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**CMST 7969 Visual Culture Spring 2013**  
Tues/Thurs 1:30-2:50 Coates 203

Visual culture refers to practices of looking between viewers and images, screens, graphic interfaces, social scenarios, physical or media environments, and other viewers. These looking relations bear the weight of particular image archives, memories, aesthetic traditions, social histories, and performance repertoires. In the moment, practices of looking are highly contextual. A complex web of mediating factors may come to bear on a given visual event including but not limited to: visual technologies, cultural ideologies, discursive formations, institutional constraints, economic relationships, patterns of circulation, conventions of embodiment, and perceptual limits. To make matters more difficult, the visual cannot be separated from other sensual experiences any more than it can be said that particular media are exclusively visual. Given this set of variables, we will explore how subjectivity, meaning, value, power, fear, desire, care, and confusion emerge out of and function across particular visual events. The course is organized as a survey of current critical visual studies. In addition to reading recent work in the field, we will cover select aspects of its intellectual history. Finally, we will endeavor to bring the interdisciplinary field “home” by engaging with relevant scholarship in Communication Studies.

Required Texts:

Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

*Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*

(Book is available at the LSU bookstore; other readings are posted on Moodle)

Grading Scale:

"A" = 90-100; "B" = 80-89; "C" = 70-79; "D" = 60-69; and "F" = below 60

Grading System:

Participation	10%
Reading Responses	20%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Paper 3	30%

Notes on grading:

- A or √+ seminar performance is exceptional in all areas of assessment  
B or √ assigned work is completed at a graduate level, but not exceptional in any area  
C or √- seminar performance does not meet passing standards

If you want to know my perceptions of your seminar performance at any point in the semester, arrange an appointment to meet with me.

## ASSIGNMENTS

Participation:

You are expected to attend and participate fully in all course meetings. You are a member of the particular community we will form this semester. I expect you to treat your colleagues with respect and good humor, extending the benefit of the doubt and treating all questions as legitimate. If/ when you find it necessary to reference outside texts (those not assigned for this course), you should be prepared to briefly summarize key arguments or points for those of us who may not have read those texts.

Participate in class discussion: You should expect to speak regularly in class discussion. If discussion becomes unbalanced, I will call on quiet students and ask the more talkative members to hang back a bit.

Reading Responses: (1-2 pages): You will prepare four reading responses over the course of the semester. You will provide an oral summary or report of your written response in class. The responses should be concise and clearly grounded in a particular passage, argument, question, or application arising from the readings. While brief, the responses should not be casual but rather well thought out. These will inform our class discussion each week.

## ASSIGNMENTS (continued)

Paper 1 (5-7 pages): Write a longer critical response to the readings assigned for that week. This can be an expansion upon one of your shorter reading responses. You should choose the readings based upon your own research agenda for this course and beyond. For example, if you are interested in contributing to the scholarship in queer studies, then you should engage with the readings most relevant to those goals. Since the paper is due one week after class discussion, your work should reflect and build upon what we generated in class.

*Paper #1 due: the week after the readings to which you are responding.*

Paper 2 (5-7 pages): Methodological Essay (with an abstract of no more than 250 words). In this essay (from the French verb *essayer*, which means to make an effort to perform or accomplish something), you will attempt to combine and build upon your first reading

response and paper 1. First, adopt a working definition of visual culture and/or critical visual studies. Second, articulate the shared and/or split theoretical and methodological commitments of visual culture and a particular critical theory or relevant field of study [Marxism, critical race theory, feminist theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory, disability studies, American Studies, Performance Studies, etc.]. Support your claims: How do the scholars that you engaged with in your first reading response and paper #1 help you to understand the relationship between visual culture and [fill in the blank]? Third, discuss the possibilities and constraints of working at the intersections of visual culture and [fill in the blank]. What methodological tools and analytical resources might visual culture offer to the study of [fill in the blank]? How might visual culture be limited in what it can contribute to the study of [fill in the blank]?

*Paper #2 due: two weeks after you turn in paper #1.*

Paper 3 (15-20 pages): Pursue a case study in visual culture. Your case study should be located at the same intersection of fields of study and/or theoretical and methodological commitments that you explored in paper #2. You may choose an object of study that is more historically, politically, or ethically oriented. Prior to commencing work on your final project, you should submit a one-page proposal to me for approval. The proposal should indicate what sources and methods will be used; how the case study will be focused or delimited; and make the case for why it is a project worth doing.

*Paper #3 due: April 30; Proposals due April 21.*

## Schedule of Readings

### January 15: Virtual meet and greet

### January 20: What is visual culture?

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture"

Mieke Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture"

William J.T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture"

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Introduction: For Critical Visual Studies"

Recommended reading: *October* 77 (1996) "Visual Culture Questionnaire," Summer: 25-70.

### January 22: Iconology

W.J.T. Mitchell, "Vital Signs, Cloning Terror"

"What Do Pictures Want?"

"Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry"

Recommended reading: Janet Wolff, "After Cultural Theory: The Power of Images, the Lure of Immediacy"

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

### January 27: Ways of seeing/ Practices of looking

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, Introduction to *Practices of Looking*

Recommended reading: *Journal of Visual Culture: The Ways of Seeing* 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue 11: 2 (2012), Edited by Raiford Guins, Juliette Kristensen and Susan Pui San Lok.

January 29: No class meeting

February 3: No class meeting

### February 5: Ways of seeing/ Practices of looking (film spectatorship)

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Mary Ann Doane, "Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator"

Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance"

Bell Hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze"

Patricia White, "Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: *The Haunting*"

Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess"

Recommended reading: José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*

Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory"

**February 10: Ways of seeing/ Practices of looking (reception theory)**

Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"

Michel De Certeau, "Reading as Poaching"

Jan Radway, Excerpt from *Reading the Romance*

Henry Jenkins, "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching"

**February 12: Ways of seeing/ Practices of looking (reception theory continued)**

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Recommended reading: Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida*

February 17: Mardi Gras

**February 19: Performance studies and visual studies**

Shannon Jackson, "Performing Show and Tell: Disciplines of Visual Culture and Performance Studies"

Brian Rusted, "Performing the Visual North"

Rachel Hall, "Introduction: Rethinking Asymmetrical Transparency: Risk Management, the Aesthetics of Transparency, and the Global Politics of Mobility"

**February 24: Critical visual studies**

*VCR* (1-85)

**February 26: Expansions**

*VCR* (86-147)

**March 3: The civil contract of photography**

Ariella Azoulay, Selections from *The Civil Contract of Photography*

Lucaites and Hariman, Read and report back on the *No caption needed blog* (nocaptionneeded.com)

**March 5: War and violence**

*VCR* (149-219)

**March 10: War and violence (continued)**

*VCR* (220-243)

Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire"

Diana Taylor "War Games"

**March 12: Attention and visualizing economy**

*VCR* (245-295)

**March 17: Attention and visualizing economy (continued)**

VCR (296-327)

Kevin Deluca, Sean Lawson, and Ye Sun, "Occupy Wall Street on the Public Screens of Social Media: The Many Framings of the Birth of a Protest Movement"

**March 19: The body, coloniality and visuality**

VCR (329-398)

Amber Johnson, "Antoine Dodson and the (Mis) Appropriation of the Homo Coon: An Intersectional Approach to Performative Possibilities of Social Media," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30 (2013): 152-170.

**March 24: Histories and memories**

VCR (399-462)

Sara Ahmed, "The Affective Politics of Fear"

**March 26: Histories and memories (continued)**

VCR (463-495)

Joan Faber McAlister, Drake University, "Collecting the Gaze: Memory, Agency, and Kinship in the Women's Jail Museum, Johannesburg." *Women's Studies in Communication*, February 2013.

Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory"

#NotABugSplat.com

**March 31: (Post/de/neo)colonial visualities**

VCR (497-520)

**April 2: (Post/de/neo)colonial visualities (continued)**

Lisa Parks, "Digging into Google Earth"

Rachel Hall, "Opacity Effects: The Performance and Documentation of Terrorist Embodiment"

Recommended reading: Gil Hochberg, *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone*

Spring Break April 6-10

**April 14: Media and Mediations**

VCR (591-673)

Recommended reading: Mark Andrejevic, *The Work of Being Watched* and "The Work of Watching"

Rachel Dubrofsky, "Surveillance on Reality Television and Facebook: From Authenticity to Flowing Data"

Rachel Dubrofsky, "Therapeutics of the Self: Surveillance in the Service of the Therapeutic"

**April 16: Disability Studies and Visual Culture**

Excerpts from Rosmarie Garland-Thompson, *Staring: How We Look*

**April 21: Visual Rhetoric**

*Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*

**April 23: Visual Rhetoric (continued)**

*Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*

April 28: Student presentations

April 30: Student presentations