

Zooming In: Looking at Visual Culture
MCC Honors
Ellen Grabiner
grabiner@simmons.edu
x2827, L514

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

-Marcel Proust

Objective: To see anew.

Intelligently negotiating our increasingly saturated visual worlds requires the ability to parse what it is that we are seeing, to unearth hidden assumptions in how we make meaning, and come to thoughtful conclusions. Donis Dondis, in her book *A Primer to Visual Literacy*, laments the fact that although we are painstakingly taught to read, speak and write, it is assumed that we just “know” how to see. Our point of view is “frozen,” we see what we expect to see, what we habitually see. By paying careful attention to our visual field and our visual world, we will learn to “thaw” the habitual meanings we make and to see anew.

In this class, we will begin at the beginning, examining both the syntactic (formal) and semantic (meaning making) elements of seeing and inquiring into the visual as a mode of communication.

Specific content goals and methods:

Through readings, discussion, viewing and critiquing images of all kinds, we will deepen our ability to see. By coming to understand how we construct our visual world we will gain insights. By studying the sensual and perceptual theories of visual communication, we will understand how we make meaning. By exploring how images are mediated in our culture we will be alerted to gender, racial, political, sexual and ethical bias. By examining how we are persuaded, moved and swayed by what we see, we will understand the power of visual language.

Required Readings:

- Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, Oxford University Press.
- Seeing and Writing, Donald McQuade , Christine McQuade, St. Martins, 2000
- LB Brief handbook,
- Percepolis, Marjane Satrapi, Pantheon
- *and others as they are assigned*

Course Overview:

Part One: On the nature of seeing and looking

1. Introduction to the visual: visual literacy, visual intelligence
2. Three levels of visual data
3. Construction of what we see: the eye and the brain

Part Two: Visual Syntax and Semantics

1. Theories of Perception
2. Semiotics and meaning making
3. Comix: sequential images, narrative and word and image

Part Three: Reproduction and Visual Technologies

1. Technology's impact on how and what we see
2. Photography and memory
3. Ways of seeing, spaces and contexts

Part Four: Identity and Ideology

1. Killing us Softly
2. Gender, Race and Identity
3. Embodied vision

Assignments

You will be responsible for completing all the readings (on time!), writing assignments and participating in class discussions. Your voice in class is critical to the success of this course!

Grading

I strongly believe that learning occurs when the learner is motivated by her interest in the subject matter and an intellectual curiosity. Therefore I would like to remove the “grade” as the motivating factor in the learning that occurs in this course.

If you attend all classes, do all the assignments appropriately and hand them in on time, participate actively in discussions in class, you will automatically get a grade of A-. If you do extraordinary work or participate in extraordinary ways, you will get an A. For every class you miss, for each assignment that doesn't get handed in, for every class period in which you fail to contribute, you run the risk of diminishing your A-.

Attendance

The MCC attendance policy states that students are expected to attend all class meetings. After three absences, a student receives an academic warning. After six absences, she fails the course regardless of the quality of her other work in the course.

Those other rules:

Any assignment that is not completed will receive an F/zero for a grade. Please hand in your work on time. If you absolutely must miss a class, you are responsible for making up the material. This means finding a student in the class that is willing to share her notes, information with you. The heart of this course is what happens in class. Yes, there are outside assignments and opportunities to participate in extending our classroom discussion outside of the classroom time. But what is truly important is the dialog, discussion, debate that occurs during class time. *For this reason, please be aware that if you miss three or more classes over the course of the semester, you will not be able to pass the course.*

A Note on Plagiarism:

Don't. All the work you hand in must be your own. Your very own. If you cite other sources, and you certainly should, it gives credence to your assertions, and strengthens your arguments, use quotation marks if copying verbatim or just cite the source if you are paraphrasing.

I will know it if you use other's words and don't give them credit. I will know it if you steal other's work from the web. I will know it if you copy out of a book. It is just plain dumb and you will be the one who suffers. Don't do it.

Tentative Calendar

Date	Topic
9/9	Intro to Visual Culture
9/16	Levels of visual data: I
9/23	Theories of Perception Gestalt,
9/28	Semiotics
9/30	Monster's Ball I
10/7	Finish Monster's Ball
10/14	Comix 1...
10/21	Comix 2
10/28	Photo I
11/4	Photo II
11/11	Veterans day
11/18	MFA
11/23-25	Thanksgiving
12/2	Identity/ideology
12/9	Last Class

Integrative Seminar

Zooming In: Looking at Visual Culture

Talk to Me: Exploring Computational Linguistics

The obvious meeting site for these two courses is the intersection of word and image. Metaphor, graphic novels, animation and film offer us a locus in which we can explore the ways in which word and image interact to create narrative. In this integrative seminar, we will draw together our insights and employ word and image in concert to create relevant narratives of our own.

9/7 Welcome to LCIS
9/14 Star Trek: Structuring shared belief system
9/21- Library Jeopardy
9/28 Star Trek Metaphors/,Visual illusions, speech errors
10/5 Semiotics
10/12 Gestures
10/19 Percepolis
10/26 American Splendor
11/2 Slam
11/9 Gender Construction
11/16 Movie presentations
11/23-25 Thanksgiving
11/30
12/7