and reaction paper with your groupmates. This will enable you to participate more constructively. Bring a hard copy of your paper with you to class, and be prepared to read or refer to its contents as appropriate during the discussion. The aim of the discussion is to highlight both the differences and similarities in our affective responses to various artworks (encounters with other objects, individuals, situations, etc.) and the diversity (disparity) and the unity (consistency) of our responses to persons and things in contexts.

In the discussion during our third class meeting, we will reprise the field trip in an effort to attain some clarity on your feelings about the experience and the objects encountered. A class presentation will be prepared with images including some or all of the objects singled out by fieldtrip participants in their reaction forms.

What will we be able to learn about "quality" or "feelings" or "aesthetic values" by discussing the fieldtrip experience?

Evaluate the field trip experience as a whole.

What was your attitude in approaching it?

What was your impression of the mood in which others were approaching the field trip? What were your "first impressions" as you entered and began to explore the museum? Did your impressions change after a while? How, Why? Why not? Explain.

What is your position on the "where is the beauty" question?

Is it inherent in "things of beauty"? Or does it lie in "beholders' eyes"?

Does your experience admit any alternative formulation?

What (if anything) has the field trip experience taught you (e.g. about cross-cultural human particulars and universals/ about specifically and generically human cognitive, affective and expressive aspects of art? About our own currently prevailing (aka Western; North American; Bostonian; Eurocentric) worldviews, valuesystems and lifestyles? About the aesthetic values of peoples belonging to entirely different ages, communities or cultures?

VIEW: 3-3 C. & R. Eames and P. & P. Morrison, "Powers of Ten" (1978)

READ 3-4 Timescales handout (on the Lecture Notes page)

IMPORTANT: To facilitate our follow-up discussion next week, it would be most helpful for you to use a digital camera to document your visit to the museum. For further details, see the MFA Guide.

MFA Field Trip Follow-up: Reflect on the field trip experience in a way that enables you to draw some conclusions about your own attitudes and actions.

WRITE: Reaction Paper #3

SUBMIT paper and two informatively labeled digital photo(s) of the work(s) selected from the many encountered. Send to the instructor.

(See notes about the MFA Fieldtrip Guide above.)

Study Groups continue to meet weekly

Keep reading ZAAMM

We meet next as a class (Class 4) ...

Bring book and a hard copy of Reaction Paper #3 to class with you.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

9.68 Affect: Neurobiological, Psychological and Sociocultural Counterparts of "Feelings"
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