
INTS 245: Visual Culture and Society Spring 2017

Friday, 10:30am – 1:10pm Robinson Hall B213

4 credit hours

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Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course will provide an overview of the evolving, interdisciplinary body of scholarship and research known as Visual Culture. Visual Culture draws from Art History, Cultural Studies, and Film and Media Studies, however, it is not reducible to any of those disciplines or modes of inquiry. Visual Culture is foremost a study of power; in our class we will examine the technologies of photography, film, and television and the way they reinforce or challenge societal power structures.

Furthermore, research in Visual Culture has attended not only to visual objects, but also to the act of looking itself, and to the social construction of perception. As many of the theorists we'll read have argued, perception is far from natural and universal; rather, it is historically and culturally specific and as such has changed over time, in part as a result of the development of new visual technologies. Looking practices, particularly those that have developed in the West, are also both the product of, and a system of reinforcement for, power and economic relationships, along gender and racial lines. Throughout this course, we will work to make visible the typically unnoticed practices of looking, and gain insight into the way society is structured through the visual.

By the end of the semester, students will have learned to:

- Understand past, current, and emerging theories associated with visual culture, photography, film, and television in society
- Acquire, expand, and deploy a conceptual vocabulary appropriate for the analysis of complex visual phenomena
- Apply relevant theoretical perspectives to the exploration of visual culture and its functioning within contemporary societies

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Readings will be made available in electronic format via Blackboard.

Assignments	% of Grade	Grading Scale			
		A+	=	97 – 100	
Class Participation	10	A	=	94 – 96.9	
Reading Responses (10 responses)	20	A-	=	90 – 93.9	
Final Paper Proposal	10	B+	=	87 – 89.9	
Final Paper	40	B	=	84 – 86.9	

In-Class Presentation	20		B-	=	80 – 83.9
			C+	=	77 – 79.9
			C	=	74 – 76.9
TOTAL	100		C-	=	70 – 73.9
			D	=	60 – 69.9
			F	=	Below 60

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Participation: If there is a good reason you need to arrive late or leave early, I need to know in advance. Absences are unexcused unless you see me prior to your absence and can provide necessary documentation. In case of absence, it is a good idea to exchange contact information with another classmate so that you can arrange to get information/notes missed in class. I do not post presentations on Blackboard or give hard copy of notes. I am, however, happy to meet with students to go over material that they missed or are struggling with.

You are evaluated based on your active participation in this class. You and your peers benefit from your active participation in this learning community. Through class discussions and group/individual assignments, you will have the opportunity to discover new perspectives and examine ideas that were previously unchallenged. Open discussion depends on the development of trust and safety among participants, as well as risk-taking and effective facilitation. I encourage you to bring to class relevant materials for discussion from other classes, the media, or other learning experiences.

Reading Responses: You will write 10 weekly response essays due over the course of the semester (do not do one for our first class meeting or Week 5 – when you submit proposals). In these brief essays (1-2 pages) you will explain the author's overarching argument, connect the text to others (when possible) and pick a concept or issue the author develops to flesh out. On weeks when you are reading multiple essays, try to articulate the thesis of each essay and the relationship between the readings. How do the texts speak to (and agree or disagree) with one another?

Final Paper Project: This assignment consists of three (3) parts: a proposal, in-class presentation and final paper. Your final paper will be 6-8 pages and will engage with a theory/theories on the visual that we have discussed by linking it to a specific case study (a photograph/set of photographs, film, or television series). In addition to the information below, we will also discuss the parameters of this project in class.

Part I: Paper Proposal. Due Friday, February 24 by 1:00pm on BB

Your paper proposal is a 2-4 page typed, double-spaced essay that includes four linked elements:

1. A full description of the visual object (photograph(s)/film) you have chosen.
2. Which theory or theories of the visual you will link to your visual object.
3. An initial thesis statement.
4. Bibliography of your sources (at least 3).

Part II: Presentation. Due Friday, May 5 in class

Each student will give a concise, professional 4-5 minute oral and visual presentation on the visual object that is the subject of the final paper. You will only have time to present a brief sketch – the highlights, if you will, of your final paper.

*It is advised that you practice your presentation. Not only do you want to make sure you stay within the 4-5 minute time limit, you should also engage you audience through eye contact rather than having you head down, reading your presentation notes.

Part III: Final Paper. Due Saturday, May 6 by 11:59pm on BB

You will produce a 6-8 page final paper. This final assignment asks you to revise your proposal by further developing your thesis, strengthening your evidence (description and theoretical analysis), and refining your writing style based on the comments you received and further research you have done.

In your final paper, you will be assessed on the extent to which you clearly articulate and develop an interesting thesis statement and how well your description and theoretical analysis fully and persuasively supports that thesis. Take into consideration all aspects of your evidence – could someone else see the subject differently or take it to mean something else entirely? Are there aspects of your visual object that contradict your interpretation? The presence of either of these things does not necessarily make you wrong, but you must account for them in order for you thesis to be fully plausible. We will further discuss the final paper in class.

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Attendance: Important responsibilities come with participation in this learning community including: completing readings and assignments on time, actively engaging course materials, coming to class regularly and on time, and listening attentively to comments made in class. An absence is excused when due to serious illness, religious observance, participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, or compelling circumstances beyond your control. To claim an excused absence, you must provide a signed letter by a person in a position to make an authoritative determination as to the validity of the cause of the absence within three calendar days of your return from that absence. You are responsible for all announcements, assignments, materials and date changes covered or made in class while you are absent.

Accommodations: If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: (1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Room 2500; 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu/>) to determine the accommodations you need; and (2) speak with me to plan your accommodation needs, especially regarding exams. Please note that faculty cannot legally provide accommodation to students with learning differences or physical conditions that may affect academic performance without appropriate documentation.

Diversity Statement: George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a

quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

School of Integrative Studies, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and disability.

- We value our diverse student body and desire to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff.
- We commit to supporting students, faculty and staff who have been the victims of bias and discrimination.
- We promote continuous learning and improvement to create an environment that values diverse points of view and life experiences.
- We believe that faculty, staff and students play a role in creating an environment that engages diverse points of view.
- We believe that by fostering their willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, our students will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, aware of their biases and how they affect their interactions with others and the world.

Policy for Late and Missing Assignments: You are responsible for completing assignments on time. All assignments will be submitted as a hard copy at the beginning of class the day they are due unless instructed otherwise. I will not extend any assignment deadlines unless previous arrangements have been made. This means that if you anticipate not being able to complete your assignment on time whether it is due to a documented excuse or an unfortunate conflict, you must come to me in advance, well before the assignment is due. Unless you communicate with me and get direct permission in a timely manner, you will not be eligible to turn in your assignment late even if your excuse is documented.

Email Policy: In compliance with a University-wide initiative, SIS faculty and staff will correspond electronically with students only through their GMU assigned email accounts. No assignments will be accepted via email unless specifically requested. Please check your email account regularly for updates and important announcements.

Academic Honesty and Collaboration: George Mason University has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity: 1) all work submitted must be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) when in doubt about citation rules or assignment guidelines, ask your seminar

leader for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. GMU provides a range of services to help with test anxiety, writing and study skills, personal issues, and other concerns.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is plagiarism! If you quote directly from any text, you **MUST** use the exact words (including punctuation) just as the words, phrases, and sentences appear in the original text. You must also follow proper citation rules to indicate that you are quoting directly from a text (e.g. Quotation marks, quote indentation, source identification). If you paraphrase ideas, that is, convey the author's ideas in your own words, you must still cite the source, using an established citation format. The re-use of papers, presentations, and other materials from one course in another course is not appropriate. We expect that submitted work has been prepared for this class only.

Format for Assignments: All papers must be stapled, typed, double spaced on 8.5" x 11" paper using 12 point font with 1" margins. Papers and speeches must be documented properly according to the MLA citation manual. Keep a copy of all assignments. Failure to follow assignment guidelines may result in a grade deduction.

SELECT GMU RESOURCES

Counseling Services: (703-993-2380; SUB I, Room 3129) provides individual and group sessions for personal development and assistance with a range of emotional and relational issues. In addition, the Learning Services Program (703-993-2999) offers academic skill-building workshops as well as a tutor referral service.

Office of Disability Services: (703-993-2474; SUB I, Room 2500) assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will provide a form to give to your instructor at the beginning of every course.
<http://ods.gmu.edu>

Writing Center: (703-993-1824; Robinson A 114, main office; Enterprise 076) provides, at no charge, tutors who can help you develop ideas and revise papers. The Writing Center is also available online at <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>.

Learning Services: (703-993-2380; Student Union Building I, Suite 3129) provides, at no cost, study skills workshops can help you improve your academic performance. These workshops include, but are not limited to: strategies for note-taking, reading, exams, memory and organization, time-management, performance anxiety, and improving concentration. They are offered multiple times throughout the semester. You can find descriptions, schedule and links to register online at <http://tuscan.gmu.edu/depts/unilife/learningservices.gmu.edu/academic-skills-workshops/>

Week 1: What is Visual Culture?

Date	Readings and Assignments Due
1/27	Reading: Sturken and Cartwright: <i>Practices of Looking</i> Chapter 1 W.J.T. Mitchell: "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture"

Week 2: Reading Images

2/3	Reading: Roland Barthes: "Myth Today" from <i>Mythologies</i>
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Week 3: The Gaze

2/10	Reading: Jean-Paul Sartre: "The Look," from <i>Being and Nothingness</i> (stop at first paragraph on 268) Frantz Fanon: "The Fact of Blackness"
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Week 4: Photography

2/17	Readings: Susan Sontag: "In Plato's Cave" from <i>On Photography</i> Roland Barthes: selections from <i>Camera Lucida</i>
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Week 5: Proposals

2/24	CLASS WILL NOT MEET Due: Final Paper Proposal (submit via Blackboard by 1:00pm)
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Week 6: Photography, continued

3/3	Readings: Barbie Zelizer: "Journalism, Memory, and the Voice of the Visual" from <i>About to Die</i> Ariella Azoulay: "What is Photography?" from <i>Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography</i>
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Week 7: The Cinematic Apparatus

3/10	Readings: Comolli and Narboni: "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" Laura Mulvey: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"
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Week 8: Power and Resistance on Screen

3/24	Readings: Richard Dyer: “The White Man’s Muscles” from <i>White</i> Carol Clover: “Her Body, Himself” from <i>Men, Women, and Chain Saws</i>
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Week 9: Melodrama

3/31	Readings: Linda Williams: “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” Linda Williams: “Mega-Melodrama! Vertical and Horizontal Suspension of the ‘Classical’”
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Week 10: The Spectator

4/7	Readings: Vivian Sobchack: “What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh.” (http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/conference-special-effects-special-affects/fingers/)
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Week 11: Television and the Home

4/14	Readings: Lynn Spigel: “Television in the Family Circle” from <i>Make Room for TV</i> Caetlin Benson-Allott: “Reprotechnophobia: Putting an End to Analog Abjection with <i>The Ring</i> ” from <i>Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens</i>
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Week 12: Television and History

4/21	Readings: Malgorzata J. Rymza-Pawlowska: “Broadcasting the Past” Alison Landsberg: “Waking the Past” from <i>Engaging the Past</i>
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Week 13: Mobile Witnessing

4/28	Readings: Anna Reading: “Mobile Witnessing: Ethics and the Camera Phone in the ‘War on Terror’” Cave and Oliver: “The Raw Videos that Have Sparked Outrage Over Police Treatment of Blacks” (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/30/us/police-videos-race.html?_r=0)
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Week 14: Conclusion

5/5	In-Class: Presentations Final Paper Due Saturday, 5/6 by 11:59pm on Blackboard.
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