

VISS 501: Introduction to Visual Studies: Methods and Debates



Professor Vanessa R. Schwartz
Fall 2021
University of Southern California

Wednesday, 2-5pm, CPA 254
Office Hours: By zoom appointment at vschwart@usc.edu

Seminar Description:

Over the last two decades, visual studies has gained wide currency as a field of research and teaching in universities both in the United States and abroad. Scholars from disciplines as diverse as art history, American studies, literature, anthropology, film and media studies, psychology, history, and gender studies have focused attention on both the cultural specificity of vision and on the ever-widening array of images and objects available for viewing.

This course will provide a critical introduction to the history, methods and central debates within the field. How have scholars and critics taken up — or in some cases dismissed — the study of visual culture and to what ends? What are the limits and possibilities of the interdisciplinary models on offer? We will explore these questions through a sustained engagement with selected texts that are rich in methodological orientation and that address such subjects as definitions of the image, the experience of seeing, the science of vision, constructions of visibility, and the experience and creation of visual objects.

This course is one of two required courses for USC's VSGC.

Books for Purchase:

Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018).

Matthew Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Edmund de Waal, *Letters to Camondo* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2021).

Reading PDFs:

All readings in Dropbox, by week, unless a URL link is next to the citation in syllabus (i.e., links to eBooks or websites). Dropbox Link:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/icophzwhfgkavqp/AAQ5C2sQvAni6v_7bagG-9ha?dl=0

Readings and Seminar Participation: Readings are extensive. Our primary task as individuals is to read with care. As a group, our goal is to engage in a discussion that helps illuminate the readings. Seminar participation is an essential component of the class. Students and the instructor are welcome to “test” out ideas and say things that they might not be sure of or even believe and for which they thus are not held permanently accountable. This is a space to test concepts and ideas as in any lab. All seminar members are welcomed to express themselves freely, including in respectful and clear disagreement with each other. Disagreement between students and/or with the instructor is considered a vital part of advancing knowledge and of academic life more generally.

Expectations and Requirements: Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to seminar meetings and to discuss the texts and critical issues at hand during each session. Each student must also post a “response” to the week’s readings on the class electronic blackboard on the class website by no later than 5 am Wednesday morning, although posts earlier are welcomed.

Class website: <https://5f025c71a1b5d.site123.me/>

Class Slack Channel: https://join.slack.com/share/zt-u4o9jqoi-,zA9K~i0MAi1MHvrdDZNTQg?skip_onboarding=1&accepted_invite_id=I02AM2N9USE Students are also expected to read each other’s responses before class, and thus we may need to adjust the deadline for submission based on the needs of the group. A response can be a critical summary of the readings, a series of questions, complaints, rants. The idea behind them is to ask each student to take some time to reflect on the week’s readings and to share those thoughts with the class before we meet as a starting point for discussion that the instructor will organize and lead.

Special Events and Lectures: As part of this seminar, you are expected to attend at least three special events sponsored by the VSRI but it is preferable that you attend them all. See VSRI website and VSRI Slack channel (log in with your USC email credentials and hit launch VSRI channel):

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/vsri/>

<https://app.slack.com/client/T013XQR1J6P/C0143PV737E>

Final Project:

Please listen to at least five podcasts from the BBC Series, “A History of the World in 100 Objects” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrt2/episodes/downloads?page=4>). In addition, please screen multiple episodes of Kenneth Clark’s *Civilization* and Raoul Peck’s *Exterminate All the Brutes* on HBO Max. (see Review in NYT here:

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/arts/television/review-exterminate-all-the-brutes.html?mc=aud_dev&ad-

[keywords=auddevgate&gclid=Cj0KCQjwxdSHBhCdARIsAG6zhIVtCICzz9HNxa6SvDpFqgAonPL7l_-gwnnVMAg0pFK2SH5iEDQGK28aAglrEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/arts/television/review-exterminate-all-the-brutes.html?mc=aud_dev&ad-keywords=auddevgate&gclid=Cj0KCQjwxdSHBhCdARIsAG6zhIVtCICzz9HNxa6SvDpFqgAonPL7l_-gwnnVMAg0pFK2SH5iEDQGK28aAglrEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds))

The final exercise in this class is to make a visual lesson about an image, an object, an exhibition, or about looking or seeing. Your final project is to “visualize” a lesson about your object through PowerPoint, Prezi, Keynote or an alternative means. THIS IS TO BE UPLOADED to the class website by November 29 and watched by class on December 1.

In addition, you are to write a 10-12 page paper, “Visualizing Knowledge,” which reflects on the methods and approaches you used in making your lesson that may or may not have emerged from taking the class. The paper will consider the different “theories and methods” and definitions of Visual Studies encountered in the class and transmitted through your visual presentation of your lesson. Students are asked to reflect on the specific issue of the production of the image and producers, what images do, questions of looking, circulation, truth, evidence, and knowledge construction relating to vision, visibility, images, seeing, and identity. In other words, how and why is this an object that relates to a field that might be called “visual studies” and how is your approach different from how you might have treated this in your home discipline, or is it different at all? Due December 12 at 11 am via email or link to the instructor.

In preparation for this, please also read:

- Vanessa R. Schwartz, “Film and History,” in James Donald and Michael Renov, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Film Studies* (London: Sage, 2008), 199-215.
- W.J.T. Mitchell, “Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (August 2002): 165-181.

Grading:

Weekly Posts: 25%

Seminar Discussion: 25%

Final presentation and paper: 40%

Contribution to activities: 10%

Schedule of Readings, Seminars, and VSRI Events

Part I: Definitions and Contextualization

Week 1: August 25: Setting the Stage

- Screen: *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) and *Summer of Soul* (2021)
- Edmund de Waal, *Letters to Camondo* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2021).

USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar

Sunday, August 29

10-11:30am, LACMA Resnick Pavilion

Acting Out: Cabinet Cards and the Making of Modern Photography, 1870-1900

Britt Salveson and Thomas W. Laqueur, Helen Fawcett Professor of History Emeritus, UC Berkeley

Tuesday, August 31

5-6:30pm PST, Zoom

Discussion

Week 2: September 1: What is a Field of Study? A Discipline? A Method?

- Von Falkenhausen, *Beyond the Mirror: Seeing in Art History and Visual Culture Studies*
- W. J. T. Mitchell, Introduction and "The Pictorial Turn," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 1-34.
- Carlo Ginzburg, etc., "Inter/Disciplinarity," *Art Bulletin* 77:4 (December 1995), pp. 534-552.
- Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "Visual Culture's New History: Twenty-First Century Interdisciplinarity and Its Nineteenth-Century Objects," in *The Nineteenth-Century*
- *Visual Culture Reader* eds. Schwartz and Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004): 3-14.
- Heller, "Visual Images Replace Text as Focal Point for Many Scholars" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 19, 1996.
- Mieke Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture" (2003) *Journal of Visual Culture and responses from pp. 229-268*: <http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/vcua/2/2>

Images out of Time Launch

Thursday, September 2

12:30-2pm PST, Zoom

Panel discussion of *A Palimpsest of the Africa Museum*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whhIA5Pw-o>

VSGC Graduate Student Research Presentations and Lunch

Wednesday, September 8

12:30-2PM, DML 240

Week 3: September 8: Art, Art History and Visual Culture

- Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (buy or <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.29158/page/n19/mode/1up>)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPumlXye5Qs> (Gombrich Interview)
- Horst Bredekamp, "A Neglected Tradition? Art History as *Bildwissenschaft*," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Spring 2003), pp. 418-428.
- Michael McNay, "John Berger Obituary," *Guardian*, January 2, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/02/john-berger-obituary>
Screen:
- "Ways of Seeing" John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972) (four episodes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk&t=8s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk&t=8s
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7wi8jd7aC4>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jTUebm73IY>)

Week 4: September 15: Visual Studies Now!

Guest: Rob Gordon-Fogelson, Newly Defended PhD

- John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; reis., New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), 3–19.

- Alexander Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art": The Work of Herbert Bayer* (1947; reis., New York: New York University Press, 1958), 9–19; 134–148.
- Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (1948; reis., New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), v–vii; 2–11; 714–723.
- Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 136–162.

Part Two: Key Questions

Week 5: September 22: What Is An Image? What Can It Do? REMOTE

- W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Is an Image?" *New Literary History* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1984), 503–537.
- Asbjørn Grønstad and Øyvind Vågnes, "What do pictures want? Interview with W. J. T. Mitchell," *Image & Narrative*, November 2006, <https://www.visual-studies.com/interviews/mitchell.html>
- Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), esp. 1-30; 137-192; 265-288.
- Michael Allan, "Picturing *Other* Languages: Reflections on Photography and Philology" *College English* 82, no. 1 (September 2019), 96-114.
- Daniel Boorstin, Introduction and Chapter One, in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
- Earthrise: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/opinion/earthrise-moon-space-nasa.html>

Week 6: September 29: What is Sight? Other Senses? REMOTE

Read:

- Joan Saab, *Objects of Vision: Making Sense of What We See* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2020).
- Mark M. Smith, *A Sensory History Manifesto* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2021).
- "Trevor Paglen: Sight Unseen," Smithsonian American Art Museum, <https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/paglen>

VSGC Student Research Presentations and Lunch

Wednesday, October 6

12:30-2pm

SOS 250

Week 7: October 6: Truth and the Image:

- Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
- Thierry de Duve, "Art in the Face of Radical Evil," *October*, Vol. 125 (Summer 2008): 3–23.
- Courtney Baker, "Emmett Till, Justice, and the Task of Recognition," in *Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death* (Urbana, University of Illinois, 2015): 69-93

- Schwartz and Hill, "Introduction," in *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News* eds. Schwartz and Hill (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015).

CV and Grant Writing Workshop

Saturday October 9

10:00am to 4:30pm SOS 250

[Strongly Recommended for EVERY Student. First year and second year: morning CV-writing. Second and third and above: full day.]

Week 8: October 13: What Is the Object of Study? Fashion

Guest: Professor Nancy Troy, Stanford University

Read:

- Nancy J. Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). Introduction.
- Nancy J. Troy and Ann Marguerite Tartsinis, *Mondrian's Dress: Piet Mondrian, Yves Saint Laurent, and Pop Art*, Draft Manuscript of Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 for review, + supplemental materials (2021)

Images Out of Time Seminar

Tuesday, October 19

12:30-2pm PST

The Tyranny of Morphology and the Presence of Things

Hybrid event: DML 240 and Zoom

Week 9: October 20: Devotion and Things

- Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, pp. 82-98, 136-160, 317-344.
- Caroline Walker Bynum, "Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology: Or, Why Compare?" in *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- Caroline Walker Bynum, "Growing Up in the Shadow of Confederate Monuments," *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 27 No. 2, (2021): 163-170.

Week 10: October 27: Do Certain "Moments" Matter More: The fin-de-siècle

Guest: Rhonda Garelick, Dean, School of Art and Design, Parsons

- Rhonda Garelick, "Electric Salomé: The Mechanical Dances of Loie Fuller," from *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siecle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- Rhonda Garelick, "Loie Fuller and the Serpentine," *The Public Domain Review*, November 5, 2019 <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/loie-fuller-and-the-serpentine> (for photo group also)
- Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Introduction," from *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* eds. Charney and Schwartz (California: University of California Press, 1996)
- Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus," from *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* eds. Charney and Schwartz (California: University of California Press, 1996)

Optional:

- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader* eds. Schwartz and Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004): 63-70.
- Vanessa Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *The American Historical Review* 106:5 (December 2001): 1721-43.

USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar

Wednesday, October 27

6:30-8pm PST, location TBD

Loie Fuller Between Photography and Film

Rhonda Garelick, Dean, School of Art and Design, Parsons

Part III. Applications

VSGC Student Research Presentations and Lunch

Wednesday, November 3

12:30-2pm, SOS 250

Week 11: November 3: Circulation and Empire

Guest: Daniela Bleichmar, Professor of Art History and History, USC

Read:

- Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Especially Intro, Ch.1, Ch.3, and Conclusion
- Daniela Bleichmar, "Painting the Aztec Past in Early Colonial Mexico: Translation and Knowledge Production in the *Codex Mendoza*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 72 (2019): 1362-1415.
- Vanessa Schwartz, "Networks: Technology, Mobility, and Mediation in Visual Culture," *American Art* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 104-109.

Screen:

- Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkkIDfY8ifQ>: with English Subtitles)

Week 12: November 10: Picturing Race and Power

Guest: Matthew-Fox Amato, Asst. Professor, History, University of Idaho

Read:

- Matthew Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), Introduction and Ch. 1-2.
- Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction: Photographs as Objects," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), 1-15.
- 3) Matthew Fox-Amato, "Civil War Iconoclasm" (article in progress)

Week 13: November 17: What do Photographs DO?

Guest: Catherine Clark, Associate Professor, History and Global Languages and Cultures, MIT

Read:

- Julia Adney Thomas, "The Evidence of Sight," *History and Theory*, Vol. 48 No. 4 (December 2009): 151-168.
- Catherine E. Clark, "The Commercial Street Photographer: The Right to the Street and the *Droit à l'Image* in Post-1945 France," *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 16 No.2 (2017): 225-252.
- Catherine E. Clark, "Capturing the Moment, Picturing History: Photographs of the Liberation of Paris," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 121 No. 3 (June 2016): 824-860.
- Catherine E. Clark, "Blinded by Realism: The Photographic Practices of French Maoism" (draft, work in progress).

Week 14: Reschedule: November 21-23: Pictures and Time

Seminar and dinner at Vanessa's: Sunday, November 21, 2:30-7pm preferred

Pictures and Time

Read:

- Schwartz essay in progress on Time-Life Books
- Daniela Bleichmar, Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Visual History: The Past in Pictures," *Representations* Vol. 145 No. 1 (Winter 2019): 1-31.
- Billie Melman, "Ur: Empire, Modernity, and the Visualization of Antiquity Between the Two World Wars," *Representations* Vol. 145 No. 1 (Winter 2019): 129-151.
- George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).
- Lynn Hunt, Vanessa R. Schwartz. "Capturing the Moment: Images and Eyewitnessing in History." *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (December 2010): 259–71

Screen:

- Bill Morrison, *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (2016) (available on Amazon Prime)

Week 15: December 1: Presentations: Remote

Upload presentations by 29th Class-time is the Discussion of each presentation

10-15 page paper due electronically by December 12 at 9am.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally

unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421
studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710
studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

