LIT 6856. Cultural Studies: Interventions, Spring 2019
Professor: Dr. Trevor Mowchun

The Image World: Themes and Experiments

Class: Graduate seminar room (TUR 4112)—Wednesday, periods 3-5 (9:35am-12:35pm)
Screening: ROL 115—Thursday, periods E1-E3 (7:20pm-10:10pm); projectionist: Matthew Barkley
Office hours (TUR 4336): Wednesday 1:15pm-3:00pm and Thursday 4:15pm-5:30pm, or by appointment.
Email: tmowchun@ufl.edu (please allow at least 24 hours for a response)
Office phone number: 352-294-2839

Media Assistant: Jessica Murray (TUR 4303)
Availability: Tuesday periods 9-10 (4:05pm-6pm), Wednesday periods 6-8 (12:50pm-3:50pm),
Thursday periods 9-10 (4:05pm-6pm), Friday periods 4-5 (10:40am-12:30pm)
Email: jrmurray94@ufl.edu

Course Description

An exploratory course on the nature of images as we experience them today (from art objects to historical objects to fundamental facts of our everyday life), we will be driven by some very basic yet demanding questions: What do images do? What do different kinds of images do differently? What do we do with images when we view them thoughtfully, and how are we affected in turn when we allow ourselves to be carried away by them? Why do some images enthrall while others barely scrape our awareness? Why has the image become so vital to our way of life and how have technologies of visual representation like photography and film changed our way of life? The image-based mediums of painting, photography and film will be considered individually and in light of each other, as “image fields” within the increasingly complex and rapidly changing contexts of contemporary visual culture. Today, amidst a dense saturation and daily consumption of images, it is more important than ever to learn how to view such images critically without diminishing their remarkable powers of illumination and arrest. To this end, classes will feature a cluster of questions and contexts designed to expand our everyday habits and horizons of viewing. Ideas within and between film studies, aesthetics, art history, philosophy, psychology and ethics will be developed in relation to various motifs, movements, and epiphanies from the visual arts. With text and image in either hand, some ideas to be considered are as follows: the ambiguity of the image, the historical evolution of realism, the ruptures of abstraction, chance, the psychology of analogue and digital images, the optical unconscious, the candid versus the staged, shock value, image pollution, and the ocularcentrism of the West.

In addition to being interdisciplinary, the methods of this seminar on the image are also of a hybrid nature encompassing both theoretical and artistic modes of inquiry. Students will be encouraged to think openly and freely, to develop their own methods of interdisciplinary research and creation, exploring the resonance between readings and screenings through response papers and video essays. The video essay will also be studied as a way of thinking in audiovisual terms, with a selection of screenings devoted to exemplars of this relatively recent genre of “cinematic scholarship.” (Students will be provided with access to the English
department’s production and post-production equipment; basic proficiency in video editing in particular is recommended but not required. Collaborations on the video essays are possible and encouraged.) Regardless of the forms of thought developed throughout this course, our primary mandate will be to stage a meaningful dialogue between ideas and images in an effort to intellectualize our senses and sensitize our intellect. The absence of a single method or overarching paradigm to tackle “the image world” calls for an expansive, deeply engaged perspective that is both theoretical and hands-on, one with an openness for intellectual and creative experiment. Be prepared for an intense and exciting semester of reading, viewing, thinking and making.

Equipment, Technical Assistance, and Proficiency (for video essay projects)

The Department of English provides production and post-production equipment, including Adobe Premiere editing software, however you are free to use your own equipment if you so choose. A basic proficiency test administered by our media assistant will be required before checking out equipment for the first time, particularly the department’s cameras. Our media assistant will be available in the equipment room (TUR 4303) to conduct basic proficiency tests and provide demonstrations of production and postproduction equipment, in addition to assisting with any technical questions you may have in person and via email. Please be aware that technical support is restricted to the department’s onsite resources. Hours of availability are listed at the top of the syllabus.

In order to record, store, transfer and regularly back up your work you may need all or some of the following equipment:
- SD card for video recording (recommended: SanDisk 32GB Extreme Pro SDHC UHS-I Memory Card)
- SD card for audio recording (recommended: SanDisk 16GB Ultra UHS-I SDHC Memory Card class 10)
- External hard drive for project storage (recommended: WD 1TB My Passport USB 3.0 Secure Portable Hard Drive)
- SD card reader (recommended: Transcend RDF5 USB 3.0 SDHC/SDXC/microSDHC/SDXC Memory Card Reader) *The department’s iMac computers have SD slots, as do the majority of laptops

Equipment and Lab Policies

The production room is located in TUR 4303. Throughout the semester you will have 24/7 access and will be given keys to the building and to an interior editing room. If you lose either of these keys, you will be charged $50 for a replacement. To sign out keys please consult with the technician during scheduled office hours in TUR 4303. Be sure to return your keys at the end of the semester.

When checking out equipment, the technician will manage all equipment sign-ins and sign-outs, support all computer platforms and deal with any equipment problems, exchanges, repairs etc. She will provide a schedule and forms for requesting equipment for all projects and determine return dates in accordance with the syllabus and the course deadlines. You are fully responsible for all equipment that you have signed out, including any mishandling, damage or loss of gear.
Online technical resources:
- Video Production Tips (from Penn State Media Commons):
  https://mediacommons.psu.edu/2017/02/01/video-production-tips/
- Department camera manual—Canon Rebel T5i (information about video starts on page 173; page 176 discusses manual video settings):
- Film glossary (from New York Film Academy):
  https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/glossary/
- Basic Adobe Premiere editing tutorial:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hls3Tp7JS8E

Schedule:

* The screening schedule is subject to change.
* Films shown on the Thursday screening pertain to the following week in which they are scheduled and will be taken up on the next Wednesday class.
* In addition to feature films, screenings will consist of thematically linked clusters of clips. The screening session will typically involve a feature film and sometimes a short film—only these are indicated in the syllabus. The clip materials will be shown in class. Titles of all paintings, photographs and films shown in class will be posted on Canvas for your reference.
* There will be no textbook for the course. All readings are on reserve and generally available for download through Canvas. Readings are assigned to animate weekly themes and will be used less as guides than catalysts for discussion.

Week 1 (Jan. 9-10): Introduction and Some Cinematic Awakenings


Screening (short): Untitled (for Marilyn) (Stan Brakhage, USA, 1992)
Screening (feature): San Soleil (Chris Marker, France, 1983)

Week 2 (Jan. 16-17): Visual Thinking and the Pictorial Challenge


Screening (feature): Toute une nuit (Chantal Akerman, France/Belgium, 1982)

Week 3 (Jan. 23-24): Grounding the Image, Redeeming the Everyday


Screening (short): La Morte Rouge (Victor Erice, Spain, 2006)
Screening (feature): Blue (Derek Jarman, UK, 1993)

Week 4 (Jan. 30-31): The Form/Formlessness of the Essay


Screening (feature): Contempt (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1963)

Week 5 (Feb. 6-7): Mobile Mediums


Screening (short): Who Killed Brown Owl (Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy, UK, 2004)
Screening (feature): Dream of Light (Victor Erice, Spain, 1992)

Week 6 (Feb. 13-14): The Look and Logic of Realism


Screening (short): idizwadidiz (Isiah Medina, Canada, 2018)
Screening (feature): Mirror (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1975)

Week 7 (Feb. 20-21): The Image as Other


Screening (short): Interface (Harun Farocki)
Screening (feature): Holy Motors (Leos Carax, France, 2012)

Week 8 (Feb. 27-28): From Analogue to Digital Images and Psychologies


Screening (short): Rose Hobart (Joseph Cornell, USA, 1936), Alone. Life Wastes Andy Hardy (Martin Arnold, Austria, 1998)
Screening (feature): The Phantom of Liberty (Luis Buñuel, France, 1974)

Week 9—no classes, spring break

Week 10 (Mar. 13-14): Cinephilia, Surrealism, and the Optical Unconscious


Screening (feature): Play Time (Jacques Tati, France, 1967)

Week 11 (Mar. 20-21): Phenomenologies of the Image


Screening (short): November (Hito Steyerl, Germany, 2004); examples of videographic essays by Eric Faden, Catherine Grant and Kevin B. Lee

Week 12 (Mar. 27-28): The Videographic Essay

Christian Keathley and Jason Mittell, The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image (Montreal: Caboose, 2016)

Screening (short): 13 Most Beautiful... Songs for Andy Warhol Screen Tests (Andy Warhol, USA, 1964-66)
Screening (feature): Christine (Antonio Campos, USA/UK, 2016)

Week 13 (Apr. 3-4): Visual Truths and Lies


Screening (feature): The Master (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA, 2013)

Week 14 (Apr. 10-11): From the Sacred to the Profane


Screening (feature): Afterschool (Antonio Campos, USA, 2008)

Week 15 (Apr. 17-18): Image Pollution and Violent Images


Susan Sontag, Chapters 1-3 from Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), pp. 3-58.


Week 16 (Apr. 24): Wondering and Wandering: Towards an Ethics of Image Production and Reception


Coursework:

3 response papers (3-4 pages each), Due in class: Jan. 30, Feb. 20, Mar. 13 30%
Moving Image Experiment (2-4min), Due: Apr. 5, via WeTransfer 15%
Essay (8-12 pages) or video essay (5-10min), Due in class or WeTransfer: Apr. 24 30%
Oral presentation 15%
Participation 10%

Response papers are thoughtful engagements with the readings and artworks explored in class. The goal is not to summarize anything or toss quick and easy answers to complex material. Rather these papers are opportunities to contemplate, experiment and build a deeper understanding of the course content in a more direct, imaginative and unsystematic way. More detailed instructions are forthcoming.

The Moving Image Experiment will explore the scholarly, artistic, and/or pedagogical possibilities of the video essay. The conceptualization and realization of a short video essay or audiovisual fragment of thought is also an opportunity to combine the intellectual rigor of the scholarly essay and the aesthetic power of a work of art. The experiment can be seen as interdisciplinarity itself in action where you will have the opportunity to develop and demonstrate your own manner of “audiovisual thinking.” In the process, we will test to what extent a video essay/fragment can reach the depth, detail and precision of written essays/thoughts. Two possible paths you may undertake in the development of the moving image experiment are as follows: audiovisual hermeneutics and speculative reflection. The former involves an audiovisual interpretation of one of the films or film clips screened in class, and the latter is a more artistic activation/exploration of one of the concepts taken from the readings or lectures.

The oral presentation is a 15-20 minute consideration of some of the ideas and questions emerging from the readings and films for a given week. Depending on your interests, you may focus more on the readings or screenings—though I would like to see some possible connections between them. Use of quotes from the readings, clips from the films, and any other outside scholarly and/or artistic material is encouraged. Conclude your presentation with 1-2 questions or speculations for further discussion. These presentations can also be used as a testing ground for material from the response papers or the moving image experiment.

The final paper or video essay will be a more substantial consideration of a suggested topic or topic of your own choosing. You may expand and develop one of your response papers or the moving image experiment, if you feel it is worth pursuing in greater depth and contains the seeds of a larger research project. However, you are also free to start from scratch if a new set of ideas and connections emerge in your thinking. It is highly recommended that you discuss the overall direction and details of your final work with me during office hours or via email, especially if
you plan on pursuing ideas not yet tackled in your shorter work. You can use the course material as a theoretical foundation and/or inspiration for analyses involving multiple artworks and artistic mediums.

* Submission of written material: I require hardcopies of all written assignments, submitted in class and on time. If you are unable to submit your work in class, please let me know the reason and email me a PDF file on the due date. If you cannot meet a deadline then please inform me as soon as possible and we will figure out how best to proceed. Use 1.5 or double spacing, reasonable formatting and bibliographic referencing, as per usual.

* Submission of film material: I recommend using a free file sharing service called WeTransfer instead of flash drives. On WeTransfer you can upload files upwards of 2GB, which should be more than sufficient. If your files exceed the maximum size be sure to compress them. Send your files to my email address: tmowchun@ufl.edu. Once you successfully transfer your files using this service, I will receive a link with the time of submission and you will receive a confirmation email once they have been downloaded. Please ensure your files are labelled with your name and project title, if applicable.

**Policies and Services**

* I will respond to emails usually within a day or two. While email communication may seem indispensable nowadays, you may find it more productive and interesting to come meet with me during office hours to discuss the course material. If you are unable to meet during scheduled office hours then feel free to make an appointment.
* If you have to miss a class for any reason, please let me know ahead of time. A maximum of 2 absences will be permitted with advance notice and a reasonable excuse. Communication with the instructor is crucial to avoid misunderstandings related to absences. These policies are consistent with the UF’s attendance policies. For more information on these policies, please visit: https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx
* I respectfully ask all students to refrain from using cell phones and internet during class and screenings.
* Please do not record any class lecture without permission from me.

* Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/
* Students with disabilities who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/).
* For information on UF Grading policies:
  https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/
* For counseling or urgent help you may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center at 352-392-1575, or contact them online: https://counseling.ufl.edu/services/individual/
* UF’s policy on Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/