

CORE 101—Symbols and Conceptual Systems

Instructor

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Office Hours: Tuesday 8:30-9:30, and by appointment

Lecture	TTh	9:30-10:50	THH 116
Discussion	F	11	THH 110
Discussion	F	12	THH 110

Discussion Leader

Bess Murphy emurphy@usc.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11-12 in VKC 368B, or by appointment

ICONS

Marilyn Monroe, the Eiffel Tower, John Wayne, Mickey Mouse. Few would dispute the notion that the mass visual media have transformed these people, places and things into “icons.” Although these phenomena exist apart from their representation, their cultural significance and importance is attached to their status as pictorial representations that are widely disseminated. The term “icon” initially invoked an object worthy of religious devotion; that original meaning now denotes an uncritical and popular devotion. This course poses the question “What becomes a legend most?” That question, made famous by the Blackgama fur ads, conflated “becoming” in the sense of being visually pleasing with “becoming” a legend, a modern process fueled by image-making. We will examine basic ways of thinking about visual symbols by learning about semiotics, symbolic and cultural anthropology and what art historians have called iconology. This course will trace the interplay between specific icons and the visual culture that made them iconic. Particular emphasis will be placed on technologies of representation such as photography and film and the vital role they have played in the culture of modern icons.

Course Requirements:

All scheduled classes are mandatory and will begin on time. Please do not arrive after class begins. Class time will either consist of lecture (which will include images and student participation) or lecture-discussion based on the week’s readings. More than three missed classes will result in failure. No late papers will be accepted.

Readings:

Reading in this course is extensive and all listed readings are required. It is essential that you keep up with the readings on a weekly basis in order to follow the lectures and participate in discussion. Readings marked with an * are available on the class blackboard.

Book List:

Class Field-Trip to Disneyland (mandatory Saturday event).

Cormack, Robin. Icons. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
Danto, Arthur. Andy Warhol. New Haven: Yale, 2010.
Berger, John. Ways of Seeing. New York: Penguin, 1990.
Rojek, Chris. Celebrity. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.
Sontag, Susan. On Photography. New York: Picador, 2001.
Lubin, David. Shooting Kennedy – JFK and the Culture of Images. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
Kingwell, Mark. Nearest Thing to Heaven. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
Guffey, Elizabeth. Retro: The Culture of Revival. London: Reaktion, 2006.
Lukas, Scott. Theme Park. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.
Golec, Michael. The Brillo Box. Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2008.

Required Articles and Excerpts:

- *Exodus on the Golden Calf.
- *Morgan, "The Violence of Seeing" from The Sacred Gaze.
- *Urban Icons Project.
- *Barthes, selections from Mythologies.
- *Marling, "Disneyland, 1955..." from **American Art** 5 (1991): 168-207.
- *Selections from Gabler, Walt Disney, pp.479-583.
- *Dyer, from Heavenly Bodies, "Judy Garland and Gay Men."
- *Meyer, "Rock Hudson's Body."

Films:

City Clips Reel

Walt: the Man Behind the Myth

Andy Warhol: The Complete Picture

American Masters: Judy Garland: By Myself

The Life and Times of Andy Warhol – Superstar

Writing Assignments and Exams: All written work must be your own and proper citation is essential as you write your papers and projects. Plagiarism will NOT be tolerated and the academic integrity code will be strictly enforced.

- 1) **February 22:** In-class mid-term examination.
- 2) **March 31:** 5-7 page paper: An essay written from one of three questions based on class readings.
- 3) **April 18:** Disneyland Project: A 3-5 page paper in response to the Disneyland trip. Instructions will be handed out closer to the trip.
- 4) **May 5:** Final Icon Projects due. See attached description.

Grading:

Mid-term Exam: 15%

Paper: 25%

Disneyland Project: 15%

Final Project: 35%

Participation: 10%

These are meant to serve as guidelines for evaluation in this course. Grades are not calculated mathematically, but are determined through a process of evaluation. All grading is done on an A-F basis.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings:

Week One: Introducing Symbol Systems

- January 11 Why study icons? What becomes a legend most?
January 13 Symbol Systems: Structuralism and Semiotics
Reading: Berger, Ways of Seeing.
January 14 Section Discuss Berger.

UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY
Monday, January 17, 2011
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Week Two: Looking and Reading Images as Texts

- January 18 Ways of Seeing
January 20 What is Semiology?
Reading: *Barthes, Selections from Mythologies.
*Exodus on the Golden Calf.
*Morgan, The Violence of Seeing.
January 21 Section Discuss Barthes, Exodus and Morgan.

Week Three: Religious Symbols in the Western World

- January 25 Semiotics II: Mythology and Roland Barthes
January 27 Traditional Icons: Religion and the Debate over symbolism
Reading: Cormack, Icons.
January 28 Section Discuss Cormack.

Week Four: Print Culture, Photography, Or How Mechanical Reproduction Changed the World

- February 1 Print culture
*ATTEND Talk by Jennifer Homans on the history of ballet for extra credit
February 3 Photography
Reading: Sontag, On Photography.
February 4 Section Discuss Sontag.

WEEKS FIVE-SEVEN: ICON AND PLACE

Week Five: Urban Icons

- February 8 Introducing Urban Icons.
February 10 Working with the Website in Class.
Reading: Navigate and Read the "Urban Icons" website
[http://journals.cambridge.org/fulltext_content/supplementary/Urban Icons/index.htm](http://journals.cambridge.org/fulltext_content/supplementary/Urban%20Icons/index.htm). By class on Thursday read

the Introduction and “navigate” the site and post a two-page response to using the site by Wednesday at 5pm. Read Introduction, Wasserstrom, Dimendberg.

Kingwell, Nearest Thing to Heaven.

February 11 Section Urban Icons discussion.

Week Six: Theme-Park Cities

February 15 Disneyland: A History

*ATTEND Talk by Christian Henriot on Digital urban history at Noon for extra credit

February 17 Las Vegas

Reading: *[Karal Ann Marling](#), “Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream,” American Art, Vol 5 (1/2 Winter/Spring 1991), 168-207 (also can download from J-Stor).

Lukas, Theme Park.

February 18 Section Discuss readings.

UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY

Monday, February 21, 2011

Presidents’ Day

Week Seven: City Films – Still and Moving Images

February 22 IN-CLASS MID-TERM EXAM

February 24 City Clips Reel.

No reading this week.

February 25 Section Discussion of City Films.

WEEKS EIGHT-TEN: PEOPLE AS ICONS

Week Eight: Celebrity

March 1 Celebrity as a System.

March 3 The Movie Star.

Reading: Rojek, Celebrity.

March 4 Section Discuss readings.

Week Nine: Stars

March 8 The Most Famous Mouse in the World.

March 10 Screen: Judy Garland: By Myself.

Reading: *Richard Dyer on Judy Garland.

*Richard Meyer, “On Rock Hudson’s Body.”

No Section this week.

BY THIS WEEK EVERYONE NEEDS TO HAVE PICKED AN ICON and needs to submit a one to two paragraph description of their icon to the TA and on Blackboard by March 10.

SPRING RECESS
March 14-18, 2011

Week Ten: The Press and the Photojournalistic Icon

March 22 Guest Lecture: Jason Hill: Photojournalism.
March 24 News Images and Icon as Evidence.
March 25 Section Discussion of readings and screening.
Reading: Lubin, Shooting Kennedy.

WEEKS ELEVEN-TWELVE: THE LOOK OF THINGS

Week Eleven: Part I, Commerce as Art

March 29 Advertising and Its History.
March 31 Screening: Andy Warhol: The Complete Picture.
5-7 page paper due in class: March 31, 2011
April 1 Section Discuss Readings.
Reading: Danto, Warhol.

Week Twelve: Part II, And Vice Versa, Art as Commerce

April 5 Branding.
April 7 What is Pop Art?
April 8 Section.
Reading: Golec, The Brillo Box.
Guffey, Retro.

Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W": Friday, April 8, 2011

WEEKS THIRTEEN-FIFTEEN: APPLYING WHAT WE'VE LEARNED — DISNEYLAND TRIP AND ICONS PROJECTS

Week Thirteen

April 12 Screening of Walt: the Man Behind the Myth.
April 14 Preparation for the trip to Disneyland and discussion of reading.
No Section this week.
Reading: *selections from Gabler, Walt Disney.

SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 2011 - D-DAY: Trip to Disneyland
Meet at the bus no later than 7am

Disneyland meditations, 3-5 pages, due Monday, April 18, by 5pm on the class BB.
Trip details to be discussed later.

Week Fourteen:

April 19 Presentation: Group 1 and 2.
April 21 Presentation: Group 3 and 4.
No Section this week.

Week Fifteen

April 26 Group 5 and 6.

April 28 Group 7 and 8.

April 29 Section Review for final papers.

Final Individual Icons Projects Due: Thursday, May 5, 2011, at 10 am.

Description of the Icons Project

The class will be divided into 8 groups of 3-4 people, give or take a person or two. Groups will represent different kinds of icons that are listed below, first by category and then by icon. There is some flexibility in choosing an icon if there is an icon you really want to study and it is not on the list. Each student will write a five page paper on their icon which they give to their group and to me and the TA at least two weeks before the day of the group presentation. All group members must read each other's papers and then meet and come up with a 20 minute presentation in class about their "category" of icon and its meaning based on reading the papers in the group. They will also need to post their presentation on the class blackboard when they are done. We will have four sessions of 2 group presentations each. After the two presentations in one class period, I will ask questions and the rest of the class will also have a chance to make comments and ask questions. Each student will then write a final 10-page take-home final which integrates what they have learned from doing their own icon, being in their group and comparing their group to the other groups and is based in responses to prompts I give.

Suggested Icons List

Group 1: Stars of the Screen

Marilyn Monroe

Charlie Chaplin

Mary Pickford

Elizabeth Taylor

Clark Gable

Gene Kelly

Group 3: Idols

An "American Idol"

Jesus

Satan

Ganesh

Buddha

Abraham Lincoln

Group 2: Political Figures

Louis XIV

Stalin

Hitler

Ghandi

Eva Peron

Chairman Mao

Group 4: Fictional Icons

Santa Claus

Snoopy

Spider Man

Betty Boop

Aunt Jemima

Group 5: *Iconic Images*

"Terror of War" (Vietnam War Image)
Schulman Image of Case Study House #22
"The Kiss at the Hotel de Ville" Doisneau
Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima
"Migrant Mother"
Capa Photo of D-Day

Group 6: *Monuments*

Pyramids
Parthenon
Westminster Abbey
Notre Dame
Great Wall of China
Temple of Jerusalem
The Alhambra
Hollywood Bowl

Group 7: *Ads and Logos*

Coke Bottle
Betty Crocker
Michelin Man
Shell Logo
Lucky Strike Package
Brillo Box
CBS Eye

Group 8: *Signs and Symbols*

Happy Face
Cadillac
Peace Sign
The Swastika
The Cross
Jolly Rogers skull and crossbones