

**Spring, 2013 ENG 6426: Visual Texts & Technology**

**Professor Barry Mauer**

**cl1 119, 7:30PM - 10:15PM Mondays**

Office Hours: M 6:30-7:30 p.m., TR 10:00-11:45 a.m., and by appointment

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**Visual T&T Course description**

What is at stake in the contemporary shift from a text-based culture to an image-based one? In particular, how do photographic and digital images alter our ideas and practices of ideology, science, art, and invention? This seminar offers two approaches—hermeneutic and heuritic—to answer these questions. The hermeneutic approach concerns the interpretation of texts. To pursue this line of inquiry, we will investigate the materiality of visual texts and their production, from painting to photography and film, and eventually to digital images. We will examine inventions within the visual arts, from Impressionism and Cubism to Surrealism, Hollywood and avant-garde cinemas, and electronic and online avatars. In addition, we will investigate critical perspectives useful for interpreting visual texts, including semiotics, Freudian psychology, cognitive psychology, Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism. The other approach, heuritics, relates to the invention process itself. Using this approach, we will experiment with new research and writing practices using technologies of visual texts with an eye towards transforming the apparatus of scholarship itself. Our goal is to understand how we might develop new research practices appropriate to our visual age: to write with images. The types of experiments we will be producing do not require a high degree of technical skill or artistic talent. They do require the ability to conceptualize.

The midterm and final papers will require a section of formal experimentation with the “visual essay,” though our “target” will not be the arts, but rather the intersection of Texts and Technology with public policy. The final paper will be addressed to an agency (to be chosen in consultation with the instructor) concerned with solving or ameliorating a public problem. Students may choose to work in teams, each writing a chapter (12-15 pages) of a longer manuscript.

**Course Objectives**

1. To train you to work in critical studies of visual texts and in the production of visual texts.
2. To identify the aesthetic features of visual texts.
3. To identify the methods of composition practiced by the producers of visual texts.
4. To experiment with methods of visual texts production.
5. To write persuasively about the “how” and “why” of such experiments, particularly your own. Each act of composition involves developing the “rules of the game,” a set of constraints about what is and isn’t allowed. You will learn to explain and justify the rules of the game for your own compositions.
6. To learn how to read and incorporate elements from difficult works, including avant-garde texts, theories that account for visual texts’ methods and meanings, and written accounts of complex historical events in your own writing.
7. To create a bridge between criticism and practice, as numerous authors and artists like Breton tried to do. In other words, criticism is not separate from the concerns of artists; it has its own compositional principles and is open to invention. Occupy criticism!
8. To learn about the recent movements in context by exploring the transformational ideas and events of the past 180 years, including the triumph of science over religion, the invention of photography, audio recording, and the cinema, the rise of modern cities, the emergence of trains and automobiles, the arrival of mechanized warfare, the theories of Marx and Freud, Feminism and Structuralism, and the rise of Taylorist economies, which include liberal democracies and fascist and communist states. This historical context supplied the problems that our artists and authors addressed, provided them with means for addressing those problems, and allowed them access to markets that had not previously been available.

### **Course Goals**

The goals of this class overlap with those of the English Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, the discipline of textual studies, the University of Central Florida, and its relationship to the greater community (Orlando, Florida, the United States, and the world). The goals of this class also overlap with my goals as an instructor and, I hope, with your goals as a student.

#### **English:**

- To read discerningly, think critically, and write clearly.
- To study literature in historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts to reveal the ways of people and society while encouraging the lifelong pleasure to be found in this art form.

#### **Discipline of textual studies:**

- Literacy
- Critical thinking
- Self-knowledge
- Citizenship

#### **CAH:**

- To cultivate the examined life in order to act thoughtfully and ethically, in both public and private roles.
- To nourish respect for the rich artistic and scientific contributions of all cultures.
- Critical reflection and evaluative skills.
- To solve the problems of our society with broad knowledge, precise expertise, critical thinking, and skills to effectively utilize technology.
- Professional skills.
- Public service and an appreciation for tolerance, freedom of expression, and open-mindedness.
- To challenge conventional wisdom through our inquisitiveness, good communication, and good citizenship.
- To store and the transmit the cultural, humanistic, and scientific learning that addresses the recurrent, and yet ever changing, human and social questions of how individuals and groups give meaning, purpose, and value to their lives.
- Citizenship in an increasingly diverse global economy.
- Familiarization with the technological advances that characterize the postindustrial society and application of these advances to major fields of inquiry.

#### **UCF Goals:**

- Provide international focus to our curricula and research programs.
- Become more inclusive and diverse.

#### **UCF's relationship to the Community (role of education in it):**

- To educate students for a world in which cooperation is as important as competition; in which societal and environmental impacts of new developments are as important as their technical merits; and in which technology, the arts, sciences, humanities, and commerce work together to shape the future.
- To create new knowledge, new points of view, and new means of expression in a broad range of academic, professional, and socially significant areas. To convey the results, methods, values, and expressions to students, colleagues, and the public.
- To serve the free expression of ideas, the equality of all people, and the dignity of the individual.

#### **Required Texts**

- Course disc (distributed in class)
- Hodge and Kress – *Social Semiotics*
- Dyer - *Stars*
- McCloud – *Understanding Comics*
- Mitchell – *Picture Theory*
- Ulmer – *Avatar Emergency*

**Grading**

10-12 page final paper	150 points
4-5 page papers (3@ 50 pages each)	150 points
<u>Presentations (2@ 50 points each)</u>	<u>100 points</u>
Total	400 points

**Course Grades**

A = 370-400	B- = 320-329	D+ = 270-279
A- = 360-369	C+ = 310-319	D = 250-269
B+ = 350-359	C = 290-309	D- = 240-249
B = 330-349	C- = 280-289	F = Below 240

**Course Policies**

- Classroom Behavior: Proper classroom behavior is expected at all times. Students must follow UCF standards for personal and academic conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule. As a matter of common courtesy, please arrive on time prepared to stay for the entire class. Proper classroom conduct also entails creating a positive learning experience for all students; therefore, sexist, racist, homophobic, or other derogatory remarks will not be tolerated. My top priority is to provide a safe environment for learning.
- Your participation in class discussions is **required** and is expected at each and every class meeting. This is a discussion-based, student-centered class; it only works if you, the student, take responsibility for your learning by showing up prepared and engaged. Full preparation means you have read the assigned material and wrote or thought about it and you have brought your course materials to class with you.
- Attendance is crucial because of the vital role discussion plays in this course. You will drop your grade a whole letter for every three unexcused absences. Absences will be excused in cases of emergency or for prior arrangements of short duration. You must contact me ASAP once you know you will be absent.
- Make-up work is available at the professor's discretion for excused absences only. No make-up work will be given for unexcused absences. Students are responsible for raising the issue of make-up work with the professor.
- Late assignments will lose 20% of the total possible points per class meeting after due date.
- All work is to be done individually unless otherwise noted by the instructor.
- All papers must be proofed, printed, and stapled. Incomplete papers will be returned.
- Responses to emails may take up to three days. Please be patient.
- No incompletes will be given in this course.
- Complaints about assignment grades should be discussed with me within two weeks after return.
- Plagiarism and Cheating: All work that you submit for this class must be your own, and it must be written exclusively for this course. Also, any sources consulted for your writing must be properly documented. "Rewriting," in which a student consults a source, changes a few words, and presents the ideas as his/her own, is plagiarism. Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment and may also lead to an "F" for the entire course. Plagiarism and cheating subjects a student to referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule (<http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>). I will adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not expect me to change your grade illegitimately or to break rules.
- Disability Accommodation: The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Rm. 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116.

**Standards for Written Work**

- An "A" text is exceptional. It presents sophisticated and significant critique and is guided by a meaningful argument. It contains the required elements of the assignment, is written in an engaging style, is arranged in a logical manner, is memorable, and is visually appealing. It is free of mechanical errors.
- A "B" text is strong. It contains all required elements of the assignment. It is generally above average in terms of the criteria mentioned above, but falls short of excellence in one or more category. It has few mechanical errors.

- A “C” text is competent. It contains all required elements of the assignment. It is generally average in terms of the major criteria listed above. It has some mechanical errors.
- “D” work is weak. It does not include the required elements of the assignment and it falls below average in terms of one or more of the major criteria.
- “F” work fails in terms of one or more of these criteria.

## Schedule

### PART I - IDEOLOGY

#### Week 1 Monday, January 7: Course Introduction

Lecture and discuss the grammatological tradition, technology, and the course themes. Distribution of course CD.  
Screening: John Berger *Ways of Seeing*

#### Week 2 Monday, January 14: Ideology I

- **Group 1 Presentation**
  1. Lippmann – “The World Outside and the Pictures in our Heads” (20 pages)
  2. Barthes – “The Photographic Message” and “Rhetoric of the Image” (36 pages)
  3. Williamson – “A Currency of Signs” (19 pages)
  4. Ray – *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (87 pages)

#### Week 3 Monday, January 21: MLK Day. NO CLASS

#### Week 4 Monday, January 28: Ideology II

- **Group 2 Presentation**
  1. Nichols – *Ideology and the Image* (110 pages)
  2. Hodge and Kress – *Social Semiotics* (161 pages)

#### Week 5 Monday, February 4: Ideology III

- **Group 3 Presentation**
  1. Dyer – *Stars* (131 pages)
  2. Barthes – “The Third Meaning” (16 pages)
  3. Mauer – “Film Stills Methodologies: A Pedagogical Assignment” (18 pages)

### PART II - SCIENCE

#### Week 6 Monday, February 11: Science I

- **Paper 1 due**
  1. Ray – “Snapshots: The Beginnings of Photography” (14 pages)
  2. Freud – “The Dream Work” (12 pages)
  3. Breton – “Manifesto of Surrealism [1924].” (25 pages)
  4. Mauer – Notes on Surrealism (6 pages)
  5. Lowenstein – “The Surrealism of the Photographic Image: Bazin, Barthes, and the Digital Sweet Hereafter” (30 pages)

#### Week 7 Monday, February 18: Science II

- **Group 4 Presentation**
  1. Benjamin – “A Short History of Photography” (18 pages)
  2. Ginzburg – “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method” (32 pages)
  3. Nichols – Documentary Film and Modernist Avant-Garde (32 pages)
  4. Mauer – “The Found Photograph and the Limits of Meaning” [http://enculturation.gmu.edu/3\\_2/mauer/](http://enculturation.gmu.edu/3_2/mauer/) (13 pages)

## Part III - ART

### Week 8 Monday, February 25: Art I

- **Paper 2 due**
  1. Judovitz – Critiques of the Ocular (62 pages)
  2. Baxandall – “Intentional Visual Interest: Picasso's *Portrait Of Kahnweiler*” (32 pages)
  3. Peterson – Is a Cognitive Approach to the Avant-Garde Perverse? (22 pages)
  4. Mauer – Notes on Peterson (1 page)
  5. Benjamin – “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (26 pages)
  6. Lipton – “History of an Encounter: Alias Olympia” (10 pages)

### Week 9 Monday, March 4: No Class – Spring Break

### Week 10 Monday, March 11: Art II

- **Group 1 Presentation**
  1. Mitchell – *Picture Theory* [skip chapters 8, 9, and 11] (approx. 300 pages)

### Week 11 Monday, March 18: Art III

- **Group 2 Presentation**
  1. McCloud – *Understanding Comics* (215 pages, but it's comics!)
  2. Thompson – “Emblems of Prowess: Eجاهam Art and Writing in Two Worlds” (41 pages)
  3. Mauer – “Rigorous Infidelity” (10 pages)

## Part IV – INVENTION

### Week 12 Monday, March 25: Invention I

- **Paper 3 due**
  1. Silverman – “The Look” (30 pages)
  2. Mulvey – “Fetishisms” and “Pandora's Box: Topographics of Curiosity” (26 pages)
  3. Bordwell – “Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory” (33 pages)
  4. Mauer – “The Epistemology of Cindy Sherman: A Research Method for Media and Cultural Studies” (21 pages)

### Week 13 Monday, April 1: Invention II

- **Group 3 Presentation**
  1. Garber – *Vested Interests* (173 pages)
  2. Perkins – “Lives of Inquiry” (24 pages)
  3. Fiedler – “The Myth of the Mutant and the Image of the Freak” (27 pages)

### Week 14 Monday, April 8: Invention III

- **Group 4 Presentation**
  1. Yates – *The Art of Memory* (49 pages)
  2. Read Ulmer's *Avatar Emergency*, to page 107. (132 pages)

### Week 15 Monday, April 15: Invention IV

1. Read Ulmer's *Avatar Emergency* to the end. (163 pages)

### Week 16 Monday, April 22: Review of Projects/Discussion in class

### Week 17 Monday April 29: Finals Week

Final Papers due in my office by 2:00.