ENGL 657/AMST 650: Introduction to Visual Studies

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Course Description: Scholars from across the humanities--from art history, film and media studies, American studies, and literary and cultural studies to anthropology, philosophy, sociology, history and gender studies--have increasingly turned their attention to the study of the visual. This seminar takes as its point of departure the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of visual studies during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Students will be provided with an overview of the theories, practices, and histories of the visual from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and historical periods. The seminar will be organized around a series of basic questions (such as what is an image? how do images produce meaning? what is vision?) whose responses have come to constitute the field as well as its interdisciplinarity. Readings will be drawn from seminal works in visual theory, critical iconology, cultural semiotics, cultural theory, intermediality, art history, media studies and theory as well as the psychology, philosophy, and science of vision.

Course Requirements:

1. Class Work (20%). As an introductory reading seminar in an emergent and highly disputed field whose texts stretch across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, this course will concentrate on exposure to and discussion of the texts which comprise the field of visual studies rather than longer, more formal research writing. As a result, this seminar will emphasize student-driven discussion and student-defined learning outcomes as part of its structure. Preparation for and participation in class discussion are vital parts of this course. For this reason, its success in large part depends upon you. If you are unable to attend a meeting (due to illness or family emergency) it is your obligation to contact me as soon as possible. More than one missed class session will negatively impact your grade.

2. Short Papers (10% each). Each student will write two short response papers (~3-4 double-spaced pages each), one on a text(s) from the first half of the semester, and the other on a text(s) from the last half of the semester. These papers are due on the week the readings are discussed in class and they should be turned in at the end of that class. You may choose to write on any week you like so long as (1) the first paper covers material from weeks 2-6; (2) the second paper covers material from weeks 7-14; and (3) the papers do not cover the same material (or week) as the student’s in-class presentation paper. Although the intellectual shape of the response should be open and exploratory (it could be a close reading of or response to the text’s argument, a series of questions generated by the text or by an image, or something different), its writing and analysis should be clear, concise, and coherent. These short papers are intended for you to exercise your reading skills in identifying central claims and areas for discussion, develop your analytical skills in evaluating those claims, and practice your critical and writing skills in articulating questions or problems that arise from the texts/images under discussion.

3. In Class Presentation/Discussion Leader/Critical Term (25%). At the beginning of the semester, each student will sign up to present a short paper (~10-12 minutes/5-6 pages) responding to the textual/visual material assigned for that date. The paper should be distributed electronically to fellow students at least 24 hours before you present to the class. The purpose of
these papers is to provide you with practice in leading group discussion of a text(s) and identifying subjects or problems for further inquiry. Although the papers will be pre-circulated, your responses are likely to be informal and interrogative rather than argumentative at this stage. The goal is to practice articulating the kinds of questions a text might raise and to begin formulating the stakes of asking such questions. Students can choose to focus their discussion on one text or several. The only requirement is that the assigned material not be excluded from the discussion/paper. You should consult me (either in person or via email) at least a week prior to your presentation.

4. Final Project (25%). Sometime before week 10, students should meet with me to begin formulating ideas for their final project. During week 13 (November 15), you will schedule an individual meeting with me so that we can discuss your progress and ideas. Your final project will most likely be a piece of original criticism on a relevant topic, text, image, or critical problem. However, proposals for intellectually rigorous alternatives will be considered. Ideally, the final project will result in a stunning conference paper that combines your particular research interest in visual studies with knowledge obtained from the course. The professional goal is for you to have a completed conference paper that you then can submit to appropriate venues within your particular area of specialty for presentation. The final project should be no more than 11 polished pages in length. Final projects are due the final session of class.

5. Undergraduate Syllabus (10%). Students will be asked at the end of the semester to turn in a brief undergraduate or graduate course proposal (the proposal should be no longer than one double-spaced page) and syllabus (specifying the weekly readings) on visual studies, visual literacy, or a course that combines visual studies with their area of expertise or home discipline.

Course Web Page(s): This course will encourage you to take advantage of the digital resources available on the web for the study of visual culture. Throughout this course you will be required to read, view, and print out materials located on this course’s web pages. All course content will be posted onto the university’s Blackboard page. It is imperative that you are able to access (and, if you so choose, print) course content each week. If you are a registered student of this course, you will have access to all the content on the site (http://www.purdue.edu, click on Blackboard). During the first week of class, you should access all content related parts of the site (especially the course documents and links in the course folders for each week). If you are unable to access or print/see any areas, you should contact me immediately during the first week of class. We may attempt to run wiki and group related functions for the course through the Department of English’s Professional Writing Program course web site: http://courses.rhetorike.org/lukasik.

Required Texts: Some of our readings will be assigned from the books listed below, but the majority of readings will be available in digital format through the course web page. Therefore, it is presumed that everyone registered for the course has a laptop computer which they will bring to class in order to access course materials for discussion. The books can be purchased from Von’s Bookstore (please let me know immediately if any books are unavailable). Additional readings will be distributed on-line or in class. Please purchase the editions ordered and always bring the week’s reading to class in whatever form it might be.

Tentative Semester Reading/Viewing Schedule: Readings not obtained from Von’s bookstore will be distributed on-line through the course’s Blackboard website and they can be found in the folder marked for that week (the on-line items are marked with an asterisk below). Each week you will be responsible for the reading listed below. In addition, I will try to post key images inside the weekly folders in an effort to provide higher quality reproductions than those found in the print files. Based on our weekly conversations, student interest, and the pace of the course, texts or images may be added to or removed from any given week, so be sure to check the course web page on Friday of each week. Occasionally, and according to student demand, additional material will be posted on the course web page for those who are interested in exploring a subject in more depth. As always, the reading schedule is tentative and subject to change.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Introduction
TH 8/23 Introduction, Image Access and Other Logistics, Course Content, and Seminar Organization

Week 2: What Is Visual Studies?
TH 8/28 Stuart Hall, “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and The Crisis of the Humanities” (1990)*
Michael McKeon, “The Origins of Interdisciplinary Study” (1994)*
W. J. T. Mitchell, “The Pictorial Turn” (1994)*
October Visual Culture questionnaire (1996)*
Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, “What is Visual Culture?” (1999)*

UNIT 2: WORD, IMAGE, MEDIA

Week 3: What Is An Image? How Do Images Mean?
TH 9/6 Exodous 30; 32*
C. S. Peirce. “Icon, Index, and Symbol” (1895-97)*
Ferdinand de Saussure, “The Nature of the Linguistic Sign” (1906-1911)*
Raymond Williams, “Image” (1983)*
Norman Bryson, “The Natural Attitude” (1983)*
Norman Bryson, “The Essential Copy” (1983)*
Gillian Rose, “Visual Methodologies” (2005)*
Ron Burnett, “Vantage Point and Image-Worlds” (2005)*

Week 4: Word and Image
TH 9/13 Gotthold Lessing, chapters 15-18, Laocoön (1766)*
Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoön” (1940)*
J. Hillis Miller, “Word and Image” (1992)*
W. J. T. Mitchell, “Metapictures” (1994)*
W. J. T. Mitchell, “Beyond Comparison” (1994)*
Peter Wagner, “Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality—The State(s) of The Art(s)” (1996)*
Irena Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality” (2005)*

**Week 5:** **Medium, Media, and Mediation**

TH 9/20
- Raymond Williams, “Media” and “Mediation” (1976)*
- Raymond Williams, “From Medium to Social Practice” (1977)*
- Régis Debray, “What is Mediology?” (1999)*
- Lev Manovich, “What is New Media?” (2001)*
- W. J. T. Mitchell, “Addressing Media” (2005)*

**UNIT 3: VISION AND VISUALITY**

**Week 6:** **What Is Vision 1? On The Science of Vision**

TH 9/27
- Richard Solso, from *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (1994)*
- Semir Zeki, from *Inner Vision* (1999)*
- Barbara Stafford, “Form as Figuring It Out: Toward a Cognitive History of Images” and “Mimesis Again! Inferring from Appearances” (2007)*

**Week 7:** **What Is Vision 2? On The Psychology and Philosophy of Vision**

TH 10/4
- Jean Paul Sartre, “Le Regard/The Look” (1943)*
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” (1961)*
- Jacques Lacan, “Anamorphosis” and “Line and Light” (1973)*
- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975)*

**Week 8:** **What Is Vision 3? On the Cultures of Vision: Spectacle, Surveillance, and Visuality**

TH 10/11
- Michel Foucault, “Las Meninas” (1966;1970)*
- Guy Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967)*
- Michel Foucault, “Panopticism” (1975;1979)*
- Peter DeBolla, “The Visibility of Visuality” (1995)*
- Douglass Kellner, “Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle” (2005)*

**UNIT 4: FORMS, HISTORIES, & PRACTICES OF THE VISUAL**

**Week 9:** **Perspective**

TH 10/18
- Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective As Symbolic Form* (1924-5; 1991)
Joel Snyder, “Picturing Vision” (1980)*
Hubert Damisch, from *The Origin of Perspective* (1995)*

**Week 10:** **Photography**

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Pierre Bourdieu “The Social Definition of Photography” (1965)*  
Joel Snyder, “Picturing Vision” (1980)* (continued)  
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1982)*  
Susan Sontag, “What Have We Done?” (2004)* |

**Week 11:** **Technology**

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John Johnston, “Machinic Vision” (1999)* |

**Week 12:** **Politics**

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**Week 13:** **Student Conferences – CL @ ASA**

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**Week 14:** **Thanksgiving Break**

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**Week 15:** **Media Theory**

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**Week 16:** **Conclusion**

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<td>TH 12/6</td>
<td>Final Projects and Syllabi Due In Class</td>
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