

## COMM 450: Visual Culture and Communication

Fall 2017 / MW 12:00-1:20/ASC 328

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Office Hours: M/W 2:00-3:00 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 **two** free pass in case you need a personal day. Documents for medical/family emergencies and travels for scheduled athletic competition and observances of religious holidays will be excused as long as you explain your circumstances prior to class. All other absences will negatively impact your participation grade. **Missing more than seven classes without discussing the situation with the instructor will result in a failing grade for the course.**

#### Class Participation (10%)

I expect you to come to class on time and be prepared to ask questions, discuss the assigned readings, and make insightful and substantive contributions in every class. You are **required** to come to class with at least 3 questions from the reading(s) for class discussions, informal in-class writing assignments, and group activities. The quality of your group activities, questions from the course materials, and discussion leading will all factor into your grade. In other words, your mere presence in class **does not** constitute participation in class. Poor attendance will adversely affect your participation grade. Be aware that if you miss more than two classes, you **will not** receive the full participation grade.

### 10 Discussion Question Assignments (10%)

You will prepare thought-provoking discussion questions based on the class reading(s) for 10 classes over the course of the semester. Be aware that your discussion questions can be used in class. Therefore, your discussion questions need to be substantive by raising interesting points, engaging with basic ideas in the text, or clarifying confusions in arguments. You will submit the questions in the beginning of class.

### 5 Tumblr Posts (20%)

You will produce 5 Tumblr posts that contain visual images (i.e., photo, video clip, scanned image, snapshot, advertisement, graffiti, etc.) that are related in some way to the class reading materials with a brief explanation on what those images are and how they highlight/contradict the arguments in the readings. Think of it as a reading response assignment done visually.

### 2 Visual/Image Analysis Papers (15% Each = 30%)

You will be asked to do 2 visual/image assignments that dissect and deconstruct visual images. Detailed information on these assignments will be provided at a later date.

### Final Project (30% = Proposal 5%+ Paper 25%)

For the final project, you will have the option to either create a piece of visual storytelling or write a paper that analyzes an example of visual culture. 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 early in the semester. More information on this final assignment 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](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, 21 August: Introduction and Overview

Wednesday, 23 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, 28 August:

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

Wednesday, 30 August:

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

### **Week Three: Photography**

Monday, 4 September:

**Labor Day – No Class!**

Wednesday, 6 September:

- Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave” in *On Photography* (pp. 1-19).
- Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message” in *Image Music Text* (pp. 15-31).
- Teju Cole (2015). “[A True Picture of Black Skin](#)” in *The New York Times*.

### **Week Four: Photojournalism and the Truth/Legitimacy Debate**

Monday, 11 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, 13 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: Selfies**

Monday, 18 September:

- Jerry Saltz (2014). “[Art at Arm’s Length: A History of the Selfie](#)” in *Vulture*.
- 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.
- Nathan Jurgenson (2011). “[The Faux-Vintage Photo: Full Essays \(Part I, II, & III\)](#)” in *Cyborgology*.

Wednesday, 20 September:

- Hayley Phelan (2016). "Is the Naked Selfie Good for Feminism?: Let's Take a Closer Look" in *Elle* (March 17).
- Alice Marwick (2015). "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy" in *Public Culture* 27(1), pp. 137-160.

### **Week Six: Gaze and Spectatorship**

Monday, 25 September:

- 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, 27 September:

- 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 Seven: Power and the Surveillance Gaze**

Monday, 2 October:

- Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" in *Discipline & Punish* (pp. 195-228).

Wednesday, 4 October:

- Simone Browne (2015). "B@anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness" in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (pp. 89-129).

### **Week Eight: Biometrics and Body Imaging Technologies**

Monday, 9 October

- Shoshana Magnet (2011). "Representing Biometrics" in *When Biometrics Fail: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (pp. 127-148).
- Kelly Gates (2011). "Finding the Face of Terror in Data" in *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (pp. 97-124).

Wednesday, 11 October

- Carol Stabile (1992). "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance" in *Camera Obscura* 28, p. 179-205.
- Rosalind Pollack Petchesky (1987). "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction" in *Feminist Studies* 13(2), pp. 263-292.
- Katy Waldman (2014). "[Does Looking at Ultrasound Before Abortion Change Women's Minds?](#)" in *Slate*.

**Assignment #1 Due**

## Week Nine: Visual Communication in the Digital Culture

Monday, 16 October:

- Jason Eppink (2014). “A Brief History of the GIF” in *Journal of Visual Culture* 13(3), pp. 298-306.
- Nick Douglas (2014). “It’s Supposed to Look Like Shit: The Internet Ugly Aesthetic” in *Journal of Visual Culture* 13(3), pp. 314-339.
- Lisa Nakamura (2014). “‘I WILL DO EVERYthing That Am Asked’: Scambaiting, Digital Show-Space, and the Racial Violence of Social Media” in *Journal of Visual Culture* 13(3), pp. 257-274.

Wednesday, 18 October:

- Andrew McGill (2016). “[Why White People Don’t Use White Emoji](#)” in *The Atlantic* (May 9).
- Megan Molteni (2017). “[Designing Genderless Emoji? It Takes More Than Just Losing the Lipstick](#)” in *Wired*.
- Colette Shade (2015). “[The Emoji Diversity Problem Goes Way Beyond Race](#)” in *Wired*.
- Jess Zimmerman (2015). “[Racially Diverse Emoji Are a Nice Idea. But Will Anyone Use Them?](#)” in *The Guardian*.

## Week Ten: Representation, Realism, and Simulation in Video Games

Monday, 23 October:

- Vít Sisler (2008). “Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games” in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, pp. 203-219.
- Maja Mikula (2010). “Gender and Videogames: The Political Valency of Lara Croft” in *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 17(1), pp. 79-87.

Wednesday, 25 October:

- Alexander R. Galloway (2006). “Social Realism” in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (pp. 70-84).
- Roger Stahl (2010). “Toying with Militainment” in *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*, pp. 113-138.

Proposal Due!

## Week Eleven: Comics and Animations

Monday, 30 October:

- Scott McCloud (1993). “Setting the Record Straight” and “The Vocabulary of Comics” in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (pp. 2-59).
- Rex Kruger (2010). “Aaron McGruder’s *The Boondocks* and its Transition From Comic Strip to Animated Series” in *Animation* 5(3), pp. 313-329.

Wednesday, 1 November:

- Hiroshi Yamanaka (2008). “The Utopian “Power to Live”: The Significance of the Miyazaki Phenomenon” in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (pp. 237-255).

## Week Twelve: Brand and Consumer Culture

Monday, 6 November:

- Sut Jhally, “Image-based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture” in *Gender, Race and Class in Media* (pp. 77-87).
- Barbara J. Phillips, Jessica Miller & Edward F. McQuarrie (2014). “Dreaming Out Loud on Pinterest: New Forms of Indirect Persuasion” in *International Journal of Advertising* 33(4), pp. 633-655.

Wednesday, 8 November:

- Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Free Self-Esteem Tools?: Brand Culture, Gender, and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign” in *Commodity Activism* (pp. 39-56).
- Andi Zeiser (2016). “The Corridors of Empower” in *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement* (pp. 3-28).
- Daniel Victor (2017). “[Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter](#)” in *The New York Times*.

## Week Thirteen: Billboards, Graffiti, and Street Art

Monday, 13 November:

- Catherine Gudis (2004). “Conclusion: The Road Ahead” in *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (pp. 231-246).
- Lauren Rosewarne (2007). “Advertising and Public Space” in *Sex in Public: Women, Outdoor Advertising and Public Policy* (pp. 9-31).
- The Times Editorial Board (2017). “[Billboards, Billboards Everywhere? No Thanks](#)” in *Los Angeles Times*.

Wednesday, 14 November:

- Joe Austin, “Writing “Graffiti” in the Public Sphere: The Construction of Writing as an Urban Problem” in *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (pp. 75-106).
- Leslie A. Hahner & Scott J. Varda (2014). “Yarn Bombing and the Aesthetics of Exceptionalism” in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11(4), pp. 301-321.

Assignment #2 Due

## Week Fourteen: Visualizing Food

Monday, 20 November:

- Alison Caldwell (2012). “Will Tweet for Food: Microblogging Mobile Food Trucks – Online, Offline, and in Line” in *Taking Food Public: Redefining Foodways in a Changing World* (pp. 306-321).
- Signe Rousseau (2012). “Food for Sharing” and “Twitter Feeding” in *Food and Social Media: You are What You Tweet* (pp. 1-16 & 35-50).
- Helene Shugart (2008). “Sumptuous Texts: Consuming “Otherness” in the Food Film Genre” in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25(1), pp. 68-90.

Wednesday, 22 November:

Thanksgiving – No Class (November 22 – 26)

## **Week Fifteen: Urban Landscapes**

Monday, 27 November:

- Lilian Knorr (2016). “Divided Landscape: The Visual Culture of Urban Segregation” in *Landscape Journal* 35(1), pp. 109-125.
- Josh Sides (2004). “Straight Into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb” in *American Studies* 56(3), pp. 583-605.

Wednesday, 29 November:

- Molly Lambert (2014). “[Downtown Los Angeles in Film: Its Grimy, Gorgeous Past and Its Many Futures](#)” in *Grantland*.
- Lawrence Webb (2016). “When Harry Met Siri: Digital Romcom and the Global City in Spike Jonze’s *Her*” in *Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media* (pp. 95-118).

## **Finals Week**

Saturday, 9 December: **Final Project Due (by 5PM)!**