



COMM 451 Visual Communication and Social Change

4 units

Fall 2024 – Tue/Thu – 3:30 PM

Location: ASC 331

Instructor: Professor Visperas (she/her)

Office: ASC 326E

Office Hours: Email to schedule for Zoom meeting; available to meet in-person Tue/Thu mornings

Contact info: mejiavis@usc.edu

Meeting room:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/3257696309?pwd=QnB2NDhwSGsvQnkvRFVlN1h6a2EyQT09>

Meeting ID: 325 769 6309

Passcode: 7s794u

We acknowledge that the territory on which we gather is the occupied land of the Tongva/Gabrielino peoples. We recognize the ongoing history of settler-colonialism in this place, and that we must strive to ensure that our learning, teaching, and building of knowledge and community honors the struggles, resilience, and vital wisdom of the Tongva/Gabrielino peoples. To learn more about the Indigenous history of our region go to <https://native-land.ca/> and <https://mila.ss.ucla.edu/>. To connect to on-campus resources and programs for indigenous or interested students go to the Native American Student Union: <https://nasu.usc.edu/>.

Course Description

Analysis of photography's evolution; new strategies for the photographic image, photo documentary work and global social issues; analysis of images on blogs and web sites.

This course will examine the continued effectiveness of visual culture and aesthetics to foster social change. Students will develop a theoretical and practical understanding of the history and current practices of visual communication and its storytelling capabilities, principally through photography, video, and film. These skills are extremely important at a time in history when billions of digital photos and videos are being produced annually. In one year, an estimated 250 billion digital photos were made and nearly a billion camera phones were said to be in use. During the semester, we will explore different approximations to the aesthetics of the visual, and we will explore ways to utilize this knowledge to devise strategies for the social use of the photographic image. The course will look explore visual culture in its relationship to power, as an interconnection of objects, and their constituted relationships.

This course will help explore the possibilities for change through the multiple levels of interdisciplinary scholarship that converse among the fields of visual culture and communication, especially across media theory, digital media, affect theory, and cultural studies, rooted in theoretical and pedagogical foundations of our constructed imaginaries.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Understand the genealogy of visual culture in its relation to media and communication.
- Critically compare different approaches to visual communication across various disciplines and mediums for change.
- Evaluate the effects of visual culture through the materiality from the past and into the future
- Synthesize the media ecology of the visual realm in terms of memory, affect, and imagination
- Develop critical awareness of photographic uses in the digital age and image methods and ethics for information, social awareness and social change.
- Critically examine the emergence of civic media and participatory culture in the shaping of critical and personal worldviews.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Most assigned texts are available electronically via USC Libraries, but alternately you can also purchase them from your favorite independent bookstore. Required course readings not available via USC Libraries will be made available via the content section of Brightspace. The instructor may change the syllabus at any time during the course in order to better serve the intellectual mission of the course.

Students will always have access to the course syllabus on Brightspace. Lecture slides will be provided to students with OSAS letters indicating the accommodation.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Assignment 1: Images that Changed Us: / 20 points / September 24

Find a photograph that has influenced your views about society and that you believe has a clear meaning. You will create a dossier that describes the photograph, explains how it impacted you, and how the meaning is enhanced or transformed if other aspects of the image are emphasized.

Assignment 2: People and Environments / 10 points / October 15

Take three photos of someone you do not know or who is a casual acquaintance. Each photo should take into consideration the compositional arrangement of the individual in relation to their environment in order to tell a different story about the person.

Assignment 3: Vision, empathy, and social change / 10 points / November 5

Find and analyze two images (or one short video) of suffering that present different possibilities for empathy and social change.

Assignment 4: Photographing place / 10 points / November 19

Take three photos of landscapes, either natural, built, or both. Each photo should take into account the camera's relationship to each landscape. For this assignment, one of your photographs can be AI-generated. However, you must say what AI system was used and your intentions for using it.

Maker Project

Throughout the semester you will explore your relationship to social change, inspired by course materials and discussions, and use your personal exploration and questions to produce a three-part maker project. Based on research, your project will use digital photography or video documentary to present a visual engagement with reality that anticipates, invites, or incites social change. Students should dedicate no more than **15 hours** to this project.

- **Part 1: Maker Project Proposal or Progress Report/ 10 points / Weeks 13-15**
Applying broad ideas of the course, this work-in-progress will be presented to the class in the last three weeks of the course in order to solicit peer and instructor feedback. Students should be ready to give a 10 minute presentation
- **Part 2: Final Maker Project / 20 points / December 17**
The students produce the final project, exploring concepts and topics discussed in the course.
- **Part 3: Feedback Response/ 10 points / December 17**
Attached to the final maker project is a brief discussion of how the project incorporated feedback from their presentation.

Participation

Participation is a major component of this class and is worth 10% of your total course grade. The participation grade will be determined by contributions to class discussions in the form of questions, comments, peer collaboration, and office hours attendance.

Grading Breakdown

Description of assessments and corresponding points and percentage of grade.

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Participation	10	10
Assignment 1	20	20
Assignment 2	10	10
Assignment 3	10	10
Assignment 4	10	10
Maker project	40	40
TOTAL		100%

Course Grading Scale

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
94% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 93%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

Grading Standards

What each letter grade demonstrates.

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.
C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most expectations are met; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming; deficiencies indicate only the most rudimentary level of understanding.

Letter Grade	Description
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; deficiencies indicate lack of understanding.

Grading Timeline

For effective learning, students should receive timely feedback on assignments and exams. Therefore, every attempt will be made to grade assignments and post grades within two weeks. Scores for all assignments are regularly updated on Blackboard.

If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must first wait 24 hours (cooling off period) before appealing it in writing (approximately 1 page, single-spaced), stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate, taking specific written comments into consideration. Additionally, the student must have compared their work to that of another student who received at least half a letter grade higher. All concerns should be addressed to the professor within 7 days of receiving the graded assignment. After that, no appeals will be accepted for review and the grade will be considered final.

Course Policies

In this class, the instructor and students alike should strive to create a vibrant and respectful place for learning. This means recognizing social differences; affirming discomfort as a place for reflection; and maintaining the high standards of rigor that higher education demands. These constitute ways that we can care for each other in the classroom. Thus, unlike social media, the classroom is not a platform for dehumanizing speech or misinformation.

We are mindful of tremendous learning challenges in times of difficulty. The instructor in this course will endeavor to be responsive to student needs. However, at its best, care is reciprocity. We are also mindful of teaching challenges, where instructors also perform (often gendered) emotional and caring labor. This runs the risk of becoming care fatigue. Hence, students can also perform care for their instructor by meeting the instructor half-way: please let them know as soon as possible of any accommodations needed, so that they can prepare ahead of time.

If you require testing and learning accommodations for this course, please provide the instructor with your OSAS letter as soon as you are able.

Assignment Submission Policy

The class schedule below indicates important due dates. Extensions are provided only in cases of emergency. **Extensions are not retroactive.** Therefore, it is important that the instructor be notified as soon as possible and before the due date if a student requires an extension.

All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will risk a grade reduction: For every 24 hours that the assignment is late, half a grade will be deducted. That means that if an assignment receives a letter grade of A, but is a day late, then it will receive a final grade of A-.

Attendance

Attendance is important: there is significant material covered in class that is not in the reading. In addition, unless assigned for asynchronous instruction, there may be screenings in lecture for which you will be responsible. Students who miss more than **three (3) meetings** will have their grades reduced. Attendance will be taken during class, and you will lose half a letter grade from the final grade for every unexcused absence. This means that if your

final grade is an A and you miss four section meetings, your final grade will drop to an A-. An excused absence is one where you inform the instructor beforehand that you will not be able to make it to class for a valid and documented medical or legal/religious reason. Contact the instructor at the very beginning of the semester in order to inform them of your needed accommodations for religious observances. If you have an unforeseen emergency that prevents you from attending section, inform the instructor **as soon as possible** and provide written evidence of the reason of the emergency (e.g. doctor's note).

Unexcused absences are not retroactive, and so it is very important that the professor is notified as soon as possible if a student requires an excused absence beyond the three allowable unexcused absences.

Arriving significantly late to section is disruptive to section meetings, and will hurt participation grade. Other examples of what will hurt participation grade include: not engaging with peers during group activities; being on one's phone during class time; not doing in-class work during class time.

In the event that you find yourself experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms, in keeping with university recommendations, you should:

- Stay home! This is the best way to prevent spreading COVID-19 as supported by scientific evidence; Please do not come to an in-person class if you are feeling ill, particularly if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Nothing we do in our class is worth risking your health, my health, or the health of your peers.
- Contact your TA to identify options available for keeping up with course requirements and content. Office hours are for clarifying questions concerning assignments, grades, and lecture/section materials, and not for repeating any lectures/sections that a student may have missed.

Communication

Please do not hesitate to contact the professor about your questions or concerns. I will respond in a timely manner to all emails, which means within three business days. The instructor is not expected to respond to emails during the weekend or after 5PM and before 8AM on weekdays.

Course Schedule

Important note to students: Be advised that this calendar is subject to change based on the progress of the class, news events, or guest speaker availability.

	Theme	Readings/Homework
Week 1		
Tue. Aug. 27	Introductions	No readings/homework
Thu. Aug. 29	Learning How To Look	Grace Linden, 2023, " <u>To Master the Art of Close Looking, Learn to Hold Time Still</u> " Guy Debord, 1967, excerpt from <i>The Society of the Spectacle</i>
Week 2		
Tue. Sep. 3	Compositional Analysis	Gillian Rose, 2001, "'the good eye,'" in <i>Visual Methodologies</i>
Thu. Sep. 5	Contexts of Looking	Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken, 2009, "Images, Power, and Politics," in <i>Practices of Looking</i>
Week 3		
Tue. Sep. 10	Showing vs Telling	Roland Barthes, 1977, "The Rhetoric of the Image"
Thu. Sep. 12	Desiring Images	W.J.T. Mitchell, 2005, "What do Pictures Want?"
Week 4		

Tue. Sep. 17	Pain Pornography	Kimberly Juanita Brown, 2014, "Regarding the Pain of the Other: Photography, Famine, and the Transference of Affect," in <i>Feeling Photography</i>
Thu. Sep. 19	Bearing Witness	Allissa Richardson, 2020, "The New Protest #Journalism: Black Witnessing as Counternarrative"
Week 5		
Tue. Sep. 24	Evidence, Part 1	Charles Goodwin, 1994, "Professional Vision" ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE BEFORE CLASS TIME
Thu. Sep. 26	Evidence, Part 2	Travis Wagner and Ashley Blewer, 2019, "'The Word Real Is No Longer Real': Deepfakes, Gender, and the Challenges of AI-Altered Video"
Week 6		
Tue. Oct. 1	Portraits	Shawn Michelle Smith, 2004, "The Art of Scientific Propaganda," in <i>Photography on the Colorline</i>
Thu. Oct. 3	Selfies	Ace Lehner, 2021, "Proliferating Identity: Trans Selfies as Contemporary Art," in <i>Visual Culture Approaches to the Selfie</i>
Week 7		
Tue. Oct. 8	Bodies, Part 1	David Marriott, 2000, "'I'm gonna borrow me a Kodak': Photography and Lynching," in <i>On Black Men</i>
Thu. Oct. 10	FALL RECESS	NO CLASS
Week 8		
Tue. Oct. 15	Bodies, Part 2	Tobin Siebers, 2006, "Disability Aesthetics"
Thu. Oct. 17	Bodies, Part 3	Michael Brower, 2003, "'Take Only Photographs': Animal Photography's Construction of Nature Love, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE BEFORE CLASS TIME
Week 9		
Tue. Oct. 22	War Photography	Susan Sontag, 2002, "Looking at War"
Thu. Oct. 24	Drone Images	Lisa Parks, 2008, "Targeting: Mediating US Drone Wars"
Week 10		
Tue. Oct. 29	Landscapes: The Nation	Thy Phu, 2008, "The Spaces of Human Confinement: Manzanar Photography and Landscape Ideology"
Thu. Oct. 31	Landscapes: Ice	Lisa Bloom, 2022, excerpt from <i>Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics</i>
Week 11		
Tue. Nov. 5	No Readings	See Zoom link on Brightspace for class time ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE BEFORE CLASS TIME
Thu. Nov. 7	Zooming Out: The Planet	Denis Cosgrove, 1994, "Contested Global Visions: One-World, Whole-Earth, and the Apollo Space Photographs"
Week 12		
Tue. Nov. 12	Zooming In: Haptics	Laura U. Marks, 2000, excerpt from <i>The Skin of the Film</i>

Thu. Nov. 14	Memes	Sulafa Zidani, "Messy on the inside: internet memes as mapping tools of everyday life"
Week 13		
Tue. Nov. 19 -21	Final project preparations	
Week 14		
Tue. Nov. 26	<u>ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE BY 11:59PM PST</u>	
Week 15		
Tue. Dec. 3-5	Final project preparations	
FINAL		
<u>TUE. DEC 17</u>	<u>FINAL DUE</u>	<u>SUBMIT BY 11:59 PM PDT</u>

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

AI Generators Policy

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, **apart from Assignment 4**, all other assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in

groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

While students are prohibited from using AI-powered programs for their assignments, they may find themselves analyzing or critiquing AI-generated images. In these cases, students are required to cite or credit AI-generated material. For instructions on how to do so, refer to [USC Libraries Citing Generative AI](#).

Please ask the instructor if you are unsure about what information requires citation and/or attribution.

In this class, you are expected to submit work that demonstrates your individual mastery of the course concepts. Unless specifically designated as a “group project,” all assignments are expected to be completed individually.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an “F” grade on the assignment, exam, or in the course.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation, is prohibited. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor’s permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in

the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate](#)- and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

[Annenberg Student Success Fund](#)

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

[Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund](#)

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.