VISS 501: Introduction to Visual Studies: Methods and Debates

Professor Vanessa R. Schwartz
Fall 2019
University of Southern California

Wednesday, 2-5pm, Taper Hall 308
Office Hours: Wednesday, 5-6, Taper Hall 336 and by 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 visuality, and the experience and creation of visual objects.

This course is one of two required courses as part of the USC’s VSGC.

Books for Purchase:

**Reading PDFs:**
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c6h71vqownqt26i/AAB25qhIxDJjj1oL3pLM-HfDa?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 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 electronic 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. 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 which I 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. All special events are listed below:

1. **Back-to-School with VSRI: Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion**
   **Film Screening: Bathtubs Over Broadway**
   Screening and Q & A with Steve Young (Star) and Dava Whisenant (Director, Producer)
   Wednesday, August 28
   5:00-7:15pm
   Cammilleri Hall at the Brain and Creativity Institute (BCI)

2. **VSGC Student Lunch**
   Wednesday, September 4
   12:30-2:00pm
   SOS 250

3. **USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar**
   Gallery discussion: *Thomas Joshua Cooper: The World’s Edge*
Joan M. Schwartz (Department of Art History and Art Conservation, Queen's University)
Saturday, September 21
10:00-11:30am
LACMA, Resnick Pavilion

4. **EMSI Visual and Material Culture**
   Making and Unmaking the Paper World: Dark Media and Graphic Performance in Late Georgian Britain
   Joseph Monteyne, (Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory, University of British Columbia)
   Wednesday, September 25
   12:30-2:00pm
   DML 240

5. **Book Talk: Weaving Modernism: Postwar Tapestry Between Paris and New York**
   Kay Wells (Department of Art History, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee)
   Friday, September 27
   12:30-2:00pm
   and

   **Graduate Student Research Round-Up: Formulating a Research Project**
   Friday, September 27
   2:15-4:00pm
   SOS 250

6. **Grant-Writing Workshop**
   Saturday September 28
   Screeners: Kay Wells (Art History, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee); Ali Behdad (Comparative Literature, UCLA); Kerim Yasar (East Asian Languages and Cultures, USC), Amy Knight Powell (Art History, USC)
   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.]

   Edward Dimendberg (editor, School of Humanities, UC Irvine) and Michael Turcios (CAMS and VSGC, USC)
   **Thursday, October 10 or Friday, October 11** TBD
   12:30-2:00pm
   SOS 250

8. **Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion**
   **Talk Title TBD**
   David Lubin (Department of Art, Wake Forest College)
   Wednesday, October 16
9. USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar
   Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
   Arctic to Asbestos: New Documentary Work and the Environment
   Louie Palu, Documentary Photographer and Filmmaker
   Wednesday, October 23
   12:30-2:00pm
   Location Pending

10. Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
    Performing Live: News, Shows and Shipwrecks
    Clare Pettitt (Professor of Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture, King’s College London)
    Thursday, October 24
    5:00-6:30pm
    The Ide Room, THH 420

11. Graduate Student Research Round-Up: Research and the Grant Proposal
    12:30-2:00pm
    Job Market Discussion
    2:00-3:30pm
    Both on Tuesday, November 5
    SOS 250

12. EMSI Visual and Material Culture
    Piranesi Works
    Carolyn Yerkes (Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)
    Wednesday, November 20
    12:30-2:00pm
    DML 240

13. USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar
    Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
    Imaging Animal Industry: Visualizing the American Meat Trade
    Emily Kathryn Morgan (Department of Art and Visual Culture, Iowa State University)
    Thursday, December 5
    5:00-6:30pm
    Dundon-Berchtold University Club of USC, Scriptorium

Final Project:
Please listen to at least two podcasts a week from the BBC Series, “A History of the World in 100 Objects” (http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2/episodes/downloads?page=4). In addition, please screen multiple episodes of either Kenneth Clark’s Civilisation or the new Civilisations by the 12th week. If you do Clark, the order of screening is more important than the
2018 series. I prefer the British version to the American one. We will try to rip a copy and make it available. More information coming on that.

The final exercise in this class is to make a visual lesson about an image or exhibition or about looking or seeing. Your final project is to “visualize” a lesson through PowerPoint, Prezi, Keynote or an alternative means. 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 upon 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, visuality, images, seeing, and spectacle. In other words, how and why is this an object that relates to a field that might be called “Visual Studies” that is different from how you might have treated this in your home discipline, or is it different at all?

In preparation for this, please also read:

Grading:
Weekly Posts: 20%
Seminar: 30%
Final paper: 40%
Contribution to activities: 10%

Schedule of Readings, Seminars, and VSRI Events

Part I: Definitions
Week One: August 28: Seeing, Images, Knowing

Complete readings and post a response on the class blackboard by 8 pm, August 27.

Read:

Screen:
- First episode of Clark, Civilisation, “The Skin of Our Teeth” (1967)
  (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6qYjisp51M)

VSRI EVENT

Back-to-School with VSRI: Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
Film Screening: Bathtubs Over Broadway
Screening and Q & A with Steve Young (Star) and Dava Whisenant (Director, Producer)
Wednesday, August 28
5:00-7:15pm
Cammilleri Hall at the Brain and Creativity Institute (BCI)

Week Two: September 4: Ways of Seeing and Looking at What?: Rewind on How Visual Studies Came to Be

Read:
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/02/john-berger-obituary

Screen:
· William Karel, Dark Side of the Moon (2002) (available on Amazon Prime)
· 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=5jTUbem73IY)

VSRI EVENT

VSGC Student Lunch
Wednesday, September 4
12:30-2:00pm
SOS 250
Week Three: September 11: What is An Image?

Read:

Week Four: September 18: What is Sight? Who Sees?

Read:
· Martin Jay, Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 (for overview) Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley: University of California, 2009).

VSRI EVENT
USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar
Gallery discussion: Thomas Joshua Cooper: The World's Edge
Joan M. Schwartz (Department of Art History and Art Conservation, Queen's University)
Saturday, September 21
10:00-11:30am
LACMA, Resnick Pavilion

Week Five: September 25: Vision in Motion? Or Is it The Frame that Changes?

Read:
· Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern. (Berkeley: University of California, 2000) -- (Virtual Window alternate).

Optional:

or

**VSRI EVENT**

**EMSI Visual and Material Culture**

Making and Unmaking the Paper World: Dark Media and Graphic Performance in Late Georgian Britain

Joseph Monteyne, (Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory, University of British Columbia)

Wednesday, September 25

12:30-2:00pm

DML 240

**VSRI EVENTS**

**Book Talk: Weaving Modernism: Postwar Tapestry Between Paris and New York (Yale, 2019)**

Kay Wells (Department of Art History, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee)

Friday, September 27

12:30-2:00pm

**Graduate Student Research Round-Up: Formulating a Research Project**

Friday, September 27

2:15-4:00pm

SOS 250

**VSRI EVENT**

**Grant-Writing Workshop**

Screeners: Kay Wells (Art History, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee); Ali Behdad (Comparative Literature, UCLA); Kerim Yasar (East Asian Languages and Cultures, USC), Amy Knight Powell (Art History, USC)

Saturday September 28

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 Six: October 2: What Do Images Do?**

Read:


Part II. Knowledge, Transmission and Support(s)

Week Seven: October 9: What is a Medium? Change class day: YOM KIPPUR: Move to Monday evening or Thursday or Friday?

Read:

VSRI EVENT
Book Talk: A Conversation about The Moving Eye: Film, Television, Architecture, Visual Art and the Modern
Edward Dimendberg (editor, School of Humanities, UC Irvine) and Michael Turcios (CAMS and VSGC, USC)
Thursday, October 10 or Friday, October 11
12:30-2:00pm
SOS 250

Week Eight: October 16: Visual Knowledge: Imperial Knowledge/Racial Knowledge

Read:

Screen:
· Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, Les Statues Meurent Aussi (1953)
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkktDfY8iQ: with English Subtitles)

VSRI EVENT
Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
Talk Title TBD
David Lubin (Department of Art, Wake Forest College)
Wednesday, October 16
12:30-2:00pm
THH 309K

Week Nine: October 23: Visual Evidence and Truth

Read:

Screen:
· Errol Morris, Standard Operating Procedure (2008) (available on Amazon Prime)

VSRI EVENT

USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar
Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
Arctic to Asbestos: New Documentary Work and the Environment
Louie Palu, Documentary Photographer and Filmmaker
Wednesday, October 23
12:30-2:00pm
Location TBD

VSRI EVENT

Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion
Performing Live: News, Shows and Shipwrecks
Clare Pettitt (Professor of Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture, King’s College London)
Thursday, October 24
5:00-6:30pm
The Ide Room, THH 420

Week Ten: October 30: Pictures and Time

Read:

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

**VSRI EVENT**
- **Graduate Student Research Round-Up: Research and the Grant Proposal**
  12:30-2:00pm
- **Job Market Discussion**
  2:00-3:30pm
  Both on Tuesday, November 5
  SOS 250

**Week Eleven: November 6: Circulation, Transport, Networks, Mobility**

Read:
· Lawrence Alloway, “Art and the Communications Network,” *Canadian Art*, no.100 (January 1966).

Screen:
· The Walt Disney Company, *Epcot* (1966) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLCHg9mUBag)

**Week Twelve: November 13 Guest: Akira Lippit: readings TBD**

During this period, each student will also have a dedicated video meeting to discuss progress on their visual lesson.

**Week Thirteen: November 20: Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion: Guest: Jennifer Greenhill**


**VSRI EVENT**

*EMS! Visual and Material Culture*

**Piranesi Works**
Carolyn Yerkes, (Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)
Wednesday, November 20
12:30-2:00pm
DML 240

**No Class Thanksgiving Holiday November 27**

**Week Fourteen: December 4: Presentations**

Final Visual Presentations: Possibly December 4 (date and time to be determined by the group.)
Likely Location at Schwartz residence with dinner but other possibilities exist.

**VSRI EVENT**

*USC-LACMA History of Photography Seminar*

**Selling the Story: Commercial Pictures and Visual Persuasion**

**Imaging Animal Industry: Visualizing the American Meat Trade**
Emily Kathryn Morgan (Department of Art and Visual Culture, Iowa State University)
Thursday, December 5
5:00-6:30pm
Dundon-Berchtold University Club of USC, Scriptorium

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.