

Visual Culture and Society  
NCLC 245 001  
4 credits, 1 EL credit  
Fall 2005  
Robinson B105  
MW 10:30-12:20

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Office Hours: Mon/Wed 1–2 p.m.  
(and by appointment)

<http://mason.gmu.edu/~sandrew3/classes/nclc245.05/index.htm>

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The course will focus on Visual Culture and Society. This means that it will discuss the development of “the visual” in contemporary culture and society: in traditional art, in photography, in advertising and public relations, in film and television, and in the global electronic media. These are historical developments that we will attempt to place in their proper context in order to better understand the role they play.

Towards this end, we will also be thoroughly engaged in exploring various theories and concepts that have been put forward to help explain and understand these changes. Using an interdisciplinary approach, we will consider ideas originally put forward in Visual Cultural Studies, Sociology, Economics, Communication, Art History, and many others. Some of these concepts will be helpful to you; others will not: it will be your job to evaluate them and come up with reasoned arguments either way.

The hands-on experience of this course will include working with contemporary visual media tools, such as computer graphics. The software used will primarily be Adobe and whatever tool you use for blogging. Individual and group experimentation with these media will be encouraged.

Students’ experiential learning credits will be earned through 45 hours of out-of-class work, primarily through individual and group critical exercises, but also through class field trips and individual field study. Students will produce mid-term and final experiential learning papers that capture observations of field studies and that apply the theory learned in class.

Because of its breadth, the course will touch on all of the nine competencies in one way or another. For anyone unfamiliar with the competencies, they are: Communication, Critical thinking, Strategic problem solving, Valuing, Aesthetic awareness, Information technology, Global understanding, Effective citizenship, Group interaction. Be aware of which you are being challenged or enhancing.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Course reader packets available in Johnson Center Bookstore.

## **REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS**

- Active George Mason University MEMO email account
- Active web page (at least one per group)
- Active blog and access to WebCT page

## **COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

A primary objective of this course is for students to understand the history of the emergence of visual culture studies as an interdisciplinary field, its relation to changes in forms of representation and the role of visuality in Western Societies, and to understand the major theoretical terms used to study visual culture. Students will demonstrate their mastery of this material by:

- Correctly identifying the major theories/theorists associated with visual culture studies via in-class quizzes and writings.
- Participating in class discussion focused on analyzing and responding to a wide variety of visual materials, including film, television, advertising, traditional art and digital art.
- Composing integrative essays successfully using key theoretical terms covered in the text and in-class discussions and presentations.

- Evaluating your experience as a consumer of images and a citizen in a public sphere dominated by the visual through experiential learning exercises.
- Working collaboratively on a group project illustrating application of visual culture theory to a visual medium.
- Assembling a course portfolio including reflective writing highlighting the major ideas from the course that the student found most useful to his or her continuing interest in visual culture studies.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION**

This course is designed to help you develop critical thinking and reading skills, oral and written communications skills, group interaction skills and information technology skills. Consistent class attendance is expected of all students. I expect you to carefully read all assignments, and often, we will have in-class writing assignments or quizzes. **These in-class assignments may not be made up.**

As is true of all New Century College learning communities, your active engagement in all stages of the learning process is expected. I expect you to meet all deadlines for turning in assignments.

- Papers and other assignments turned in after the beginning of class on the due date will be *marked down one letter grade per day*.
- No work that is more than one week late will be accepted without a valid written medical excuse or notice of death in the family.
- The evaluation process will take place through written feedback, interaction in peer groups and conversations with me.

### **Grades for the course will be determined from the following assignments:**

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| • Glossary and Reflection Blog                  | 100 points                         |
| • Participation, in-class assignments/quizzes   | 100 points                         |
| • Experiential Learning Essay                   | 100 points                         |
| • Two 5-page integrative essays                 | 200 points                         |
| • Group work                                    |                                    |
| – One group project w/presentation (technology) | 200 points                         |
| – Group WebCT Journal Assignments               | 50 points (2 @ 25 points)          |
| – Group article presentations                   | 50 points (2 @ 25 points)          |
| • Individual course portfolio                   | 200 points, (w/creative component) |

## **GUIDELINES FOR FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

Students must word process all formal writing assignments, using a 12-point font (no Courier, Courier New, or other overly wide fonts) printed on white bond paper. Papers should have 1-inch left and right margins and 1-inch top and bottom margins. Turn in the writing assignments in a folder with side pockets. Pre-writing, outlines, drafts and peer reviews should be placed in the side pockets and turned in with the final draft. Guidelines for blog and EL exercises will be found on the webpage.

Each of the formal essays will go through a peer review during the class period before the final draft is due. Students are expected to be present for the peer reviews, and all drafts and comments are to be turned in with the final draft. If you do not turn in a draft of your essay, your grade will be lowered one-half a letter grade. If you do not turn in peer reviews of your draft, the essay will be lowered another one-half letter grade.

I treat assignments as they would be treated in the working world. No supervisor will tolerate an employee turning in an expected report a day late or failing to present an oral presentation on the date anticipated. Meeting deadlines is an important key to success as a student and as a professional in the working world. Failure to turn in portions of the assignment will result in a minimum one letter-grade reduction in your final score for the assignment. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date. A paper or assignment will be considered “late” if it is not turned in at the beginning of class on the date it is due. Papers and assignments will receive a one letter-grade penalty for each day they are turned in late. I do allow one “**life happens:**” that is, you may turn in one assignment late (up to 3 days) with no late penalty. To use your “life happens,” you **MUST** email me **BEFORE** class on the day the assignment is due. When you turn in your assignment, be sure to write “life happens” on the top of the paper. The life happens rule does not apply to the final portfolio. No extensions will be granted for the portfolio.

## ONLINE WRITING HELP

You will find valuable help for your writing in the Online Writing Guide for Integrative Studies Students at <http://classweb.gmu.edu/nccwg/>. You will also find helpful resources on Virginia Montecino's website: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/resources.htm>

## IMPORTANT REMINDER:

**Save all work.** That means save soft on your computer and on a back-up diskette. Also, save hard copies of your drafts, source material and final papers. You will need all of that work for your final portfolio. I do not accept excuses for lost work—even when printers are out of cartridges or computers crash. Always plan for the worst and hope for the best when it comes to your technology.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND COURSE EXPECTATIONS

### ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance and active participation are essential for success in this course. Some of your work involves collaboration with your peers, and your absence or tardiness will affect your progress and that of your group. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to inform your group members and professor before the class period. You are responsible for all work that is done in class. Whether you can make up work will depend on the assignment and the circumstances. However, in-class quizzes and writing assignments cannot be made up. Groups should make copies of materials and handouts for any member who is not present. If an emergency prevents attendance, be sure to contact your group to find out what you missed during that class period.

### ACADEMIC CITIZENSHIP AND CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

I expect students to take responsibility for their own learning and their own learning environments. I expect students to come to class prepared to take part and even to facilitate class discussion and to support your assertions and theories with evidence from reading and research.

### HONOR CODE

I take the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog, very seriously. It is your responsibility to study it carefully and to ask for further explanation of any part you do not understand. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual for this course be the wholly original product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. The honor code does not prohibit you from working collaboratively on group products. The products produced by your peer groups will reflect the group's collective ideas. As university faculty members, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously.

Two issues that are important to understand are plagiarism and how to avoid it and appropriate collaboration.

**Plagiarism** means using ideas, opinions, factual information, or language from a source without giving that source appropriate credit. Plagiarism is equivalent to intellectual robbery. Student writers are sometimes confused as to what should be cited. **In addition to direct quotations, paraphrasing and summaries of opinions or factual information not formerly known to the writer must also be cited. The exception to this rule is information termed general knowledge—in other words, information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so it is wise to remember the adage, "When in doubt, cite."**

In academic work, credit should generally be given in an appropriate format (for example, the systems created by the Modern Language Association—MLA—or the American Psychological Association—APA. You should own a good grammar or stylebook manual and should use it when making citations.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is plagiarism, a very serious offense. It also really upsets me. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and

punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format.

**Appropriate collaboration** is different from plagiarism. In an academic or work setting, some projects are designed to be completed by a group. With collaborative work, names of all the participants should appear on the work. If a group member does not participate in completing the project, his or her name should not appear on the project. Other assignments are designed to be completed independently. In this case, you may discuss your ideas with others and receive feedback from peers on drafts of projects. However, it is not appropriate to turn your papers over to someone else to finish or to revise for you.

You are responsible for making certain there is no question the work you turn in is your own. If your name appears on an assignment, I have a right to expect that you have done the work yourself—fully, independently, and originally for this class. Four fundamental principles to follow at all times are:

- All work submitted with your name on it must be your own
- When using the work or ideas of others, including your fellow students, you must give appropriate credit.
- If you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification.
- Additionally, the re-use of papers, presentations, etc., from another course, is not appropriate. In every NCC course, faculty expect that the work that is submitted has been done only for that class.

No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or a member of the Counseling Center staff.

### **ELECTRONIC ETIQUETTE**

GMU provides email and access to the Internet to support the educational mission of the university. Use of these facilities is defined as a privilege, which means that access can be denied in the case of inappropriate use (such as sending of chain letters, harassment of any kind, etc.) Sometimes the nature of electronic communication and the feeling of invisibility one may have when using email may encourage disrespectful behavior. If you say something rude or offensive, even unintentionally, your message will be preserved permanently in writing and can easily be forwarded to a much larger audience (including faculty and prospective employers). Electronic communication is more public than a conversation between friends in the hallway. Also, please remember the purpose of class list-serves and restrict their use to material appropriate to be shared in class.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you have a learning difference, please inform me at the beginning of the semester. You will need to contact the Disability Resource Center and supply me with a faculty contact sheet from that office explaining your learning difference so that I can adjust your course requirements accordingly.

### **COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

New Century College is an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and strives to have faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, class, linguistic background, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or physical ability.

### **WRITING CENTER**

Occasionally, I will refer students to the Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, on-line and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis. I take these referrals very seriously, so if I have referred you to the Writing Center, I will expect a report from your Writing Center tutor on your progress.

### **COMPUTER SUPPORT**

Each student in this class should obtain a computer account on the Mason cluster. For privacy reasons GMU will only allow me to correspond with you using a “@gmu.edu” account. I will use email for

collaborative work and peer review in this class. It is your responsibility to check your email frequently, because adjustments to the course syllabus, class discussions and some assignments will be handled via email. You need to make sure this account is active and check it regularly.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE...CHECK WEBSITE AND GMU E-MAIL FOR UPDATES**

Date	Daily Topic	Readings	Assignments
m8/29	Introductions and introduction to course. Film: Berger, <i>Ways of Seeing</i>		
w8/31	What is Visual Culture?	S&C: TOC,, Introduction, 1-16	Bring in visual image to introduce yourself to the class
m9/5	<b>No Class: Memorial Day</b>		
w9/7	Linguistics, Semiotics, and Structuralism	S&C: pp 10-44;, <a href="#">Barthes (mirror)</a>	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a> ; Look at Group Project possibilities, decide which project you want to do; have a back up in mind.
m9/12	Images Power and Politics, Film: <i>Triumph of the Will</i>	S&C: pp 45-71	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
w9/14	Viewers Make Meaning Film: <i>The Japanese Version</i>	Reader: Hall	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m9/19	Spectatorship and representation, Film: <i>Killing us softly</i>	S&C: 72-93, <a href="#">Mulvey</a>	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
w9/21	Discourse, Power and Knowledge Film: <i>True Meaning of Pictures</i>	S&C: 93-108 , Reader: Foucault	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m9/26	Politics of representation Ctnd. , Film: <i>Ethnic Notions</i>	Reader: McClintock	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a> ; Steps 1-4 for "Developing Story" posted to blog
w9/28	Reproduction and Visual Technologies	S&C:109-130, <a href="#">Benjamin</a>	Group Journal posted to <a href="#">WebCT</a> by Sunday, 10/2, 9:00p
m10/3	Reproduction and Visual Technologies, , Workshop: Photoshop	S&C: 130-150 , Reader: Postman	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
w10/5	Mass Media and the Public Sphere	S&C: 151-188	Look at Stephen's Guide to Logical Fallacies <a href="http://www.datanation.com/fallacies/index.htm">http://www.datanation.com/fallacies/index.htm</a> bring in an advertisement that uses one or more of these fallacies and be prepared to discuss it.
t10/11	<b>Columbus Day Holiday Monday10/10: Monday classes meet Tuesday.</b> Film: <i>Century of the Self</i>		2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a> ; Draft of <a href="#">Essay #1</a> due in class, 10/11, for peer review session
w10/12	Culture Industry and the Public Sphere	<a href="#">Adorno</a>	<a href="#">Essay #1</a> Due at 10:30a, 10/12

m10/17	Labor, Commodities, and "Commodity Fetishism"	S&C: 189-203, <a href="#">Capital, Vol I, Ch. 1</a> ; Sec. <a href="#">1</a> , <a href="#">2</a> and <a href="#">4</a> Suggested reading: Adam Smith from Wealth of Nations on <a href="#">Commodities</a> for comparison	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
w10/19	Consumer Culture and the Manufacturing of Desire Film: <i>Merchants of Cool</i>	S&C:203-236,	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m10/24	Modernism and Visual Culture Film: <i>Man with a Movie Camera</i>	S&C:237-251	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
w10/26	Postmodernism and Popular Culture	S&C: 251-278, <a href="#">Baudrillard</a> ; Suggested: <a href="#">Debord</a>	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m10/31	Scientific Looking	S&C: 279-290, Reader: Bourdieu	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a> ; <a href="#">EL papers</a> due 10/31 10:30a
w11/2	Scientific Looking, cntd., Clips: <a href="#">Silent Scream</a> ; <i>Extreme Makeover</i>	S&C: 291-314, Reader: Hartouni; Balsamo	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m11/7	Global Flow of Visual Culture Film: <a href="#">Control Room</a>	S&C: 315-332 , Reader: Shohat	Group Journal posted to <a href="#">WebCT</a> by Sunday, 11/6 9:00p
w11/9	Internet and Global Media	S&C: 333-348	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m11/14	Digital Media and Intellectual Property , Film: <i>No Logo</i>	<a href="#">Hacker's Manifesto</a> , <a href="#">Manifesto 2.0</a> (Wark)	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
w11/16	Intellectual Property	Lessig, Free Culture	2 words in <a href="#">Glossary</a>
m11/21	Peer review of Essay #2		<a href="#">Draft Essay #2</a> due in class for Peer Review
w11/23	Thanksgiving; no class		
m11/28	Wrap up and Course evaluations		<a href="#">Essay #2</a> Due 10:30a 11/28
w11/30	No Class-work on Group Projects		
m12/5	Group Project Presentations		
w12/7	Group Project Presentations		
w12/14	<b>Portfolio Due, 12:00 p.m.</b>		