COMM 262 / CIMS 262: Visual Communication

Summer Session I
T/Th, 5:30 PM-9:20 PM

Instructor: Rachel Stonecipher
Email: rstonecipher@asc.upenn.edu
Office: 139 (ground level, ASC) Office hours: M & W, 11-12 PM and by appointment

**Description:** Images permeate our everyday lives. Whether we are watching the news on TV, watching a movie on our laptops, or checking out a website on our smartphones, we are in constant interaction with images. In this course, we will learn why visual literacy matters. What do images tell us? How do we ‘read’ them? How do we produce them? The course explores these questions by introducing students to the techniques of visual communication, or how ideas, concepts, and narratives are conveyed through images - both still and moving. Using advertisements, television shows and film clips as case studies, we will examine both the formal features (e.g. design) and contextual elements (e.g. circulation) of images. We will explore how images are never ‘neutral’ because they work to support particular messages and agendas. Because our ability to analyze media is strengthened by media practice, we also will create our own visual artifacts (e.g. a short film, a digital collage, a small comic book, etc.) as part of the course.

**Course requirements:** Students are expected to do all the readings and participate fully in class discussion. While we will have fun screening ads and TV/movie clips in class, these screenings do not comprise an excuse to wander away into the pleasures of pop culture – rather, they are an invitation to think in depth about the world around us, and as such should be folded into discussion creatively and critically. Note: good participation means demonstrating that you have engaged with in-class content and readings through careful analysis, detailed questions, or legitimate sources of confusion, and are reflecting cumulatively about the presented approaches to visual communication.

Students will write two short papers (3-5 pages) and create one visual artifact of their own invention:

- The first paper will ask students to perform a semiotic analysis of a short film, clip, or image and pose an original argument for, against, or qualifying the value of semiotics to the chosen subject.
- The second, a creative writing exercise, will ask students to place their reader within the first scene of an imaginary fiction movie by describing the camera, editing, design, and other visual techniques they
would use to introduce the story, and illuminating their intended effects (e.g., on emotion, exposition, argument).

- The final project will ask students to produce a “visual argument” in any medium, about a topic of contemporary interest. Over the course of the semester, we’ll study the traits of persuasive rhetoric and how these might be mobilized within the visual. On the final day of class, students will analyze one another’s artifacts/arguments and discuss their effectiveness, as well as the ethics of image production.

**Required Texts:** There is no required textbook; all readings will be available on Canvas.

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>(%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Final Project</td>
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**Note:** Strong participation requires your attendance in class (it just does!). I’ll accept one excused absence, but after that, each absence will cost 5% of your FINAL grade (five percent of those 25 percentage points for participation).

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Key to terms below:** “HW” signals work you should complete BY THE DATE it is listed, so for example, work listed under “July 5” should be prepared for the class session on July 5. The same applies to readings.

**Week 1: Introduction to Visual Communication**

**Thursday, June 30:** Birds’-Eye View of the Field (and Welcome!)
Reading: Paul Lester (2006), *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* Ch. 5 (“The Sensual and Perceptual Theories of Visual Communication”)

**Friday, July 1:** “Sensing, Selecting, Perceiving”


**Week 2: Semiotics and the Nature of the Visual**

No classes **Monday, July 4** – Independence Day

**Tuesday, July 5:** Semiotics (the Interpretive Study of Signs)


**HW:** Research Charles S. Peirce’s theory of signs (covered in Chandler) and come to class with your favorite image (can be a copy/reproduction). Be prepared to classify it as an iconic, indexical, OR symbolic sign, and to defend your choice.

**Wednesday, July 6:** Language and the Visual

Readings: Excerpts on structuralism OR poststructuralism (divided reading; TBA) from Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory* (2002)

**Thursday, July 7:** Semiotics in Practice


**Friday, July 8:** Doing Semiotic Analysis / Critiques of Semiotics

Readings: Philip Bell and Marko Milic (2002), *Goffman’s Gender Advertisements revisited: combining content analysis with semiotic analysis*; Klaus Krippendorff (2003), *The Dialogic Reality of Meaning*

**Week 3: Power and Visual Communication**

**Monday, July 11:** Visual Literacy, Visual Persuasion (ASC Prof Paul Messaris Day)

**Tuesday, July 12:** Embodiment and Visuality


**Wednesday, July 13:** The Visuality of Race

Reading: p. 220-225 of Paul Messaris and Linus Abraham (2001), "The Role of Images in Framing News Stories." in Framing Public Life (eds. Reese, Gandy, Jr., and Grant); read to middle of p. 16 Alessandra Raengo (2013), On the Sleeve of the Visual, Introduction

**Thursday, July 14:** The Subject/Object Relationship


*Recommended:* Mary Ann Doane (1982), "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator"; Mary Ann Doane (1988), "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator"

**Friday, July 15:** The Subject/Object Relationship in Photography: Aesthetic and Ethical Debates

Readings: Mike Kukulski (2014), professional blog, “Pictorialism versus Straight Photography” (Links to an external site.) [web link]; excerpt from Susan Sontag (1977), On Photography


**HW:** First paper due-

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**Week 4: Images Telling Stories**

**Monday, July 18:** Designing for a Message


*Recommended:* If you’re interested in color theory from an artistic perspective, you may want to check out the artist Wassily Kandinsky's writings on form and color in his 1911 treatise on painting, Concerning the Spiritual in Art.

**Tuesday, July 19:** What is a Motion Picture?
Reading: Skim "Cutting" and "Composition" from Joseph Mascelli (1965), *The Five C's of Cinematography*

**Wednesday, July 20:** Montage and Film Syntax

Reading: Sergei Eisenstein (1931), "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," and watch [this] (Links to an external site.) video.

*Recommended:* Stephen Hensley and Wayne Prince (1992), *The Kuleshov Effect: Recreating the Classic Experiment*

**Thursday, July 21:** The Dawning Digital Film Era


**Friday, July 22:** Video Games and Animation: Immersion and its Discontents


HW: -Final project proposal due (300-500 words)-

**Week 5: The Digital Turn**

**Monday, July 25:** The Digital Life of Images (and Image Manipulation)


**Tuesday, July 26:** Digital Photography, Aesthetics and Uses

Reading: José van Dijck (2008), "Digital photography: Communication, identity, memory"

**Wednesday, July 27:** New Surveillance Technologies

Reading: Simone Browne (2010), "Digital Epidermalization: Race, Identity, and Biometrics"; Shoshana Magnet and Tara Rodgers (2012), "Stripping for the State"

**Thursday, July 28:** The Social Visuality of Selfies

Recommended: Katie Warfield (2016), "Making the Cut: An Agential Realist Examination of Selfies and Touch"

Friday, July 29: Changing Advertising Strategies

Reading: Former Editor-in-Chief of Wired Chris Anderson's article on "long tail" marketing, which forms part of Chapter 1 of his book, The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More.

HW: -Second paper due-

Week 6: Ethics of Images

Monday, August 1: Collective Memory and the News Image


Tuesday, August 2: Visuality and Borders

Readings: Robyn Longhurst (2013), "Using Skype to mother: bodies, emotions, visuality, and screens"; Anna Ball (2012), "Impossible Intimacies: Towards a Visual Politics of "Touch" at the Israeli-Palestinian Border".

Wednesday, August 3: Design and Difference


Thursday, August 4: Post-9/11 Images


Friday, August 5: Last Day of Class

HW: -Final project due-

[Student presentations]
Information to Students with Disabilities
The University of Pennsylvania welcomes students with disabilities and provides reasonable accommodations to those who self-identify in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Academic accommodations, auxiliary services, and technology are made available to students who meet established documentation guidelines. Policies and procedures have been developed to provide students with as much independence as possible, to promote self-advocacy, and to provide students with disabilities the same exceptional opportunities available to all Penn students. Student Disabilities Services and the Office of Learning Resources are located at Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300. (The entrance is on Woodland Walk.) Phone: 215-573-9235 (voice); 215-746-6320 (TDD); web address is: http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/.

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What is plagiarism? Plagiarism occurs when you use another’s words, ideas, assertions, data or figures and do not acknowledge that you have done so. If you use the words, ideas, or phrasing of another person or from published material, you must:

• If citing directly, use quotation marks around the words and cite the source.
• If paraphrasing or summarizing, do so acceptably and cite the source.

Whether you quote directly or paraphrase the information, you must acknowledge your sources by citing them. In this way, you have the right to use another’s words by giving that person credit for the work he or she has done. An act of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for that assignment and depending upon the degree of severity, may result in a failing grade for the course. For more resources on how and when to cite sources, visit: http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_citingsources.html.