

COMM 450: Visual Culture and Communication

Fall 2016 / MW 11:00-12:20/ASC 230

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Office Hours: M/W 1:30-2:30 and by appointment

Course Description

This course investigates the meaning of visual culture and communication looking at a broad range of artifacts including photography, advertisement, comic books, selfies, videogames, digital imaging technologies, and street art and graffiti. The aim of this class is to understand how images and visual forms produce cultural meanings and how those meanings are consumed by exploring methods and approaches central to the study of visual images. Objects of visual culture do not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, it will be important to discuss the technological and material conditions of visualization by examining each object of visual culture within a specific context (historical, social, institutional, political, geographic, economic, etc.). The interrelationship between artifacts and their contexts will elucidate the power dynamics and struggles central to visual culture and communication, allowing us to unearth the representational politics and culture wars that fundamentally define and impact the visual.

Class Readings

This class has no required textbooks. All readings are posted on Blackboard. You are expected to complete readings by the start of lecture and be prepared to actively participate in class discussions.

Course Requirements

Attendance: Required

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each class. Considering that a significant amount of material covered in lecture is not in the reading it is important that you attend class regularly. You will be given **three (3)** free unexcused absences. **Four or more absences will result in an automatic half grade deduction from your overall grade for each unexcused absence. Missing more than seven classes without discussing the situation with the instructor will result in a failing grade for the course.**

* Excused absences are granted *only* for the following reasons: serious illness (which must be documented with a doctor's certificate), a death in the family (again, documentation is required), or, in very rare cases, a school-related event that requires your presence and that you have arranged with the professor well in advance (e.g. an out-of-town university competitive event in which you are required to participate, a religious holiday, or a job interview). In order for an absence to be excused, documentation must be provided (a note from a coach, letter scheduling the interview, etc.).

The following types of situations are NOT considered excused absences: social events, meetings of Greek or service organizations, entertaining out-of-town visitors, holiday plans, going to weddings or to visit relatives, or any other circumstance that is extracurricular and at which your attendance is optional and secondary to your schoolwork.

Class Participation (10%)

I expect you to come to class on time and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings each week. This grade will reflect not only your participation, but also whether you have prepared the readings for thoughtful discussion in class. You should be able to respond to questions about the assigned readings and offer opinions and insight into the topics addressed. Poor attendance will adversely affect your participation grade. If you miss more than three classes, you **will not** receive the full participation grade. Also, participation grade will not be based solely on attendance. Each class participation will be graded based on the demonstration of your preparation and the level of involvement and contribution to class discussions.

5 Reading Response Blog Posts and Comments (25% - 20% for blog posts + 5% for comments)

You will produce 5 blog posts (500+ word count in length) that respond to the class readings on our class blog on blackboard. Your reading response should be a well-considered, essay-style discussion of the day's reading(s). Your responses should make connections among readings, ideas, and discussions in class. Your reading responses should demonstrate your active efforts to make connections and to question the ideas presented in the readings and class discussions. One of the purposes of the reading responses is to get you to relate the course material to your own life, experience, and the world. To this end, each of your reading responses should contain at least one image (i.e., photo, video clip, scanned image, snap shot, advertisement, etc.) relevant in some way to the day's reading material along with a brief explanation/discussion of the image(s) and its relation to the course. The easiest thing to do is simply work the discussion of the image(s) into your response.

In the beginning of the semester, the class will be divided into four groups. You will be responsible for an original blog post on the day your group is scheduled. The other groups will be required to select a post and write a comment (150-200 words) on it on the day they are scheduled. Comments need to be substantive and engage with the reading as well as the original post's argument(s) in a concrete way. The goal of this assignment is to generate conversation about the readings outside of class as well as in class, to provide you an opportunity to hone analytical writing skills as well as skills to write for an audience, and to ensure that you keep up with the assigned reading.

Leading Class Discussion (10%)

Early in the semester you will sign up to be a discussion leader for a topic of your interest. You will prepare at least three thought-provoking questions that we can use for class discussion. At least one of the questions must cut across multiple readings, integrating their contributions to a particular theme. The quality of our class discussions will depend on your discussion points that not only nicely summarize but also reflect and engage critically with the assigned readings (as well as previous readings, class lectures and class discussions). You will prepare a study guide that contains a short summary of the reading(s) and 3-5 discussion questions and upload it to the discussion forum on the class blackboard before coming to class.

Final Project & Presentation (35% = Proposal 5%+ Visual Culture/Storytelling 20% + Presentation 10%)

For the final project, you will have the option to either create a piece of visual culture/digital storytelling (which will be posted on YouTube) or write a paper that analyzes an example of visual culture. For the presentation, you will have approximately 10 minutes to discuss your work and an additional 5 minutes to respond to questions from the class. The topic for your research paper **must be** approved in advance by the instructor. I will ask you to submit a 1-2 page proposal that explains your topic, research purpose and

questions, and methods for approval in week 5. More information on this final assignment will be provided at a later date.

Visual/Image Assignments (20% - 10% each)

You will be asked to do 2 visual/image assignments that dissect and deconstruct visual images. You will use Storify, a social media platform that allows you to curate a digital narrative on any topic, at least for one of the assignments. Detailed information on these assignments will be provided at a later date.

*** Late Policy: All assignments must be completed and handed in on time at the beginning of class to avoid a grade deduction. No extensions will be given unless you have truly extenuating circumstances. In these cases, you must speak with me **before** the assignment is due to make an arrangement. Technology excuses are not acceptable. **Assignments turned in late without an approved extension will be marked down half a letter grade for every day late. After five days late, the assignment will earn a 0!** Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss assignments.**

Course Grading Policy

You will receive details about each assignment/exam separately. **All assignments need to be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with me in a timely manner. Do no wait until the end of the semester to sort things out.**

In order to pass this class you will need to complete ALL of the assignments. Failure to complete one or more of them will result in an F in the class.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A	outstanding, thoughtful and enthusiastic work
B+/B	above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through
C and below	fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores won the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A	= 100-94	C	= 76-74
A-	= 93-90	C-	= 73-70
B+	= 89-87	D+	= 69-67
B	= 86-84	D	= 66-64
B-	= 83-80	D-	= 63-60
C+	= 79-77	F	= 59-0

If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must appeal it in writing, stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate, within one week of receiving the graded assignment. No late appeals will be accepted for review.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards*

<https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Annenberg School of Communication Academic Integrity Policy

Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. You cannot turn in someone else’s work and you cannot turn in material you have used in other classes, whether at USC or elsewhere. You should also properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor.

The Annenberg School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade for this course, will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Disability

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the

semester as possible. DSP is located in 120 Grace Ford Salvatori Hall and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Other Classroom Policies

Getting to Class Late and Leaving Early

Late arrivals and early departures distract and disrupt class. Your professor can find them to be especially annoying and disrespectful. If you have to miss more than 15 minutes of class, either at the beginning or the end, please consider not coming and getting the notes from another student. If you have to leave 15 minutes or less before class ends, let me know before class, sit in the back of the classroom, and leave the classroom quietly.

Discriminatory Conduct (such as sexual harassment)

The University as well as this class will not tolerate discriminatory conduct. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Such behavior will not be allowed in this classroom.

Seating and Discussion

Despite the fact that this is a large class, we love discussions and encourage you to raise your hand during lecture and ask questions, make comments, or ask for clarification of points you may not have understood. Please sit toward the front and center during lecture, so that you can hear the lecture and be heard when you ask questions. When you do ask a question or make a comment, please speak up – even if the professor can hear you, your classmates need to be able to as well.

Noise-Making Devices and Computer Use in Class

All noise-making electronic devices (cellphones, mp3 players, etc.) are disruptive. Please remember to turn them off at the beginning of class and stow them in your bag or backpack. Use of computer in the classroom is a privilege. You may use a computer in the classroom only for note taking and not recreation. If we notice that you are abusing this privilege by using your computer for recreational purposes (e.g. watching videos, checking emails or Facebook, etc.), we will ask you to leave and mark you as absent for that class period.

Schedule of Classes, Topics & Readings

Week One: Introducing Visual Culture

Monday, 22 August: Introduction and Overview

Wednesday, 24 August:

- Gillian Rose, “Researching Visual Materials: Towards a Critical Visual Methodology” in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction* (pp. 1-27).

Week Two: Vision – Seeing and Looking

Monday, 29 August:

- John Berger, Section 1 in *Ways of Seeing* (pp. 7-33).

Wednesday, 31 August:

- Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, “Practices of Looking: Images, Power, and Politics” in *Practices of Looking* (pp. 10-44).

Week Three: Photography

Monday, 5 September:

Labor Day – No Class!

Wednesday, 7 September:

- Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave” in *On Photography* (pp. 1-19).
- John Tagg, “A Democracy of the Image: Photographic Portraiture and Commodity Production” in *The Burden of Representation* (pp. 34-59).

Week Four: Photojournalism and the Truth/Legitimacy Debate

Monday, 12 September:

- Julianne H. Newton (1998). “The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in Mediating Reality” in *Visual Communication Quarterly* 5(4), pp. 4-9.
- Dona Schwartz, “To Tell the Truth: Codes of Objectivity in Photojournalism” in *Visual Communication and Culture* (pp. 222-233).

Wednesday, 14 September:

- Meryl Alper (2014). “War on Instagram: Framing Conflict Photojournalism With Mobile Photography Apps” in *New Media & Society*, 16(8), pp. 1233-1248.

Week Five: It’s All About the Selfies!

Monday, 19 September:

- Mehita Iqani & Jonathan E. Schroeder (2016). “#selfie: Digital Self-portraits as Commodity Form and Consumption Practice” in *Consumption Markets & Culture* 19(5), pp. 405-415.
- Alice Marwick (2015). “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy” in *Public Culture* 27(1), pp. 137-160.

Wednesday, 21 September:

- Katrin Tiidenberg & Edgar Gomez Cruz (2015). "Selfies, Image and the Re-making of the Body" in *Body & Society*, pp. 1-26.
- Stefanie Duguay (2016). "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Visibility Through Selfies: Comparing Platform Mediators Across Ruby Rose's Instagram and Vine Presence" in *Social Media & Society*, pp. 1-12.
- Hayley Phelan (2016). "Is the Naked Selfie Good for Feminism?: Let's Take a Closer Look" in *Elle* (March 17).

Final Paper Proposal Due!

Week Six: Surveillance Society

Monday, 26 September:

- Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" in *Discipline & Punish* (pp. 195-228).
- Emily Gilbert, "Eye to Eye: Biometrics, the Observer, the Observed, and the Body Politic" in *Observant States: Geopolitics and Visual Culture* (pp. 225-245).

Wednesday, 28 September:

- Sarah Kember (2014) "Face Recognition and the Emergence of Smart Photography" in *Journal of Visual Culture* 3(2), pp. 182-199.
- Kelly A. Gates, "Inventing the Security-conscious, Tech-savvy Citizen" in *Our Biometric Future* (pp. 125-149).

Week Seven: Body Imaging Technologies

Monday, 3 October:

- Davi Johnson Thornton, "Visualizing the New Brain" in *Brain Culture: Neuroscience and Popular Media* (pp. 29-63).
- Nikolas Rose (2016). "Reading the Human Brain: How the Mind Became Legible" in *Body & Society* 22(2), pp. 140-177.

Wednesday, 5 October:

- Luciana Ugrina (2014). "Celebrity Biometrics: Norms, New Materialism, and the Agentic Body in Cosmetic Surgery Photography" in *Fashion Theory* 18(1), pp. 27-44.
- Anne Balsamo (1992). "On the Cutting Edge: Cosmetic Surgery and the Technological Production of the Gendered Body" in *Camera Obscura* 10(1), pp. 207-237.

Assignment #1 Due

Week Eight: Gaze and Spectatorship

Monday, 10 October:

- John Berger, Section 3 in *Ways of Seeing* (pp. 45-64).
- Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Film Theory and Criticism* (pp. 833-844).

Wednesday, 12 October:

- bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (pp. 115-131).

- Manthia Diawara, “Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance” in *Film Theory and Criticism* (pp. 892-900).

Week Nine: Advertising and Consumer Culture

Monday, 17 October:

- Sut Jhally, “Image-based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture” in *Gender, Race and Class in Media* (pp. 77-87).
- Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, “Consumer Culture and the Manufacturing of Desire” in *Practices of Looking* (pp. 189-236).

Wednesday, 19 October:

- Anne McClintock, “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising” in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (pp. 207-231).
- Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Free Self-Esteem Tools?: Brand Culture, Gender, and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign” in *Commodity Activism* (pp. 39-56).

Week Ten: Visuals in Popular Culture

Monday, 24 October:

- Jeffrey A. Brown, “Panthers and Vixens” in *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* (pp. 119-135).
- Anna Beatrice Scott (2006). “Superpower vs. Supernatural: Black Superheroes and the Quest for a Mutant Reality” in *Journal of Visual Culture* 5(3), pp. 295-314.

Wednesday, 26 October:

- Carol Vernallis, “Reconfiguring Music Video” in *Unruly Media* (pp. 181-203).
- Kobena Mercer, “Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*” in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader* (pp. 80-93).

Week Eleven: Visuals in Digital Culture

Monday, 31 October:

- Lisa Nakamura, “Ramadan is Almost Here! The Visual Culture of AIM Buddies, Race, Gender, and Nation on the Internet” in *Digitizing Race* (pp. 37-69).
- Beth Coleman, “Putting a Face on Things” in *Hello Avatar* (pp. 53-79).
- Andrew McGill (2016). “Why White People Don’t Use White Emoji” in *The Atlantic* (May 9).

Wednesday, 2 November:

- Alexander Galloway, “Origins of the First-person Shooter” in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (pp. 39-69).
- James Carmichael (2016). “Can a First-Person Shooter Be Nice?” in *Slate* (July 25).

Week Twelve: Food and Fashion

Monday, 7 November:

- Pauline Adema (2000). “Vicarious Consumption: Food, Television and the Ambiguity of Modernity” in *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 23(3), pp. 113-123.
- Tisha Dejmancee (2016). “‘Food Porn’ as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs” in *Television & New Media*, pp. 1-20.

Wednesday, 9 November:

- Fiona Anderson, “Fashion: Style, Identity and Meaning” in *Exploring Visual Culture* (pp. 67-84).
- Shira Tarrant, “Dressing Left: Conforming, Transforming, and Shifting masculine Style” in *Fashion Talks* (pp. 33-51).

Week Thirteen: Graffiti, Street Art, and Urban Public Space

Monday, 14 November:

- Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Branding Creativity: Creative Cities, Street Art, and “Making Your Name Sing” in *Authentic* (pp. 91-124).
- Joe Austin, “Taking the Trains: The Formation and Structure of “Writing Culture” in the Early 1970s” in *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (pp. 38-74).

Wednesday, 16 November:

- Rana Abboud (2016), “Public Space vs. Pokemon Go” in *ArchitectureAu* (July 22).
- Ash Amin (2008), “Collective Culture and Urban Public Space” in *City* 12(1), pp. 5-24.

Assignment #2 Due

Week Fourteen: Presentation

Monday, 21 November:

Presentation I

Wednesday, 23 November:

Happy Thanksgiving! – No Class (November 23 – 27)

Week Fifteen: Presentation

Monday, 27 November:

Presentation II

Wednesday, 29 November:

Presentation III

Finals Week

Final Project Due!