

Course Form for PKU Summer School International 2023

Course Title	<i>Visual Communication for a Global World</i>
	Title in Chinese: 全球背景下的视觉传播
Teacher	Professor Laurence Simmons
First day of classes	July 3, 2023
Last day of classes	July 14, 2023
Course Credit	3 credits (two weeks with 3 hours of classes every morning from Mon-Fri) plus five afternoons for field-trips and guided group discussions with multiple-choice question exercises or quizzes (Subject to adjustment).
Course Description	
Objective:	
Course goals Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain an understanding of the physiological and cognitive aspects of seeing.• Learn theories scholars have developed to explain visual communication.• Learn to analyse and critique visual messages.• Develop skills in producing visual messages.	
Pre-requisites /Target audience	
The target audience are undergraduates or graduates, or even professionals, from a wide background with an interest in visual culture and how it is defining our world today. There will be a particular focus on the importance of digital images and how they are both facilitating and challenging our lives.	
Proceeding of the Course	
Morning sessions will include a two-hour lecture and one-hour guided group work and discussion of specific images. Afternoon sessions will consist of guided close-reading of images in different media, group presentations and the multiple-choice exercises. Guided field trip(s) to explore visual imagery in places such as the National Museum of China will also be included (Subject to adjustment).	
Assignments (essay or other forms)	

Short description of image (10% Percentage of total mark for the course)

Multiple-choice Test (20% Percentage of total mark for the course)

Group Presentation

15 -minute group presentations on selected topics. All members of the group will be expected to contribute to the final presentation and deliver a segment of it. A collective mark and grade will be assigned.

Percentage of total mark for the course: 20%

Visual Analysis Project

Length around 2000 words including visual components. Due July 16.

Percentage of total mark for the course: 50%

Evaluation Details

Presentations will be evaluated in class. The Short description of an image will be due on July 9.

The multiple-choice questions will review the content of the course and the multiple-choice test will be sat in the final hour of the course. Visual Projects will be consigned by email and a mark, comments and grade returned by email.

Text Books and Reading Materials

Pdfs of readings and mp4s of material for viewing will be supplied.

Academic Integrity (If necessary)

CLASS SCHEDULE

(Subject to adjustment)

Session 1: *What we see: Elements of visual communication*

Date: July 3

Overview of the course and looks at the physiology of seeing, visual literacy, and new technologies of seeing. Images have little use if our mind's don't use them. One reason we so often forget our dreams is that the mental images are not translated into words. This is why we are going to need a lot of words to think about visual communication. Visual imagery is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges, and therefore we are also going to need a critical approach when discussing it.

How do our brains process visual messages? Why do we remember certain images?

Reading: Scott McCloud, 'The Vocabulary of Comics', <i>Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art</i> (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), Chapter 2 pp. 24-59.	
Groupwork identification and description of selected visual images.	
Session 2: <i>How we see: Sensory theories of visual communication</i>	Date: July 4
Sensory theories of visual communication are concerned with how and what the brain notices or fails to see from visual cues of colour, form and depth. Sensory theories aim to explain how raw data from nerves is transmitted to our brains. There are three main sensory theories: gestalt theory, constructivist theory and ecological theory.	
Is what you see what you get? Do we construct the images we see in our brains? What rules do we use to do that?	
Reading: Paul Martin Lester, 'Visual Theories,' <i>Visual Communication: Images with Messages</i> (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2006), Chapter 3 pp. 42-71.	
Groupwork identification and description of selected visual images.	
Session 3: <i>How we see: Perceptual theories of communication</i>	Date: July 5
Interestingly, the word theory comes from the ancient Greek word <i>teorin</i> (to see). Perceptual theories look at how meanings are formed after visual stimuli are received and processed. The two main theories are: semiotics (the study of the science of signs) and cognitive theory (which argues that mental activities such as memory, projection, expectation affect our visual perception).	
What connects the objects we see to the images we make of them? Do we only see what we expect to see? What role does memory play when seeing images?	
Reading: Gillian Rose, 'Semiology,' <i>Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching Visual Materials</i> (London: SAGE, 2016, 4TH EDITION), Chap 6 pp. 106-146.	
Groupwork identification and description of selected visual images.	

Session 4: <i>Why we see: Image or Imagination</i>	Date: July 6
Many commentators believe that there is a difference between normal vision and scientific vision. Do we 'see' in our dreams? Digitisation has radically changed how we see, make, store and transmit images. What is the difference between 'real', 'represented' and 'imaginary' images?	
What do we mean by normal vision? How important is 'seeing' for truth and knowledge? How scientific can vision be? Can we train ourselves to see 'scientifically' and be Sherlock Holmes instead of Dr Watson?	
Reading: Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, 'Normalising Vision,' <i>Understanding the Visual</i> (London: SAGE, 2007), Chapter 6, pp. 131-149.	
Groupwork identification and description of selected visual images.	
Session 5: <i>Why we see: Visual pleasure</i>	Date: July 7
Psychoanalysis offers a set of tools for interpreting visual materials. Sigmund Freud cited <i>scopophilia</i> (pleasure in looking) as one of the basic drives, and argued we desire what we 'gaze' at. While Jacques Lacan, who followed and developed Freud's theories, argued that identity emerged at what he called 'the mirror stage', the point at which a small child can recognise itself as an individual.	
Why and how do we get pleasure from seeing? How is sexual difference visual? Is all seeing voyeuristic? Is there an <i>autoerotic</i> element to the 'selfies' we take of ourselves?	
Reading: Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' <i>Visual and Other Pleasures</i> (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 14-26. (Written in 1973 and published in 1975 in <i>Screen</i>).	
Close-reading of film sequences.	
Session 6: <i>Why we see what we see: Principles of composition</i>	Date: July 10

Compositional interpretation claims to look at images for what they are, rather than what they do or how they are used. It looks very carefully at the form and experiencing of images by breaking down their composition into a number of components, for example, colour, spatial organisation, light.	
What does an image actually show? How does the image organise its space? How does it organise us, its viewer? What visual cues are we offered?	
Reading: Paul Martin Lester, 'Visual Cues,' <i>Visual Communication: Images with Messages</i> (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2006), Chapter 2 pp. 14-41.	
Groupwork identification and description of selected visual images.	
Session 7: <i>Still images: Painting and photography</i>	Date: July 11
A stilled image, one that freezes time forever in a powerfully arresting moment, will always have the capacity to capture our attention, and the stilled moment will always be a vital component of visual communication because there is no way to escape its underlying power. The spatial organisation of a painting is not innocent. It depends on conventions, has effects and it produces a specific relation between image and spectator. For example, perspective which dominated Western painting for centuries provides a means of representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface.	
How do paintings and photographs capture our gaze and affect us?	
Readings: Norman Bryson, 'Semiology and Visual Interpretation,' in <i>Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation</i> , N. Bryson, M.A. Holly and K. Moxey (eds) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 61-73 Susan Sontag, 'In Plato's Cave' in her <i>On Photography</i> (London: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 3-24.	
Close reading of a painting and a photograph.	
Session 8: <i>Moving images: Film and television</i>	Date: July 12

Film and television convey motion through an illusory phenomenon of human perception called stroboscopic or apparent motion. The phenomenon results in our perceiving multiple, rapidly moving but separate still image frames as movement. Today's films show us 24 still images every single second. Television, on the other hand, is created by electron beams that are constantly changing and the complete television frame is created as the electron beams scan two fields of alternating lines that interlace in a constant, repeated pattern on the screen. A moving image shocks, illuminates and entertains, but it is fleeting and quickly replaced by another image.

How do film and television attract and hold our attention? What are some of the differences between viewing film and television? How has the introduction of the small screen impacted our viewing of film and television?

Amy Villarejo, 'The Language of Film' in her *Film Studies: The Basics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 27-58.

Raymond Williams, 'Programming as Sequence or Flow' in his *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), pp. 86-96.

Close reading of a music video.

Session 9: *Selling the Visual: Advertising, brands and logos*

Date: July 13

The form and location of advertisements used to be straightforward: newspapers, magazines, television. But how have new kinds of advertising on the internet changed that picture? What counts as an advert is not as obvious as it once was: there are banner ads on webpages, ads that no longer appeal to audiences of mass media but are designed to appeal to target audiences (Google can find you...), product placement, celebrities as 'product ambassadors', and Facebook ad campaigns. Brand adverts are now not aimed at selling anything specific, but instead work to give a brand a certain set of values or emotional associations. The pervasiveness of brands can make deciding what is an advert and what is not difficult.

What is a brand? How has the internet changed advertising? How do we decide what is an advert and what is not? Why do corporations need visual logos? How do logos work for smartphone apps?

Arthur Asa Berger, 'What is a brand?: A Semiotic Analysis' in his *Brands and Cultural Analysis* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 9-17.

Arthur Asa Berger, 'Logos and Visual Signifiers' in his *Brands and Cultural Analysis* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 75-85.

Close reading of print and television advertisements.

Session 10: *Digital images*

Date: July 14

Images have always moved, not only in film or television. Recently that movement has intensified, images now circulate across social media platforms (YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, WeChat, Snapchat and Instagram), and that mobility is more and more central to our understanding of contemporary visual culture. The vast numbers of images on online platforms is often cited as evidence that our lives are saturated with images. Part of that 'saturation' is due to the fact that we now use, store, exchange, copy, add tags to these images in a digital format and no longer in analogue form.

How is the visual now radically determining our lives? What (digital) methods we will develop, and are developing, to analyse digital images? Will those digital methods be able to address questions of cultural meaning?

Reading: Gillian Rose, 'Digital Methods: Digital Images, Digitally Analysed,' *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching Visual Materials* (London: SAGE, 2016, 4TH EDITION), Chap 11 pp. 288-306.

Comparison of two images of animals: one of the earliest images created by humans (in the caves of Chauvet) and a recent digital creation (*Jurassic Park*).

A CV of 250-300 words and a high-resolution personal photo should also be provided