Introduction to Visual Culture

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Visual images pervade our everyday lives. We negotiate the world through visual culture, and the world itself is negotiated politically through visuality and visual images. This class is an introduction to the key issues of visual culture. It will examine the politics of images, the role that images play in producing cultural meaning, visuality and power relations, and how images are forms of visual communication. We will examine how images circulate through digital media, remakes, and viral networks, and the cross-fertilization of images between various social arenas, such as art, advertising, popular culture, news, science, entertainment media, video games, theme parks, and design. We will also examine the visual culture of New York in our discussion and assignments, in order to better “read” the visual images and visuality we live among and within.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Students are required to attend all classes, complete the readings for each class session, and complete all assignments. If you miss more than 4 classes without a reasonable excuse, your grade will be lowered.

You should make an effort to meet with me in person at some point in the semester. I am available for consultation via e-mail, in office hours, and by appointment.

READINGS:

Nicholas Mirzoeff, How to See the World (Basic, 2016)

Additional reading materials and assignments will be posted on NYU Classes.

ASSIGNMENTS:
There are 2 papers (1 short, 1 long), and two visual projects. The short papers will each be an analysis of a visual site, image, text, etc. The first visual project will be a mobile phone image exchange. These will be presented in class Weeks 6-7. The second visual project will require you to create a presentation (minimum of the equivalent of 20 powerpoint slides) that deploys
images (and not text) to narrate its argument. These will be presented to the class throughout the second half of the semester (Weeks 8-15). The final paper will be a research paper on a topic related to visual culture, 8-10 pages.

These assignments will be worth the following portion of your grade:
Short paper  20% each  
First visual project  15%  
Participation 20%  
Second visual project  15%  
Long paper 30%

Type and double-space your written work and number your pages. I recommend you use Chicago style for your citations; the short version is here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. If you submit a paper via e-mail, please put your name in the file name and on each numbered page.

GRADING AND EVALUATION
You are responsible for the material covered in lecture and in the reading. You will be evaluated on (1) the level of your engagement with the class materials (as evidenced in your written work and class participation) (2) your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms (3) and your ability to creatively explore these theories and methodologies. All of your written work will be graded on two primary evaluative scales (1) how well it demonstrates an understanding of the theories and methodologies of the class (2) how well it structures and articulates its argument.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams, making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours. You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

When taking this class, you enter into a contract that states that all the work you are turning in has been your own and no one else’s, and that you have not turned in any work for which you have received credit in another class, and that you have properly cited other people’s work and ideas. Do not take this policy lightly! Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade in the course. If you have questions about these policies, or proper citation of scholarship, please come speak with me in person. (see http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)

STUDENT RESOURCES
Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities (http://www.nyu.edu/csd/)
Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at https://nyu.mywconline.com/ or just walk-in.
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1:

Mon Jan. 22—Introduction: What is Visual Culture?

Wed Jan. 24—Images Making Meaning
Reading: *Practices of Looking*, Introduction and Chapter 1

Week 2:

Jan. 29—Ideology and Visuality
Reading: *How to See the World*, Introduction and Chapter 2, How We Think About Seeing *Practices of Looking*, pp. 22-24, 74-78

Jan. 31—Viewers Making Meaning
Reading: *Practices of Looking*, Chapter 2: Viewers Make Meaning, pp. 51-60, 74-86

PAPER 1 ASSIGNMENT GIVEN

Week 3:

Feb. 5—Perspective
Reading: *Practices of Looking*, Chapter 4: Realism and Perspective

Feb. 7—Modernity and New Ways of Seeing
Reading: *How to See the World*, pp. 89-103, 179-185
Recommended: Anne Friedberg, “The Mobilized and Virtual Gaze in Modernity”
Week 4:

Feb. 12— Panopticism and the Colonial Gaze
Reading:
Practices of Looking, pp. 103-133
Michel Foucault, “Panopticism”
Recommended:
Nicholas Mirzoeff, The Right to Look, Introduction

PAPER 1 DUE
ASSIGNMENTS GIVEN AND PROJECTS BEGIN ON MOBILE PHONE PHOTO EXCHANGE

Feb. 14— Mechanical Reproduction and Image as Politics
Reading:
Practices of Looking, pp. 185-198
Walter Benjamin, “The Age of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (excerpt)

Week 5:

Feb. 19—No class, Presidents Day holiday

Feb. 21— Ownership and Copyright
Reading:
Practices of Looking, pp. 198-215

Week 6:

Feb. 26— The Photograph from Polaroid to the iPhone
Reading:
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/671206

Feb. 28— Image Icons
Reading:
Practices of Looking, pp. 41-48
Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, No Caption Needed, (excerpt)

MOBILE PHONE PHOTO EXCHANGES SHARED IN CLASS WEEKS 6-7.
Week 7:

March 5—Making Sense of Selfies
Reading:
*How to See the World*, Chapter 1: How to See Yourself
Recommended:
Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym, “What Does the Selfie Say?”

March 7—The Culture of Irony and Postmodernism
Reading:
*Practices of Looking*, Chapter 8: Postmodernism

SPRING BREAK—March 12-16

Week 8:

March 19—Who Gets to Picture Race?
Reading:
Essays on Dana Schutz painting *Open Casket* controversy from Hyperallergic
Carol Becker, “Kara Walker”

March 21—Taboo Images and Images of Death
Reading:
Jennifer Malkowski, *Dying in Full Detail* (excerpt)
Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die* (excerpt)

Week 9:

March 26—Visual Classification and Police Pictures
Reading:
*Practices of Looking*, pp. 349-357
Recommended:
Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive”

March 28—Surveillance
Reading:
Simone Browne, *Dark Matters* Introduction and Chapter 2
Week 10:

April 2—Black Lives Matter and the Counter Surveillance
Reading:
Nicholas Mirzoeff, “How Ferguson and #Blacklivesmatter Taught Us Not to Look Away,”
Recommended:

April 4— War and Visuality
Reading:
*How to See the World*, Chapter 3: The World of War

SUBMIT TOPICS FOR FINAL PAPERS

Week 11:

April 9— The Aerial Gaze
Reading:
Caren Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths*, Introduction

April 11— Drone Visions
Reading:
Caren Kaplan, “Drone-a Rama: Troubling the Temporal and Spatial Logics of Distance Warfare”
Thomas Stubblefield, “In Pursuit of Other Networks: Drone Art and Accelerationist Aesthetics”

Week 12:

April 16— Aesthetics and Collecting
Reading:
*Practices of Looking*, pp. 60-74
James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture”
Recommended:
Pierre Bourdieu, “Distinction”

April 18— Globalization of Art and Museum Culture
Reading:
*Practices of Looking*, pp. 406-415
Saloni Mathur, “Museums and Globalization”
Week 13:

April 23—Defining Visual Activism
Reading:
Practices of Looking, pp. 402-406, 415-420
How to See the World, Chapter 7: Changing the World, and Afterword: Visual Activism

April 25—Strategies of Countervisuality: A History
Reading:
Douglas Crimp, AIDSDemoGraphics (excerpt)
Nato Thompson, Seeing Power (excerpt)
Nicholas Mirzoeff, “The Division of the Sensible” from Introduction to Visual Culture

Week 14:

April 30—Visual Cultures of Occupy
Reading:
Yates McKee, Strike Art, Introduction and Chapter 3
Recommended:
Alison Trope and Lana Swartz, “The Visual Culture of Occupy”

May 2—Climate Change Activism
Reading:
How to See the World, Chapter 6: The Changing World
Yates McKee, Strike Art, Chapter 4: Climate Justice
Recommended:
Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the Anthropocene”

Week 15:

May 7—Conclusion

FINAL PAPERS DUE