

# Visual Culture

## Course Syllabus

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Comm 432 – Fall 2019

Monday & Wednesday: 1:25 – 2:40pm

Location: Murphey – Rm. 0115

### **Professor**

Torin Monahan, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: by appt.

### **Course Description**

This course will explore the relationships among visual culture, digital media, and power. Everyday life is infused with meaningful images: dramatic representations of terrorist attacks, ubiquitous commercial brands and their logos, intimidating pictures of border fences between nations, popular films and television shows, and seemingly innocuous selfie photographs uploaded to social media sites. The visual shapes everyday experiences, perceptions of self and community, awareness of social and environmental problems, and possibilities for change. Visuality acts as an abstract form of control that creates order and coherence, oftentimes by masking—or making invisible—alternative worldviews or forms of knowledge. But the visual also serves as a site of power and contestation, where artists, activists, and others can challenge dominant representations and shift popular perceptions. Areas covered in this course will include representational practices of science and medicine, surveillance and security, environmental imaging, urban design, state territory and space, artistic and cultural creations, and popular entertainment media. Attention will be given to how visibility asserts differences along lines of race, gender, and sexuality. Readings will be drawn from the humanities, social sciences, and popular media. The class is designed to give you freedom to develop and express your own ideas. The course goal is for you to develop the ability to analyze and critique visual materials. The learning objectives are for students to develop the skills necessary to perform such analyses and communicate critical insights verbally and through writing.

### **Texts**

1. Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. 2018. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. **3rd ed.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Readings on Sakai or webpages

### **Grading**

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Quizzes (5)              | 25% |
| Image Blog Postings (12) | 12% |
| Midterm Paper            | 20% |
| Final Research Project   | 33% |
| Participation            | 10% |

[Grading Scale: A =93-100, A- =90-92, B+ =87-89, B =83-86, B- =80-82, C+ =77-79, C =73-76, C- =70-72, D+ =67-69, D =63-66, D- =60-62]

## **Course Expectations**

*Attendance:* This class will be conducted with a focus on in-class discussions and activities. Because of this format, you are expected to attend all classes for the full scheduled time. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. You can miss up to 2 classes throughout the semester without penalty, but you must turn in assignments ahead of time and arrange to get notes from a colleague. Your final grade will go down by 3 points (out of 100) for each additional class missed above these 2. Finally, if you fail to show up for a scheduled meeting with the instructor without canceling 24 hours in advance, your participation grade will be docked 3 points.

*Reading:* Complete all readings (and other assignments) prior to the class meeting for which they are scheduled. Most of the readings will be drawn from the textbook, websites, or articles posted to Sakai. You must bring readings (or copies of them) to class for the dates they are assigned. In some cases, I may distribute photocopied readings to you in class. See the course outline below for details.

*Participation:* Through communication, ideas are formed, revised, borrowed, and developed. It is through argument, description, explanation, and improvisation – within a community – that individual learning flourishes. This course requires full participation (including active listening, facilitating, note-taking, and question-asking) to create an environment of open and shared learning. An effective participant is not someone who simply talks frequently, but someone who reliably offers thoughtful insights that help others to learn.

*Technology:* Laptop computers and other portable technologies should be used in class only as learning-facilitation tools. During class, it is not acceptable to play games, send email, surf the web, answer cell phones, text message, tweet, or engage in other non-class-related activities. Your participation grade will be penalized if you break this rule. Why? Not only do these practices negatively affect your learning and participation, but they also distract others and create an environment of disrespect.

## **Course Assignments**

### 1. Quizzes:

There will be **five** short quizzes throughout the semester. These will be based on the key themes or terms covered in the reading. The format will be short answer and multiple-choice questions. Questions will ask only about material covered since the last quiz, but the questions may pertain to the readings assigned on the day of the quiz as well. The quiz dates are September 4, September 18, October 7, November 6, and November 25. No makeup quizzes will be given. If you miss a quiz due to an absence or tardiness, you will receive 0 points.

### 2. Image Blog Postings:

A vital component of the course will be finding and sharing images that connect to the theoretical perspectives covered in each week's readings. You will be expected to locate (or make) a representative image and upload it to the course's shared blog (on Cluster.co) before class each Wednesday. (No blog post is required for Week 14.) Be prepared to discuss in class how your image relates to the themes of the week. More details will be provided in class.

### 3. Midterm Paper:

There will be one individually composed paper of 10 pages required in this course. The paper (due October 16) will be a critical reading of an image—or a representational object—in its cultural context. You will learn how to conduct such a reading through our course materials and class discussion. First, you will locate an image of your choice, perhaps focusing on one that you have already shared in class. Second, you should briefly and carefully describe what the image depicts and the formal properties of its composition. Finally, drawing upon course material, you should perform a critical analysis concentrating on any number of dimensions that you deem essential to your argument: image content, values, and politics; representations of gender, race, and class; audiences and modes of participation; technological mediation, constraints and affordances; and so on). For this assignment, you will be required to mobilize a minimum of 3 of the key concepts covered in the course and apply them to your analysis. Additional research may be required to make your argument, but try to keep the focus on description and analysis of the selected image.

### 4. Final Team Research Project:

The final project will include a group presentation and a team-based paper of 18-20 pages due on December 9. (Teams will be formed in the second half of the semester and will have 4-5 people per team.) You will be asked to select a specific area of inquiry into visual culture, formulate research questions, decide upon appropriate research methods to answer your questions, analyze collected data, and compose an analytic research paper. Sample areas of inquiry might include a museum exhibit, representations of police violence, video game culture, drone warfare, medical imaging, visual evidence used by expert groups (e.g., radiologists, forensic scientists, city engineers), and so on.

The final project is worth 33% of your grade (20% for the research paper you turn in, 10% for the presentation your team gives in class, and 3% for an individual group- and self-evaluation paper, which will be required of each group member.) The criteria for evaluating the group presentation are effective visuals or materials, time management, professional appearance, argument, evidence, and conclusion. Experimentation is highly encouraged for this project. Be creative and have some fun!

I reserve the right to distribute unannounced quizzes on the reading or lecture material. Any missed points on these quizzes will be deducted from your participation grade. Quizzes may not be made-up if you are absent.

### **Writing Guidelines**

Please use 12-point Times New Roman font, 1" margins, double-spaced lines, and one line space between paragraphs. Do not use cover pages or folders of any kind unless necessary to preserve your presentation (e.g., sketches or photographs). All papers must be stapled or they will not be accepted. No late or emailed papers will be accepted.

### **Academic Honesty**

In order to avoid plagiarism, your assignments must provide full citations for all references: direct quotes, summaries, or ideas. Make sure you put all quotes in quotation marks and include references. While you are encouraged to develop your thinking with your peers, you cannot use their material without citing it. Work from other courses will not be accepted in this course. Allowing your writing to be copied by another student is also considered cheating. Please review

the Honor Code for complete guidelines on academic honesty: <http://studentconduct.unc.edu/>. If you have any questions about how to avoid plagiarism, do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

### **Gender-Fair Language**

Language structures thought and action. Biases in language can (and do) naturalize inequalities. Imprecise language also signifies un-interrogated values and sloppy thinking. For all of these reasons, the use of gender-fair language is expected in this course. For example, do not use words like “mankind” or “men” when referring to people in general; alternate between “she” and “he” instead of always using “he,” or construct sentences in the plural instead of the singular so you can use “they” or “them” and avoid the problem altogether.

### **ESL/LD Students**

Course requirements can be adjusted to serve the needs and capabilities of ESL and LD students. Please speak with the professor during the first two weeks of class to make arrangements. Students may be advised to attend additional sessions during the professor’s office hours so they can draw comparable value from the course.

### **Course Schedule (subject to revision)**

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#### **Week One: Introductions**

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Wednesday, August 21:

**Readings:**

- No Readings.

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#### **Week Two: Images, Power, and Politics**

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Monday, August 26:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Introduction & Cht.1 (pp.1-49)
- Rose, Gillian. 2012. *Visual methodologies* [2-page excerpt on semiology].

Wednesday, August 28:

**Readings:**

- Mitchell, W.J.T. 2005. There are no Visual Media. *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2):257-266
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14 (3):575-599 [10-page excerpt]

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#### **Week Three: Indexicality**

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Monday, September 2:

**Labor Day: No Class or Readings**

Wednesday, September 4:

**Quiz #1**

**Readings:**

- Doane, Mary Ann. 2007. The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity. *differences* 18 (1):128-152.

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## Week Four: Modernity: Spectatorship, the Gaze, and Power

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Monday, September 9:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.3 (pp.89-138)
- Brown, Elspeth H. 2005. *The Corporate Eye* [excerpt]

Wednesday, September 11:

**Readings:**

- Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen* 16 (3):6-18
- hooks, bell. 1992. The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 115-131.
- Halberstam, Jack. 2013. Queer Faces: Photography and Subcultural Lives. In *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by N. Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, 96-108.

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## Week Five: Surveillance, Identity, and Visibility

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Monday, September 16:

**Readings:**

- Groebner, Valentin. 2007. *Who Are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*. Translated by M. Kyburz and J. Peck. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books. [4-page excerpt]
- Sekula, Allan. 1986. The Body and the Archive. *October* 39:3-64. [5-page excerpt]
- Goldsmith, Andrew John. 2010. Policing's New Visibility. *British Journal of Criminology* 50 (5):914-934. [5-page excerpt]

Wednesday, September 18:

**Quiz #2**

**Readings:**

- Monahan, Torin. 2015. Resisting Surveillance Through Art. *Communication Currents* 10 (3). Available from <http://www.natcom.org/CommCurrentsArticle.aspx?id=6149> [accessed June 19, 2015].
- Brighenti, Andrea Mubi. 2010. Artveillance: At the Crossroads of Art and Surveillance. *Surveillance & Society* 7 (2):137-148. [5-page excerpt]
- Greenberg, Andy. 2016. Turning Live Surveillance Feeds Into Unsettling Works of Art. *Wired*. Available from <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/turning-live-surveillance-feeds-unsettling-works-art/> [accessed July 30, 2016].

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## Week Six: Realism and Perspective: From Renaissance Painting to Digital Media

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Monday, September 23:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.4 (pp.139-177).

Wednesday, September 25:

**Readings:**

- Bogost, Ian. 2015. Video Games Are Better Without Characters. *The Atlantic*, March 13. Available from <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/video-games-are-better-without-characters/387556/>. [accessed August 23, 2016].

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**Week Seven: Visual Technologies, Reproduction, and the Copy**

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Monday, September 30:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.5 (pp.179-218).

Wednesday, October 2:

**Readings:**

- Sontag, Susan. 1977. In Plato's Cave. In *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 3-16.
- Paolillo, John C. 2018. The Flat Earth phenomenon on YouTube. *First Monday* 23 (12). Available from <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/8251/7693> [accessed August 17, 2019].

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**Week Eight: Media in Everyday Life**

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Monday, October 7:

**Quiz #3**

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.6 (pp.219-256).

Wednesday, October 9:

**Readings:**

- Sturken, Marita. 2013. Tourism and Sacred Ground: The Space of Ground Zero. In *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by N. Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, 412-427.
- Braverman, Irus. 2013. *Zooland: The Institution of Captivity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. [4-page excerpt]

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**Week Nine: Brand Culture: The Images and Spaces of Consumption**

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Monday, October 14:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.7 (pp.257-299).

Wednesday, October 16:

**Midterm Paper Due**

**Readings:**

- Holmes, Brian. 2013. Do it Yourself Geo-Politics. In *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by N. Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, 313-326.

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## **Week Ten: Postmodernism: Irony, Parody, and Pastiche**

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Monday, October 21:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.8 (pp.301-336).

Wednesday, October 23:

**Readings:**

- Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983: pp. 1-9.
- Abbas, Ackbar. 2013. Faking Globalization. In *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by N. Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, 282-295.

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## **Week Eleven: Urban Measurement and Vision**

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Monday, October 28:

**Readings:**

- Cuff, Dana. 2003. Immanent Domain: Pervasive Computing and the Public Realm. *Journal of Architectural Education* 57 (1):43-49 [5-page excerpt]
- Mattern, Shannon. 2013. Methodolatry and the Art of Measure: The new wave of urban data science. *Places*. Available from <https://placesjournal.org/article/methodolatry-and-the-art-of-measure/> [accessed July 30, 2016].

Wednesday, October 30:

**Readings:**

- Mattern, Shannon. 2015. Mission control: A history of the urban dashboard. *Places Journal*. Available from <https://placesjournal.org/article/mission-control-a-history-of-the-urban-dashboard/> [accessed August 17, 2019].

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## **Week Twelve: Representing Networks and Space**

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Monday, November 4:

**Readings:**

- Harley, John Brian. 1989. Deconstructing the map. *Cartographica* 26 (2):1-20.

Wednesday, November 6:

**Quiz #4**

- Starosielski, Nicole. 2015. The Underwater Internet. *The Atlantic*, May 16. Available from <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/05/the-underwater-internet/393161/> [accessed August 17, 2019].
- Miller, Greg. 2015. Undersea Internet Cables Are Surprisingly Vulnerable. *Wired*. Available from <http://www.wired.com/2015/10/undersea-cable-maps> [accessed July 30, 2016].

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**Week Thirteen: Scientific Looking, Looking at Science**

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Monday, November 11:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.9 (pp.337-378)

Wednesday, November 13:

**Readings:**

- Goodwin, Charles. 1994. Professional Vision. *American Anthropologist* 96 (3):606-633

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**Week Fourteen: The Global Flow of Visual Culture**

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Monday, November 18:

**Readings:**

- *Practices of Looking*: Cht.10 (pp.379-423)

Wednesday, November 20:

- Research Project Coordination and Consultation (meet in classroom)
- No Readings.

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**Week Fifteen: Student Projects & Presentations**

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Monday, November 25:

**Quiz #5**

- Research Project Coordination and Consultation (meet in classroom)
- No Readings

Wednesday, November 27:

- **Thanksgiving Break – No Class or Readings**

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**Week Sixteen: Conclusions**

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Monday, December 2:

- Research Project Presentations
- No Readings

Wednesday, December 4:

- Research Project Presentations
- No Readings

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**Final Projects Due: Monday, December 9 @ 12:00pm**