



“the decisive moment, it is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which gives that event its proper expression.” henri cartier-bresson

JRNL 3112

CONCEPTS IN VISUAL CULTURE

Course Description

In the contemporary communication landscape, the visual has overwhelmed the verbal. People develop online avatars, post profile pictures on Facebook, share images on YouTube and Flickr, and watch high-definition images on a smorgasbord of channels (even over-the-air broadcasters offer multiple viewing options due to new digital capabilities). Scholars argue that the individual perceives the visual at a different and more basic level than language. Visual Culture offers students the framework to help interpret those visual messages,

Key concepts we will address in the class include:

- Photographic “truths”
- Aesthetics
- Spectatorship
- Perspective
- Mass Media
- Commodity Culture
- Reflexivity
- Globalization and the Visual

By the end of the term, students will demonstrate advanced visual literacy, through the creation of a research paper or project focusing on a specific issue related to mediation of the visual in modern culture. They will be able to engage in practices of looking, and show a mastery of the key concepts outlined above.



While the course builds off of concepts introduced in Creativity and Concepts, it does not require the courses as a prerequisite.

The course discussions build off of the weekly readings and you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss key concepts. If something is confusing or just sounds weird, don't be afraid to bring it up in class. It's likely other students have the same questions. You are strongly encouraged to use the course readings as some of the academic sources for your final paper/project.

Course meets Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9-9:50am Humanities 1B90

Professor and Office Hours

Dr. Kathleen M. Ryan

Armory 1B35

303-705-2940

kathleen.ryan@colorado.edu

Office Hours: Monday 10:00-noon and by appointment.

Course Materials

REQUIRED READINGS

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

Bright, Susan and van Erp, Hedy. 2019. *Photography Decoded*. London: Ilex.

Course Assignments

Because you are developing advanced visual literacy skills this term, traditional assessment methods such as exams are appropriate to demonstrate your knowledge. Instead, you will work on a term-long project, with several components contributing to your final grade. You are also expected to do several other minor assignments over the course the term.

FINAL PAPER/PROJECT

In your final project, you will conduct either:

- a detailed and sustained analysis of one visual artifact (or a series of related artifacts) from any time period, in which you also assess your own psychic and perceptual investment in the object(s);
- an historical comparison of two or more related visual artifacts, where you place the items historically and offer analyses of how time transforms the reception of the items; or
- a creative project illustrating your understanding of one aspect of visual culture.

The project should not only be based on theories discussed in the course but also material from other visual scholars as appropriate. The idea isn't to simply give a synopsis of the various theories but rather to find those which will best help you to understand your object of analysis (or your creative project).

If it is a research paper, it should follow the format of a traditional academic journal essay, depending upon discipline. Academic essays for the social sciences, including communication, typically follow the format outlined below. Academic essays for the humanities include all of the elements below, but weave the analysis throughout the paper. The paper should be between 8-12 pages, not including references and illustrations.



You should include illustrations of the artifact you are analyzing as well as any other items which help to cast light upon your analysis. A paper would take the following format:

- **ABSTRACT:** In 250 words (approximately) you should summarize your research paper and its findings. This should not be the same as your extended abstract. If it is a research paper, in the last sentence, you should identify which academic journal you think might be an appropriate venue for your essay (this will also tell me - and you - the citation style you should be using)
- **INTRODUCTION:** In this segment, you should give a brief (2-3 paragraph) introduction to your paper, setting out your basic argument and what you will be analyzing in the course of the paper. This differs from the abstract in that it is more descriptive and is designed to draw the reader into the meat of your paper. It's often helpful to have a short description of your visual artifact in this section.
- **LITERATURE REVIEW:** This section summarizes what past researchers have said about your topic. It should be 2-3 pages long. It ends with your research question.
- **METHODS:** This section describes what material you are analyzing and how you will be applying the theories used by past researchers. It should be 1 page long.
- **FINDINGS/DISCUSSION:** In this section you apply your theory to your visual artifact. What have you discovered? How does it compare to past research? Remember this paper should include a reflexive element, i.e. how you as a researcher react to this particular artifact. This section should be 3-5 pages.
- **CONCLUSION:** This section not only offers your paper's conclusion, emphasizing the strength of the research, but should also include what is missing (if appropriate). Saying what is missing isn't a sign of weakness, but shows that you as a researcher understand that you can't possibly look at every element related to this topic. What additional research can be done, if any, and how does your research contribute to scholarly knowledge. 1-2 pages.
- **PROPERLY CITE YOUR SOURCES:** Your sources should be cited appropriately according to the guidelines for your journal. Most communication journals use APA, but other disciplines use Chicago or MLA; some prefer in-text citations, while others demand footnotes or endnotes. Make sure your citation choice fits your journal's format.
- **YOUR PAPER SHOULD FOLLOW CERTAIN GUIDELINES.** Use appropriate grammar and spelling. Your writing should be clear and easily understood, written in standard English. Your paper should be double spaced, with one inch margins using 12 point type. At the top of the first page of your paper you should have the paper's title and your name, centered. Each subsequent page should have a "running head" in the upper right side of the page (in the header section) which consists of your last name, the first two to three words of your title, and the page number.

A *creative project* must demonstrate evidence of an equivalent amount of work and research. Its format can be more flexible (scrapbook, short film, image-based blog, visual artwork, ???). It will need to illustrate an understanding of the visual theories discussed in class. It should include a short "artist's statement" where you spend 2-3 pages discussing how your creative approach was influenced by visual theories discussed in class. Any creative project must be discussed with and approved by the professor and should fully incorporate each of the elements from the research paper, above. Keep in mind that while creative projects are welcomed, the class is not designed to provide the technical support found in typical production, studio or technology courses. In other words, if you choose a project, please make sure you have the chops to do it (or know someone who can help you out).



Note: Proofread your work! Any papers that have multiple grammatical or spelling errors will be downgraded as follows:

- 0-5 errors: no downgrade
- 5-10 errors: one full grade
- 10-15 errors: two full grades
- 15+: automatic F. 20 or more: F

Electronic submissions are encouraged, if appropriate. The project is due at the end of the final exam period, 4pm, December 18. Late assignments will not be accepted.

MEETING WITH INSTRUCTOR

You will meet with the professor twice during the term for a one-on-one discussion of your final project. The first meeting is by the end of Week 4, where you will discuss possible topics. You aren't expected to have your entire project planned by the meeting, but you should have an idea of what approach you would like to take and a general topic of research.

The second meeting will be held during Week 13. At this point, it is expected that your project will be fully developed and your research/creative practice well underway. We can talk about potential problems leading up to your in-class presentation and handing in the final project.

ABSTRACT

By the end of Week 5, you will turn in an abstract (250-300 words) outlining your final paper or project (online). The abstract should discuss what you will be looking at this term, what drew them to the artifact or project, and the theoretical/creative tools they hope to use to analyze it. I fully expect your approach and potentially even the artifact will change, and that you may add more theoretical tools or refine your creative approach as your project develops.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

By the end of Week 7, you will turn in an annotated bibliography of the research sources you are using for your project (online). The bibliography should include a minimum of 5 theoretical sources and a minimum of 2 additional (theoretical/historical/technical/artistic/journalistic) sources you will use in your research or to develop your creative project (note: while popular publications like *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, local newspapers or news blogs may offer good background information, they should not be included as theoretical sources). This research should help you determine if your project needs revisions or not.

Be careful: if you are investigating the photo coverage of the 2018 Olympic Games by *The New York Times*, the coverage of the games by *The New York Times* does not count as a research source for your bibliography (it's your research subject); a commentary by Slate about the photo coverage could be a research source. An annotated bibliography includes a brief description of how the sources are relevant to the project, including a short summary of the key argument (this could eventually be used in your final paper/project).

If you are having trouble identifying theoretical sources, consider drawing from the course readings as well as the bibliographies found in the course readings..

OUTLINE

By the end of Week 11, you will turn in an outline of your final paper or creative project (online). The outline should be no longer than 2 pages.

The outline should include:



- **INTRODUCTION.** 2-3 bullet points about the key elements of your project. Include any revisions to the project here.
- **LITERATURE REVIEW.** Bullet point list of all the sources you're using. This may (should) include additions to your annotated bibliography. The last bullet point for a research paper should be your research question(s), i.e. the question you want to answer about your artifact.
- **METHODS.** Bullet points include: what item are you looking at? what key theory are you applying? are you doing a research project or a creative work and, if the latter, what form is it taking?
- **FINDINGS/DISCUSSION.** I understand you haven't completed the project yet, but include enough in your outline so that I understand **HOW** you plan on doing the analysis. In the case of a creative project, this should be a description of how you envision the project, detailed enough that I understand what you're doing.
- **CONCLUSION.** If you have any preliminary concluding thoughts, bullet point them here. Otherwise, a bullet point saying TBD is fine.

IN-CLASS PRESENTATION

During Weeks 14 and 15, you will present your preliminary findings from their analysis and/or rough edits of your creative projects. One week will be reserved for research papers, while the other will be reserved for creative projects. This schedule may change depending upon the number of students doing creative projects versus research papers.

Before the panel date/time, students must start a discussion board post on the course Canvas site. The post must include a single image from the paper/creative project as well as a brief summary of the paper/creative project. This is so other students can offer comments to the project.

During the in-class research presentations, each student will be assigned a panel with 3-4 other students. You will have 8-10 minutes to summarize your research project and your key findings (i.e. why what you're doing is important or original). At the end of each panel, there will be a 15 minute time period for questions and answers from the class.

Your presentation should include:

- An introduction of your project/visual artifact for analysis
- A brief summary of your theoretical approach (or theoretical influence, for creative work)
- Your key findings (or what you did in your creative work)
- Video clips, photographs or other visuals to illustrate your project
- Why your work matters/your research is important

You can use a presentation program like PowerPoint or Keynote. Make sure you have visual artifacts - this is an important part of your presentation.

During the in-class creative presentations, students will set up around the room to present their creative project to small groups of fellow students. Expect to present your project multiple times.

You are welcome to make adjustments to your project between your in-class presentation and the due date of the final paper/project based upon student and instructor feedback.



Helpful hint: You should have your research completed by the date of your presentation, with a rough draft of your paper done. In the case of creative work, you should have what is known as a "fine edit": completed except for minor revisions. If your research is incomplete, you will be downgraded.

PEER FEEDBACK

Students are required to offer reaction to fellow students' presentations. A student must give feedback on any session where s/he is not presenting. Students must choose two papers and/or projects per presentation period and offer feedback and comments for fellow students. Comments must be posted by midnight of the presentation day.

VISUAL ARTIFACT

Students will sign up to bring visual artifacts to class once per term. The artifact should be related to or inspired by the readings for the week. Objects will be uploaded to Canvas for in-class projection and you will be called on in class to describe your artifact.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

This is not a lecture class. Students are expected to have completed the readings each week and participate in course discussions. This will help us to have a diverse perspective on visual communication issues.

We will also be doing regular in-class work, so it is important that you attend class and get credit for these in-class assignments.

Students are allowed four absences per without penalty for any reason, including but not limited to religious observances, illness, and death in the family. After four absences your grade will begin to go down, by one-third of a grade per absence. If you have a situation which requires you miss more than four classes, please meet with me (virtual meeting/email is acceptable). Make-up for the absence will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

If you have a temporary disability or extended illness that prevents course attendance, see the section on "Disability" below for accommodation policies.

How Much is Each Assignment Worth?

Each assignment is weighted to make up your final grade. To translate, if an assignment is worth 5% of your grade, that would be 5 points on a 100 point scale. If you don't do an assignment that's worth 10% of your grade, it will be impossible to get an A in the course.

- Final Paper/Project: 30%
- Meeting with Instructor: 5%
- Final Project Abstract: 5%
- Annotated Bibliography: 10%
- Outline: 10%
- In-Class Presentation: 10%
- Peer Feedback: 10%
- Visual Artifact: 5%
- Class Participation: 15%

Grade Distribution

Grades will be weighted to reflect the above percentages. Individual grades will be available on the course Canvas site.

95-100% A



90-94.99% A-
87-89.99% B+
84-86.99% B
80-83.99% B-
77-79.99% C+
74-76.99% C
70-73.99% C-
67-69.99% D+
64-66.99% D
60-63.99% D-
Below 60% F

Late Assignments

Unless you have a temporary medical condition verified by disability services (see section on “Disability” below) or a verified family emergency, late assignments are not accepted. No exceptions.



Course Calendar

WEEK ONE - INTRODUCTION

August 26: Introduction

August 28: In-Class Guest, Theodore Kim, *New York Times*, Internships and Fellowships

August 30: Deep Dive I

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Introduction," in *Practices of Looking*, 1-12; Bright and van Erp, "Introduction," in *Photography Decoded*, 1-13.

Due: Sign up for artifact presentation

WEEK TWO - REPRESENTATION, PART I

September 2: Holiday, Labor Day

September 4: Images, Power, and Politics

September 6: Decoding Images

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Images, Power, and Politics," in *Practices of Looking*, 13-50; Bright and van Erp, "Is is Real?" in *Photography Decoded*, 14-33.

Due September 6: Sign up for Meeting I

WEEK THREE - REPRESENTATION, PART II

September 9: Audience & Agency

September 11: Research Example I with Q&A

September 13: Work Day

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Viewers Make Meaning," in *Practices of Looking*, 51-88; Bright and van Erp, "What Do I Remember?" in *Photography Decoded*, 34-53.

WEEK FOUR - MEETING WITH PROFESSOR

September 16: Meetings during class time

September 18: Meetings during class time

September 20: Meetings during class time

Reading: NONE

Due (all week): Meeting I with professor.

WEEK FIVE - (UN)PRIVILEGED VIEWPOINTS

September 23: The Gaze

September 25: Power Struggles

September 27: Workshop - Problematizing Images

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Modernity: Spectatorship, the Gaze, and Power," in *Practices of Looking*, 89-138; Bright and van Erp, "What Makes it Problematic?" in *Photography Decoded*, 128-145.

Due September 27: Abstract

WEEK SIX - VISION AND PERSPECTIVE

September 30: The Birth of Perspective

October 2: The Language of Images

October 4: Research Example 2 with Q&A

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Realism and Perspective: From Renaissance Painting to Digital Media," in *Practices of Looking*, 139-178; Bright and van Erp, "What Goes Where?" in *Photography Decoded*, 92-109.

WEEK SEVEN - THE ART OF REPRODUCTION

October 7: Visual Technologies

October 9: Remix Culture

October 11: Workshop - Making Meaning



Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Visual Technologies, Image, Reproduction, and the Copy," in *Practices of Looking*, 179-218; Bright and van Erp, "Stealing or Borrowing?" in *Photography Decoded*, 170-185.

Due October 11: Annotated Bibliography

WEEK EIGHT - THE EVERYDAY

October 14: Every Visuals

October 16: Telling Stories

October 18: Work Day

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Media in Everyday Life," in *Practices of Looking*, 219-256; Bright and van Erp, "How Can You Tell a Story?" in *Photography Decoded*, 54-73.

WEEK NINE - JUST LOOKING

October 21: Brand Culture

October 23: Truth or Fiction?

October 25: Workshop - Paper/Project Jam Session

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Brand Culture: The Images and Spaces of Consumption," in *Practices of Looking*, 256-300; Bright and van Erp, "Can Lying be OK?" in *Photography Decoded*, 74-91.

WEEK TEN - POSTMODERNISM

October 28: Postmodernism 101

October 30: Work Day

November 1: Selfie Culture

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Postmodernism, Irony, Parody, and Pastiche," in *Practices of Looking*, 301-336; Bright and van Erp, "Who Do You Think You Are?" in *Photography Decoded*, 146-169.

Due: Sign up for Meeting 2 (online)

WEEK ELEVEN - REFRACTING THE GAZE

November 4: The Scientific Gaze

November 6: Fame/Infamy

November 8: Deep Dive 2

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "Scientific Looking, Looking at Science," in *Practices of Looking*, 337-378; Bright and van Erp, "Why is it Famous?" in *Photography Decoded*, 110-127.

Due: Outline

WEEK TWELVE - THE GLOBAL VISUAL

November 11: Global Visual Culture

November 13: Is Privacy Possible?

November 15: Presentation Examples with Q&A

Reading: Sturken and Cartwright, "The Global Flow of Visual Culture," in *Practices of Looking*, 379-424; Bright and van Erp, "Public or Private?" in *Photography Decoded*, 186-203.

WEEK THIRTEEN - MEETING WITH PROFESSOR

November 18: Meetings during class time

November 20: Meetings during class time

November 22: Meetings during class time

Reading: NONE

Due: Meeting 2 with professor.

WEEK FOURTEEN - THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK FIFTEEN - RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS (TENTATIVE)

December 2: Research Presentations I



December 4: Research Presentation 2
December 6: Research Presentations 3

Reading: NONE

Due: In-class presentations of research papers.

WEEK SIXTEEN - CREATIVE PRESENTATIONS (TENTATIVE)

December 9: Creative Presentations 1
December 11: Creative Presentations 2
December 13: Creative Presentations 3

Reading: NONE

Due: In class presentations of creative work.

FINAL EXAM PERIOD - WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1:30-4P

Due: Final papers and creative project packages (including artistic statement) must be turned in (online) by the end of the exam period. Early submissions are welcome.

If your creative project is in a format that cannot be turned in online, be sure to make arrangements with me in advance for how to submit by the exam deadline.

A Commitment and Invitation from Our College

CMCI strives to be a community whose excellence depends on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We aim to understand and challenge systems of privilege and disadvantage in higher education, such as those based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. We seek to reach across social and political divides and to make space for voices historically underrepresented in higher education and marginalized in society. In other words, diversity is not just a future reality for which we try to prepare students. It is a priority we want to put into practice here, now, and together, in order to foster places of learning where all members can thrive.

Our question for you is, *how are we doing?* Please contact the CMCI diversity team (email Karen Ashcraft or visit the [CMCI Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Staff](#) page):

- if you need support or other resources but don't know where to turn
- if any aspect of your educational experience with CMCI does not reflect the commitment expressed here, or if you want to share a positive instance of this commitment in action
- if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas related to diversity

We want to hear from you so that we can do better, and to support you however we can!

University of Colorado Policies

For full details of the University policies, [click here](#).

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).



HONOR CODE

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu, 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office Website](#).

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, AND/OR RELATED RETALIATION

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct intimate partner abuse (including dating or domestic violence), stalking, protected-class discrimination or harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. You are allowed four absences in this class for any reason without penalty. This is designed to accommodate any religious holidays that happen during the term (as well as short term illnesses). If a temporary disability due to illness or accident means that you will go over your allotted absences and prevent you from using your allotted absences for religious observances, you should consult the [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.