MDA 501: Introduction to Visual Studies: Methods and Debates
Fall 2010

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History Department
Class Meets: W, 2-5 and various special sessions
TTH 105
Office Hours: W: 1-2 and by appointment, SOS 170
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Seminar Description:
Over the last two decades, visual studies has gained wide currency as a topic 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, 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 studies 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 about images, vision, visuality and visual objects.

Required Books for Purchase:
Michael Baxandall, Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures (Yale University Press, 1985)
John Berger, Ways of Seeing (Viking Press, 1973)
Jonathan Conlin, Civilisation (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)
Denis Cosgrove and William L. Fox, Photography and Flight (Reaktion Books, 2010)
Anne Friedberg, The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft (MIT Press, 2006)
Gyorgy Kepes, Language of Vision (P. Theobald, 1949 - out of print; please obtain used copy)
Kenneth Clark, Civilisation: The Complete Series, 4 disk DVD BBC Video (1969)
All readings marked with an * are available on the class blackboard.

Readings and Seminar Participation: Readings are extensive and often difficult. Our primary task as individuals is to read with care and as a group, is to
engage in a discussion that helps illuminate the readings. Seminar participation will be considered an essential component of the class.

**Expectations and Requirements:** Students are expected to complete all required reading 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 blackboard by no later than 5 am Wednesday morning, although posts earlier are welcomed. 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. Students may also use the blackboard to respond to each other’s responses if they choose. 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 reflecting on the week’s readings and share those thoughts with the class.

**Paper: 7-10 Pages, due Week 10.** This paper will consider the different “theories and methods” and definitions of Visual Studies. Students will be asked to write a paper that either suggests that Visual Studies represents a separate discipline (and thus could be a field in which one could get a Ph.D.) or what it means if Visual Studies is considered an interdisciplinary field.

Students are also expected to visit my office once during office hours during weeks 7, 8, and 9 to talk about the final projects.

**FINAL PROJECT:** Students will be asked to screen all of Kenneth Clark’s *Civilisation* series by the 11th week of classes. The sooner the better since we will also be compiling a list of other “visual pedagogy” films for the independent work you will be doing. The final exercise in this class is to take any object or lesson about the visual you want to prepare (perhaps related to your own research) and make a short film or powerpoint or other sort of slideshow of this “lesson” about the image or vision and/or visuality. In other words, your final project is to “visualize” a lesson. This project is due December 10 and will presented to the group as well as given to me for further evaluation.

**Course work/papers assignments:**
- Class participation and weekly responses: 30%
- 7-10 page paper: 30%
- Final visual project: 40%

*Part I: Defining a Field: Theories of Representation*

**August 25: Week One:** Assignment for Class: Post an image(s) on the blackboard for class and explain (in writing) "why the image" and "Why Visual Studies" for you? Due August 24th.

**September 1: Week Two: Defining Visual Studies**

**September 8: Week 3: Context and The Social**
***Selection from Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 29-86

**September 15: Week 4: Marx, The Production of Knowledge and The Image**
   http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/106.5/ah0501001721.html

**September 22: Week 5: From Response to Cognitivism** *reschedule class to either 12:30-3:30 or 3-6 to make possible a visit by Ethington
Gyorgy Kepes, Language of Vision (P. Theobald, 1949)

**September 29: Week 6: Special Visitor: Prof. Sally Promey, Yale University:** Considering the Divisions between the Visual and the Material
Presentation: "Hearts and Stones: Material Transformations and the Stuff of Christian Practice in the United States"

**Part II: History of Images**

**October 6: Week 7: On Visuality, Space and the Built Environment**
**Special Visitor: Nathalie Roseau, Ecole des Ponts, Paris**

**October 13: Week 8: Capturing the Moment: The Time of Images**

**Table of Contents:**
Lynn Hunt & Vanessa Schwartz, “Capturing the Moment: Images and Eyewitnessing in History”
Margaret Conkey, “Images without Words: The Construction of Prehistoric Imaginaries for Definitions of ‘Us’ ”
Karen Halttunen, Comment
Marie-José Mondzain, “What Does Seeing an Image Mean?”
Megan O’Neil, “The Material Evidence of Ancient Maya Sculpture”
Erika Naginski, “Historical Pyrrhonism and Architectural Truth”
Thomas Habinek, Comment
Mary Elizabeth Berry, “(Even Radical) Illustration Requires (Normalizing) Convention: The Case of ‘Genre Art’ in Early Modern Japan”
Jeff Wasserstrom, Comment
Richard Taws, Comment
Nancy Troy, Comment
Sharon Sliwinski, “Visual Testimony: Lee Miller’s Dachau”
Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Visual Testimonies of Atrocity: Archives of Political Violence in Chile and Guatemala”
Julia Adeney Thomas, Comment
Katja Zelljadt, “Capturing a City’s Past”
Phil Ethington, Comment

October 20: Week 9: Photography
Denis Cosgrove and William L. Fox, Photography and Flight (Reaktion Books, 2010)

Part III: Vision and Visuality

October 27: Week 10: Ethnography and Framing the Other: Museums and “Primitives.” Visitor, Nancy Lutkehaus to give paper on Primitive Art in Museums

**PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

**November 3: Week 11: The Frame**
Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft* (MIT Press, 2006)

**Part IV: Visual Studies and Visual Pedagogy: Doing the Final Project**

**November 10: Week 12: Re-presentation of the image**
Finish Screening: Kenneth Clark, “Civilisation”
Read: Jonathan Conlin, *Civilisation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

**November 17: Week 13: Meeting to Discuss Methods and Modes of Visual Authoring (IML)**
Project Summary Posted to Blackboard by Monday, November 15

**November 24: Week 14: T-GIVING: NO CLASS; required individual meetings this week**

**December 1: Week 15: Rough Cuts meeting of seminar**

**Friday, December 10: Week 16: Final Presentations (no more than 10 minutes each) and dinner at my house**