Kathryn C. Hardy

SEEING IS BELIEVING: Visuality, Power, and Truth

How does seeing work? Does the process of *seeing* begin with light bouncing off of objects and into our eyes – or when we ascertain what we are looking at? Visual interactions are far from neutral perceptions of objective truth, as they always involve interpretation of the world. Yet visual representations are one of the most common ways that we classify and understand the world around us. This course considers *seeing* as it affects social, spiritual, and political life: from religious practices of iconic representation and iconoclasm (and the politics these practices engender), to the technological practices of reproduction in creating “realistic” forgeries, to the ways that visuality can be a technology of power. This freshman seminar considers examples from across a wide range of times and places. We begin by exploring visuality, representation, art, and the ways that these produce meaning. We then move to examining several premodern and contemporary visual practices of major religions, considering how practices and ideologies of the visual vary dramatically across space and time. Next, we explore the relationship of changing technologies to notions of reality and authenticity. We then consider how techniques of visuality can be used for domination, particularly in contexts of economic and racial inequality. Finally, we examine the ways in which people use visual codes to define themselves through clothes, hair, and other visible signs of identity. Throughout, students will use the tools of art history, anthropology, and religious studies to gain a greater critical understanding of the practices, ideologies, and histories through which seeing meaningfully emerges across space and time.

Class Requirements and Grading:

**20%:** Participation, including careful engagement with texts, films, and images, and enthusiastic discussion in class

**20%:** Six short message board posts, and six responses to others’ posts (one message board post and at least one response for each of the six major topics)

**10%:** Visual Assignment One: Image Analysis (1-3 pp)

**10%:** Visual Assignment Two: Film Analysis (1-3 pp)

**20%:** Visual Assignment Three: Ethnography (5 points: fieldnotes; 10 points: written ethnography; 5 points: in-class group presentation) (3-5 pp)

**20%:** Final paper (2 points: topic and bibliography; 2 points: draft to peer reviewer; 2 points: comments to peer reviewer; 12 points: final paper)

**I. Beginnings:**

[Message board post #1]

Week 1.

A. Introduction and syllabus overview. In class: read “Optical Illusions.” Watch: “Optical Illusions Show How We See,” TED talk by Beau Lotto.

B. Raymond Williams. “Image” and “Representation.” From *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. 1976.

**II. Images, Representation, Art**

[Message board post #2]

Week 2.

A. W. J. T. Mitchell. “Part I: Images.” From *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images.* 2005.

B. Michel Foucault. “Las Meninas.” From *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences,* 1966.

Week 3.

A. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. 1972. (selections)

B. E. H. Gombrich, “On Art and Artists.” From *The Story of Art*. 1995.

**MUSEUM TRIP and Visual Assignment One:** Find a figurative image that draws attention to visual interaction. Describe the object, and the visual interaction within it, in the manner of Foucault’s description of *Las Meninas*. Be prepared to show your image in class and describe the reasons you chose it for this presentation.

**III. Efficacious Sight: Iconicity and Iconoclasm**

[Message board post #3]

Week 4: (Indian Visual Encounters with the Divine)

A. Diana Eck. “Darsan,” “The Visible India,” “Film Images,” and “The Image of God,” from *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*,pp 3-21. 1981.

B. Andy Rotman. “The Erotics of Practice: Objects and Agency in Buddhist *Avadhana* Literature.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 71:3 (555-578).

Screenings: *Ramayan* (Ramanand Sagar, 1987). Selections from Episode 10.

Selections from *Amar, Akbar, Anthony*. (Mohanji Desai, DATE?).

**Visual Assignment 3: Film analysis. (You may review any of the films screened for class.)**

Week 5: (Hinduism and Politics)

A. Philip Lutgendorf. “My Hanuman is Bigger than Yours.” *History of Religions*, 33:3(211-245).

B. Melanie Dean. “From ‘Evil Eye’ Anxiety to the Desirability of Envy: Status, Consumption and the Politics of Visibility in Urban South India.” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 47:2 (185-216).

Screening: *In God’s Name* (dir. Anand Pathwardhan, 1991).

Week 6: (Images in Islam and Christianity)

A. Jamal Elias. “Representation, Resemblance, and Religion” and “Idols, Icons, and Images in Islam,” from *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam*. 2012.

B. Daniel Wojcik. “‘Polaroids from Heaven.’ Photography, Folk Religion, and the Miraculous Image Tradition at a Marian Apparition Site.” *Journal of American Folklore*, 109:432 (129-148).

**IV. Reproduction and Reality: What Counts as ‘Authentic?’**

[Message board post #4]

Week 7:

A. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

B. Christopher Pinney, “The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants ‘Get Hold’ of Images,” from *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. 2002.

Week 8:

A. Winnie Won Yin Wong. “Imagining the Great Painting Factory,” from *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade.* 2014.

B. Eric Michaels. *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons.* 1994. (selections)

**V. Surveillance, Security, Space**

[Message board post #5]

[Topic and bibliography DUE end of Week 9]

Week 9 (Spaces of Surveillance):

A. Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (Selections from “The Spectacle of the Scaffold” and “Panopticism.”)

*AND*

Jeremy Crampton, “Eastern State Penitentiary.” https://foucaultblog.wordpress.com/2007/06/30/eastern-state-penitentiary/

B. Nicholas Mirzoeff. “Oversight: The Ordering of Slavery,” from *The Right to Look*. 2011.

Week 10 (Technoscience and the Colonial “Other”):

A. Christopher Pinney. “‘Stern Fidelity’ and ‘Penetrating Certainty.’” In *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*.

B. María Elena Martínez. “Changing Contours: ‘Limpieza de Sangre’ in the Age of Reason and Reform.” In *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*.

Week 11: Ordering Space:

A. Thongchai Winichakul. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. 1994. (selections from “The Coming of a New Geography,” “Boundary,” and “Mapping: A New Technology of Space.”)

B. Timothy Mitchell. “Egypt at the Exhibition.” From *Colonising Egypt.* 1991.

**VI. Making the Self**

[Message board post #6]

**Visual Assignment 3: Ethnography.** As a class we will choose one or two everyday adornment practices on campus (styles of dorm room decoration, clothing, hairstyles, etc). You will interview 3-5 people on campus about their choices *and* take careful fieldnotes on the practices you observe. In small groups, you will discuss your findings and come up with a way to present them to the class using visual evidence.

Week 12: Style and Subculture

A. Dick Hebdige. “Subculture and Style” and “From Culture to Hegemony,” from *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. 1979.

B. Constantine Nakassis. “Status Through the Screen: Audiences and Actors in Tamil Commercial Cinema.” Working paper. 2011.

Screening: *Photo Wallahs.* (David and Judith Macdougall, 1991).

Week 13: The (Race/Caste/Gender) Politics of Adornment

A. Emma Tarlo. “Introduction: The Problem of What to Wear,” and “Fashion Fables for an Urban Village,” from *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*. 1996.

B. Ginetta Candelario. "Hair Race-ing: Dominican Beauty Culture and Identity Production," in *Meridians: Race, Feminism, Transnationalism*, 1:1.

Week 14:

Student Presentations

Paper Drafts to Peer Reviewers on Friday, to be returned the following Monday.

Week 15:

Final Papers Due