

**COMM 290: Visual Culture and Communication**

Summer 2019 Session 1: May 28 – July 3<sup>rd</sup>

MWF 5-7:30 PM

**Instructors:** Jasmine Erdener ([jasmine.erdener@asc.upenn.edu](mailto:jasmine.erdener@asc.upenn.edu))

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**Office Hours:** TBD

**Course Description:**

This course will introduce students to foundational aspects of visual communication theory and practice. Course readings will engage with critical questions of power, representation, and ways of seeing. Class discussions will unpack the power dynamics and visual regimes of race, gender, class, and citizenship. Historical case studies will supplement contemporary discussions of the visual. A key theme for this course will be creative forms of subversion and resistance—or, the “image politics” of visual communication. This course is grounded in the everyday and will draw upon current events and contemporary controversies. Students will become well-versed in the study and practice of visual communication, with the option of producing a final creative visual project or critical critique depending on student interests.

**Course Requirements:**

All course readings will be available on Canvas. The Case Studies for each day will be discussed in class.

Students will complete two short written assignments and a Final Project:

- **Assignment #1** – Assessing Visual Forms of Activism: 3-5 page double-spaced paper discussing a case study where visuals are used as a form of resistance and/or activism, due **June 7<sup>th</sup>**
- **Assignment #2** – Final Project Proposal: 3-5 page double spaced, due **June 14<sup>th</sup>**
- **In-class Presentations and Final Project** – The final project **must** be discussed with instructors during office hours before June 14<sup>th</sup>. The final project can be either a traditional scholarly paper (7-8 pages double-spaced) or a creative visual production which critically applies the readings and discussions from the class (e.g. short film, photo essay, painting, drawing, etc.), due **July 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Participation and attendance are mandatory.** Students must come prepared to discuss all readings, films, and assignments due that day.

Everyone is expected to participate in class discussions. Your grade for participation will not only reflect how often you contributed to our class discussions, but the degree to which your contributions were constructive and generative of further responses from your fellow classmates.

We expect that you will raise issues that you did not understand during your readings, ask questions of the group during discussions, and respectfully provide your opinion and thoughts.

**Grading Policy:**

Attendance and Participation: **20%**

Assignment #1 (Assessing Visual Forms of Activism): **20%**

Assignment #2 (Final Project Proposal): **20%**

In-class Presentations: **10%**

Final Project: **30%**

***\*Late assignments will not be accepted. Students will receive an incomplete (0%) upon failure to meet assignment deadlines.***

**Course Schedule:**

**Week 1: Reading the Pictures**

**CLASS 1:** May 29<sup>th</sup> – Welcome! What is visual communication? Why is it important?

**read:**

(1) Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2001), “Introduction,” in *Practices of Looking*, pgs. 1-10

(2) Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999), “Introduction,” in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, pgs. 1-7

**explore:** [Reading the Pictures](#)

**watch:** What is Visual Culture, overview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mas2QufyZI>

**CLASS 2:** May 31<sup>st</sup> – Iconography and Images

**read:** W. J. T. Mitchell (1984), “What is an Image?” *New Literary History* 15, 503-537

**Case study:** Video and photo manipulation, Jordan Peele’s fake Obama video

**Week 2: Power and Resistance**

**CLASS 3:** June 3<sup>rd</sup> – Images and Ideology

**read:** Sturken and Cartwright (2001), *Practice of Looking*, pgs. 21-42

**Case study:** Cold War propaganda (USSR/communist and U.S./capitalist) and resonances of this propaganda that continue today

**CLASS 4:** June 5<sup>th</sup> – Defining and Understanding Power Relations

**read:** Sturken and Cartwright (2001), *Practices of Looking*, pgs. 72-100

**Case study:** Memes and representations of female politicians in the United States

**CLASS 5:** June 7<sup>th</sup> – Image Politics

**read:**

(1) Jessica Kevin Michael DeLuca & Jennifer Peeples (2002), “From public sphere to public screen: democracy, activism, and the ‘violence’ of Seattle,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19:2, 125-151

(2) Rovisco and Veneti (2017), “Picturing Protest: visibility, visibility and the public sphere.” *Visual Communication*, Vol. 16(3) 271–277.

**explore:** [Center for Artistic Activism](#)

**Case study:** Iconic protest imagery and the French Yellow Vest protests/Occupy

**\*\*\*Assignment #1 due: Assessing Visual Forms of Activism\*\*\***

**Week 3: Ways of Looking and Seeing**

**CLASS 6:** June 10<sup>th</sup> – “The Gaze” and Gender

**read:** John Berger (1972), *Ways of Seeing*, chapters 2 & 3, pgs. 35-64

**Case study:** *Miss Representation* (2011) (we will watch clips in class)

**CLASS 7:** June 12<sup>th</sup> – Race and Representation

**read:**

(1) Stuart Hall (1997), “The spectacle of the ‘Other’,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, pp. 223-291.

(2) Lisa Nakamura (1995), “Race in/for Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet.” in *Works and Days*, Vol. 13, 181-193.

**Case Study:** Constructing representational avatars

The Sims Online (podcast episode): <https://www.gimletmedia.com/reply-all/129-autumn>

**CLASS 8:** June 14<sup>th</sup> – Surveillance, Panopticism and Biopolitics

**read:** Michel Foucault (1995), “Panopticism.” *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, pp. 195-230

**explore:**

<http://www.zachblas.info/works/facial-weaponization-suite/>

AND

<http://www.zachblas.info/works/body-horror/>

**Case study:** Surveillance in London: From Bentham’s Panopticon to Robert Peel’s police force (i.e. “Bobbies”) to CCTV

#### **Week 4: The Political Economy of Visual Communication**

**CLASS 9:** June 17<sup>th</sup> – Mechanical Reproduction

**read:**

(1) Walter Benjamin (1999), “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,” in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, pgs. 72-79.

(2) John Berger (1972), *Ways of Seeing*, Chapter 1, pgs. 7-34

**Case study:** Banksy’s commercial success, and the art auction in which he shredded his painting

**\*\*Assignment #2 due: Final Project Proposal\*\***

**CLASS 10:** June 19<sup>th</sup> – Capitalism and the Spectacle

**read:**

(1) Anselm Jappe (1999), *Guy Debord*, University of California Press; Introduction, pgs. 1-43.

(2) Joseph Dumit (2014), “Writing the Implosion,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 29, Issue 2, pp. 344–362

**explore:** <https://hyperallergic.com/313435/an-illustrated-guide-to-guy-debords-the-society-of-the-spectacle/>

**Case studies:** Social media practices: sharing on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; The Yes Men and Sacha Baron-Cohen's *Who is America?*

**CLASS 11:** June 21<sup>st</sup> – Hollywood, Globalization and Cultural Imperialism

**read:**

(1) Dallas Smythe, "Preface" in *Mass Communications and American Empire* (1971 edition).

(2) Joseph Dumit (2014), "Writing the Implosion," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 29, Issue 2, pp. 344–362

**Case study:** We will practice a writing implosion in class ✨

**Week 5: Memory, Photography, and Documentary Film**

**CLASS 12:** June 24<sup>th</sup> – Collective Memory

**read:** Barbie Zelizer (1998), *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 202-239

**Case study:** The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and Berlin's memorial landscape

**CLASS 13:** June 26<sup>th</sup> – The Myth of Photographic Truth

**read:**

(1) Lorna Roth (2009), "Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol 34: 111-136.

(2) Limor Shifman (2014), "The Cultural Logic of Photo-Based Meme Genres." *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol 13(3): 340-358.

**explore:** <https://www.everydayprojects.org/>

**Case studies:** Humans of New York, and surveillance memes

**CLASS 14:** June 28<sup>th</sup> – Documentary and Non-Fiction Film

**watch:** Watch a documentary film of your choosing. Write down observations pertaining to narrative, cinematography, audience, and message. Come to class prepared to discuss. Your written observations will be collected as part of your participation grade.

- Who is narrating the film and from what perspective?
- Who is the intended audience for the film?
- Is the film advocating for a cause?
- If so, how is this advocacy done (i.e. through narration, emotional appeal, composition, music, etc.)?
- Would you consider the film to be “biased”? If so, why? And if not, why not?
- Did you find the film interesting and entertaining? Why or why not?

**Case study:** *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) (we will watch clips in class)

### **Week 6: Galleries, Museums, and Final Presentations**

#### **CLASS 15:** July 1st – Visual Art and the Gallery

**visit:** Visit one of Philadelphia’s art museums and take note of how visual works are curated and displayed. Bring a journal with you as you explore the museum’s exhibitions and record your observations, thoughts, and reflections. Come to class prepared to discuss. Your written observations will be collected as part of your participation grade.

**Case study:** “The Art of the Steal,” documentary about the Barnes museum (we will view sections in class).

#### **CLASS 16:** July 3<sup>rd</sup> – Final Presentations

**\*\*\*Final Projects due\*\*\***

#### **Academic integrity**

Academic honesty is fundamental. Students who violate the University of Pennsylvania’s code of academic integrity will be sanctioned accordingly. Violations include plagiarizing all or part of a written assignment, fabricating sources or data, and submitting the same paper or work to multiple professors without prior permission.

Plagiarism occurs when you use another person’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:

- Use quotation marks around the words if you are citing directly, and cite the source.
- If paraphrasing or summarizing, do so acceptably and cite the source.

In either case, you must acknowledge your sources by citing them. This gives that person credit for the work they have done. An act of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the 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 the Penn Code of Academic Integrity: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

Purdue Online Writing Lab: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/resources.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html)

### **Accessibility**

We are available to discuss academic accommodations that you may require. Requests should be made during the first two weeks, except under unusual circumstances, to arrange reasonable accommodations.

The Office of Learning Resources at the Weingarten Learning Resources Center also offers individualized instruction and a variety of workshops. Staff provide free and confidential instruction in areas such as time/project management, academic reading and writing, exam preparation and test-taking strategies, and study strategies. The office is located in Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street, [www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc).

### **Contacting the Instructors**

We will reply to e-mails within 24 hours of receipt during the week, Monday through Friday. If you send an e-mail over the weekend, the earliest you should expect a reply is Monday, though you may receive a reply sooner.

**Electronics:** You may use laptops or tablets in this class to consult online readings or to take notes. However, any other use of these devices and the use of cell phones is strictly prohibited. Place your phone on mute before you come to class. Violating this policy will negatively impact your participation grade.