

**VISS 501 Introduction to Visual Studies: Methods and Debates**

Vanessa R. Schwartz, University of Southern California

Wednesday, 2-5pm, Taper 308  
Office Hours: Wednesday, 5-6, Taper Hall 336  
and by appointment at vschwart@usc.edu



---

**Course 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 as part of the USC's Visual Studies Graduate Certificate (VSGC).

---

**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. All readings will be posted on a shared Dropbox folder, which can be found here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/lnrc9njbcc4zu01dsygg/h?rlkey=9k6jsvi7efk1k4ovt2aytajbn&dl=0>. There may also be books you would like to purchase.

*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

website 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.

The link to the class website can be found here: <https://64cbff910c283.site123.me>

---

### 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. For Zoom events, please RSVP with [vsri@usc.edu](mailto:vsri@usc.edu) to receive the link. All special events are listed below:

- **Wednesday, August 30:** VSGC Welcome Back Event, 5:00-6:30 PM, Fisher Gallery Courtyard.
- **Friday, September 8:** "Dioramas, life-casts, and the lives of sensitive images: When was this? And did it ever happen?" Noémie Etienne, professor of cultural heritage and art history at the University of Vienna, 12:00-1:30 PM, Zoom event.
- **Saturday, September 9:** Exhibition tour of *Alfredo Boulton: Looking at Venezuela (1928-1978)*, with Idurre Alonso, Curator of Latin American Collections, Getty Research Institute, 10:00 AM, Getty Research Institute. [*Limited capacity event*]
- **Wednesday, September 13:** "Bousbir, Casablanca's Colonial Red-Light District," Jean-François Staszak, Professor of Geography and the Environment, University of Geneva, Switzerland, 12:30-2:00 PM, SOS 250.
- **Saturday, September 23:** VSGC Grant-Writing Workshop, 10:00-4:30 PM, SOS 250. [*Strongly Recommended for EVERY Student. First year and second year: morning CV-writing. Second and third and above: full day.*]
- **Tuesday, September 26:** VSGC Student Research Presentations, 12:30 PM SOS 250.
- **Thursday, October 12:** "Nos Images: Intersecting Colonial and African Photography in Postwar Belgian Congo," Sandrine Colard, Assistant Professor of African Art History, Rutgers University, Newark, 12:30-2:00 PM, Zoom event.
- **Wednesday, October 18:** VSGC Student Research Presentations, 12:30-2 PM SOS 250.
- **Thursday, October 26:** "Lenin's Shadow in Hanoi and Other Responses to Monuments by Contemporary Vietnamese Artists in the Age of Decoloniality," Nora A. Taylor, Alsdorf Professor of South and Southeast Asian Art History, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 12:30 PM SOS 250.

- **Wednesday, November 1:** “Mondrian's Dress Yves Saint Laurent, Piet Mondrian, and Pop Art,” Nancy J. Troy, Professor Emerita, Stanford University, 12:30 PM SOS 250.
- **Wednesday, November 8:** VSGC Student Research Presentations, 12:30-2 PM SOS 250.
- **Wednesday, November 29:** “Alternative Visions in the Institutional Archive: Haim Shmuel Mizrahi’s Albums and the Zionist Movement,” Rotem Rozental, Executive Director of the LA Center for Photography, Lecturer at University of Southern California, SOS 250, 5:30 to 7:30 PM.

---

### Final Project:

The final exercise in this class is to make a visual lesson about an image or exhibition about looking or seeing. Your final project is to “visualize” a lesson through PowerPoint, Prezi, Keynote, or an alternative means. 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, visibility, images, seeing, and spectacle. 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. 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?

*Resources:* In preparation for this exercise, please listen to at least two podcasts a week from the BBC Series, “A History of the World in 100 Objects”:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2/episodes/downloads>

Screen:

- John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Episode 1 1972.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX\\_9Kk&list=PLn6KyJ4PmZsPhigNqPlWGEoCgBHJbhib3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk&list=PLn6KyJ4PmZsPhigNqPlWGEoCgBHJbhib3)

Read:

- W.J.T. Mitchell, “Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (August 2002): 165-181.

Examples of past visual lessons can be found here:

1. Olivia Armandroff, Picturing a Star, Fall 2021:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1w8tIUNBJeVf9CyEjD7DwZUHg3soqa3JE/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1w8tIUNBJeVf9CyEjD7DwZUHg3soqa3JE/view?usp=share_link)
2. Rose Bishop, The Hollywood Sign, Fall 2021:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/18NC\\_Q2ogOEVxbGhL6spdNgk5R76JWwDj/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/18NC_Q2ogOEVxbGhL6spdNgk5R76JWwDj/view?usp=share_link)
3. Christopher Persaud, Robert Mapplethorpe, Fall 2021:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VMPkDIVS\\_n4cbA7YIEPCVaUntalt3EhL/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VMPkDIVS_n4cbA7YIEPCVaUntalt3EhL/view?usp=share_link)
4. Audrey Storm, Windows XP background, Fall 2021:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nTmthJtTccG6v8k18AMi5PollxHc7yJV/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nTmthJtTccG6v8k18AMi5PollxHc7yJV/view?usp=share_link)

---

### Grading:

Weekly Posts: 20%  
Seminar participation: 30%  
Visual Lesson: 20%  
Final paper : 30%

---

### Schedule of Readings, Seminars, and VSRI Events:

#### **Part I: Definitions**

#### **Week 1: August 23**

#### **What is a Field of Study? A Discipline? A Method?**

- Horst Bredekamp, "A Neglected Tradition? Art History as *Bildwissenschaft*," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Spring 2003): 418-428.
- Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation*, Episode 1: "The Skin of Our Teeth," (1969).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMpoGi1MckQ>
- Scott Heller, "Visual Images Replace Text as Focal Point for Many Scholars" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 19, 1996.
- William Innes Homer, "Visual Culture: A New Paradigm," *American Art* 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1998): 6-9.
- 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.
- 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.

OPTIONAL:

- Susanne Von Falkenhausen, *Beyond the Mirror: Seeing in Art History and Visual Culture Studies* (Berlin: Bielefeld transcript Verlag, 2020).

**Week 2: August 30**

**What is an Image? What Can It Do?**

- 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>
- [Emanuele Coccia, \*Sensible Life: A Micro-Ontology of the Image\* \(New York: Fordham University Press, 2016\).](#)
- [Horst Bredekamp, \*Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency\* \(Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018\), esp. 1-30; 137-192; 265-288.](#)
- [Michael McNay, "John Berger Obituary," \*Guardian\*, January 2, 2017.](#)
- Daniel Boorstin, "Introduction" and Chapter One, in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
- Screen: Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, "A First Glimpse of Our Magnificent Earth, Seen From the Moon," *New York Times*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/opinion/earthrise-moon-space-nasa.html>

**Week 3: September 6**

**Identity and Culture**

- Tony Bennet, "The Exhibitionary Complex" in *The Nineteenth Century Visual Culture Reader*, eds. Vanessa R. Schwartz, Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004), 117-130.
- [Dan Hicks, \*The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution\* \(London: Pluto Press, 2020\).](#)
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Whose Culture is It Anyway?" *New York Review of Books*, February 9, 2006, 38-41.
- [Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in \*Critical Terms for Art History\*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff \(Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003\): 160-173.](#)
- [Homi K. Bhaba, "Postmodernism/postcolonialism" in \*Critical Terms for Art History\*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff \(Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003\): 435-451.](#)

## Part II: Structuring Concepts

### Week 4: September 13

#### Global Space

Guest: Jean-François Staszak, Professor of Geography and the Environment, University of Geneva, Switzerland

- Jules Verne, *Around the World in 80 Days*, trans. George Makepeace Towel, 1873.
- Paula Amad "Experimental Cosmopolitanism: The Limits of Autour du Monde-ism in the Kahn Archive," in *Cosmopolitics of the Camera: Albert Kahn's Archives of the Planet*, eds. Trond Erik Bjorli and Kjetil Ansgar Jakobsen (Bristol: Intellect, 2020): 133-154.
- [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.
- Screen: *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956). Available to rent here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NTZ5S-XNy4>

### Week 5: September 20

#### Vision

Guest: Patrick Ellis (via Zoom)

- Rene Descartes, "Optics" in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge 1999), 60-65.
- Patrick Ellis, *Aeroscopes: Media of the Bird's-Eye View* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).
- [Oliver Sacks, "To See and Not See," in \*An Anthropologist on Mars\* \(New York Vintage 1996\), 108-152.](#)
- (For overview) Martin Jay, chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009).

### Week 6: September 25

**Belief: Two Kinds (9/27 rescheduled to Monday, 9/25 due travel. lass will be hosted at Prof. Schwartz's house from 5-8 with dinner).**

- [David Freedberg, \*The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response\* \(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989\): 82-98, 136-160, 317-344 especially.](#)
- Annabel Jane Wharton, "Mechanically Reproduced Jerusalem: Entrepreneurs and Tourists," and "Spectacularized Jerusalem: Imperialism, Globalization, and the Holy

Land as Theme Park,” in *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006):

- Screen: William Karel, *Dark Side of the Moon* (2002).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJoNK4uICTY>

#### **Week 7: October 4**

##### **Time/ Temporality**

Marcus Verhagen, Senior Lecturer at the Sotheby's Institute of Art (by Zoom)

- [Marcus Verhagen, \*Viewing Velocities: Time in Contemporary Art\* \(New York: Verso Books, 2023\).](#)
- Keith Moxey, “Material Time, Images, and Art History,” in *Theorizing Images*, Žarko Paić and Krešimir Purgar eds. (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016): 35-58.
- Screen: Bill Morrison, *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (2016). Movie [available on Dropbox](#).

#### **Week 8: October 11**

##### **Technology/Medium/Format/Canon/Environment?**

- Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “Art History and the Global: Deconstructing the latest canonical narrative” *Journal of Global History* (2019) 1, 413-435.
- Bill Brown, “Materiality,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 49-63.
- Lawrence Alloway, “Art and the Communications Network,” *Canadian Art*, no.100 (January 1966).
- Francois Brunet, “Introduction: No Representation without Circulation” in *Circulation*, ed. Francois Brunet (Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art, 2017): 10-39.
- John Durham Peters, “Introduction: In Medias Res,” in *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2015).
- 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 R. Schwartz, “Walter Benjamin for Historians,” *The American Historical Review* 106:5 (December 2001): 1721-43.

#### **Week 9: October 18**

##### **Cultural Exchange/Circulation/Translation**

- Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire* (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.
- Screen: Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzxX5SYU31c> (with English Subtitles)

### **Part III: Revisiting the Exploding/Expanding Disciplines; Or Has Visual Studies Simply Won?**

#### **Week 10: October 25**

##### **Photography: A Medium for Every Field**

- Michael Allan, "Picturing *Other* Languages: Reflections on Photography and Philology" *College English* 82, no. 1 (September 2019), 96-114.
- Nadya Bair, "The International Origins of "Concerned Photography": Cornell Capa in the United States, Japan, and Israel," *American Art* Vol. 36 No. 2 (Summer 2022): 74-101.
- [Thy Phu, \*Warring Visions: Photography and Vietnam\* \(Durham: Duke University Press, 2021\).](#)
- "Introduction" and Tanya Sheehan, "Business as Usual? Scientific Operations in the Early Photographic Studio" in *To Make Their Own Way in the World: The Enduring Legacy of the Zealy Daguerreotypes*, Ilisa Barbash, Molly Rogers, and Deborah Willis eds. (New York: Aperture, 2020): 17-24, 187-204.
- Courtney Baker, "Emmett Till, Justice, and the Task of Recognition," in *Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015): 69-93.

#### **Week 11: November 1**

##### **Expanded Art History: Fashion**

Guests: Nancy Troy, Professor Emerita, Stanford University and Ann Tartsinis, ABD, Stanford University.

- Nancy J. Troy and Ann Marguerite Tartsinis, *Mondrian's Dress: Yves Saint Laurent, Piet Mondrian, and Pop Art* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2023).
- Elspeth H. Brown "Introduction" and "Black Models and the Invention of the US 'Negro Market' 1945-1960" in *WORK! A Queer History of Modeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019) 1-23 and 163-209.

#### **Week 12: November 8**

##### **History and Visual Culture**

- [Vanessa R. Schwartz, \*Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris\* \(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999\).](#)
- Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Jet Age Aesthetic: Media in Motion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).
- 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.



- 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.

### **Week 13: November 15**

#### **Expanding Film Studies**

*Guest: Brian R. Jacobson, Professor of Visual Culture, California Institute of Technology.*

- Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction(s): Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant Garde," 1986, in *The Cinema of Attraction Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006) 381-388.
- Brian R. Jacobson, "The Cinema of Extractions," manuscript in progress.

Screen:

- *The Lonedale Operator* (D.W. Griffith, Biograph, 1911, 17min): <https://www.filmpreservation.org/preserved-films/screening-room/the-lonedale-operator-1911>
- *Tungsten: A Treasure of the Sierra Nevada* (Union Carbide, ca.1960s, 17min): [https://archive.org/details/caine/cm\\_000029](https://archive.org/details/caine/cm_000029)
- *Shellarama* (Richard Cawston, Shell, 1965, 16min): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT16JijC4\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT16JijC4_Y)
- Need DVD or pay to stream: *Sunshine Molly* (Lois Weber, 1915, 36min): <https://www.kinolorber.com/product/pioneers-first-women-filmmakers-dvd-1>; and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston, Warner Bros.-First National, 126min)
- Total running time w/o *Sierra Madre* = 86 minutes (212 minutes with *Sierra Madre*)

### **Week 14: November 29**

#### **Presentations**

10–15-page paper due electronically by December 10 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](http://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](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### **Support Systems:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](https://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](https://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/ssu](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssu)

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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

