

Introduction to Visual Culture
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
New York University
MCC-UE 1412 Spring 2020



Instructor and Course Information

- Prof. Marita Sturken
- M/W 11:00-12:15. Global Center 475
- Office hours: Wed. 2-4 and by appointment, 239 Greene St. room 814
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Course Description

Visual images pervade our everyday lives. We negotiate the world through visual culture, and the world itself is negotiated politically through visibility 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, visibility 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 visibility 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.

This is a laptop free class, you will need to take notes by hand. Any student with special permission to use a laptop can see me individually.

Readings/Texts

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Third Edition) (Oxford University Press, 2018)

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

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

There are some recommended readings listed on the syllabus and in Resources on NYU Classes, which you may want to read if the topic interests you further and which should be useful to you in writing your papers.

Assignments

The assignments for this class will consist of participation in a class blog, two visual projects, and a final paper. Prompts for blog posts will be sent twice a week, and you will be expected to blog at least twice a week. 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 8-11). The final paper will be a research paper on a topic related to visual culture, 10-12 pages.

These assignments will be worth the following portion of your grade:

First visual project 15%

Second visual project 15%

Final paper 30%

Blog participation 30%

Class participation 10%

Please 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 send me a document via email, please put your name in the file name and on each numbered page.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism

http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to 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.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; report from other's oral work; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

I am obligated to report cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty for appropriate disciplinary action.

Student Resources

- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**
Students requesting reasonable accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to register with the Moses Center for students with Disabilities. You can begin the registration process by completing [Moses Center Online Intake](#). Once completed, a Disability Specialist will be in contact with you. Students requiring services are strongly encouraged to register prior to the upcoming semester or as early as possible during the semester to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations.
- NYU Writing Center (Washington Square): 411 Lafayette, 4th Floor. Schedule an appointment online at <https://nyu.mywconline.com> or just walk-in.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1:

Mon Jan. 27—Introduction: What is Visual Culture?

Wed Jan. 29— Images Making Meaning, Codes and Signification

Reading:

Practices of Looking, Introduction and pp. 13-21, 24-37

Week 2:

Feb. 3— Ideology and Visuality

Reading:

How to See the World, Introduction and Chapter 2: How We Think About Seeing
Practices of Looking, pp. 22-24, 37-41, 74-78

Feb. 5—Viewers Making Meaning

Reading:

Practices of Looking, Chapter 2: Viewers Make Meaning, pp. 51-60, 74-86

Recommended:

W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures Want?"

Week 3:

Feb. 10— Perspective

Reading:

Practices of Looking, Chapter 4: Realism and Perspective

Feb. 12—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. 17— No Class, Presidents Day

Feb. 19— Panopticism and the Colonial Gaze

Reading:

Practices of Looking, pp. 103-133
Michel Foucault, "Panopticism"

Recommended:

Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, Introduction

ASSIGNMENTS GIVEN AND PROJECTS BEGIN ON MOBILE PHONE PHOTO EXCHANGE

Week 5:

Feb. 24— 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)

Feb. 26— Photography and its Origins

Reading:

Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning With Desire*, excerpt

Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave" from *On Photography*

Week 6:

March 2— The Snapshot from Polaroid to the iPhone

Marita Sturken, "Advertising and the Rise of Amateur Photography: From Kodak and Polaroid to the Digital Image"

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/671206>

March 4— Moving Image Culture from Cinema to TV

Reading:

David Bordwell, "Film Form"

Lynn Spigel, "Suburban Home Companion"

MOBILE PHONE PHOTO EXCHANGES SHARED IN CLASS WEEKS 6-7

Week 7:

March 9— Image Icons

Reading:

Practices of Looking, pp. 41-48

Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, Chapter 1

March 11— Portrait and Self-Portrait Photography

Reading:

How to See the World, Chapter 1: How to See Yourself

Allison Meier, "Why Frederick Douglass was the Most Photographed 19th Century American"

<https://hyperallergic.com/356148/frederick-douglass-most-photographed-19th-century-american/>

Hannah Natanson, Elizabeth Warren selfies

Recommended:

Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym, "What Does the Selfie Say?"

Alice Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy"

SPRING BREAK—March 16-20

Week 8:

March 23— Photography and Memory: Family Pictures and School Photos

Reading:

Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, Introduction

Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time*, excerpt

Nicole Fleetwood, "Posing in Prison"

March 25— Ownership and Copyright

Reading:

Practices of Looking, pp. 198-215

VISUAL PROJECTS SHARED IN CLASS WEEKS 6-7

Week 9:

March 30— The Culture of Irony and Postmodernism

Reading:

Practices of Looking, Chapter 8: Postmodernism

April 1—Aesthetics and Collecting

Reading:

Practices of Looking, pp. 60-74

James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture"

Recommended:

Pierre Bourdieu, "Distinction"

Week 10:

April 6—Globalization of Art and Museum Culture

Reading:

Practices of Looking, pp. 406-415

Saloni Mathur, "Museums and Globalization"

April 8—Visual Classification and Police Pictures

Reading:

Practices of Looking, pp. 349-357

Recommended:

Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive"

SUBMIT TOPICS FOR FINAL PAPERS

Week 11:

April 13—Surveillance and Counter-Surveillance

Reading:

Simone Browne, *Dark Matters* Introduction and Chapter 2

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "How Ferguson and #Blacklivesmatter Taught Us Not to Look Away,"

<https://theconversation.com/how-ferguson-and-blacklivesmatter-taught-us-not-to-look-away-45815>

April 15— Taboo Images and Images of Death

Reading:

Jennifer Malkowski, *Dying in Full Detail* (excerpt)

Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die* (excerpt)

Week 12:

April 20— Picturing Histories of Slavery

Reading:

Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, excerpt

April 22— Who Gets to Picture Race?

Reading:

Essays on Dana Schutz painting *Open Casket* controversy from Hyperallergic
Carol Becker, “Kara Walker”

Week 13:

April 27— War and Visuality

Reading:

How to See the World, Chapter 3: The World of War

April 29— Drones and the Aerial Gaze

Reading:

Caren Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths*, Introduction

Recommended:

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 14:

May 4— Strategies of Countervisuality: 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

Recommended:

Douglas Crimp, AIDS Demo Graphics (excerpt)

Nicholas Mirzoeff, “The Division of the Sensible” from *Introduction to Visual Culture*

May 6—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 11—Conclusion

FINAL PAPERS DUE