**ARTHIST 158S** From Iconography to Instagram: A History of Images and Information

Instructor: Michael Metzger  
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Class times: M, W 1:30-3:20  
Office Hours: M, 3:45-5:15, By Appointment (M-W)

**Course Description:**
This class will survey how artists, designers and cultures have historically used images as a means to organize and communicate information. How do representations convey meaning in a manner different from language? What do visual conventions reveal about the cultures and technologies that shape them? How and why might artists and viewers subvert the legibility of images? To address these questions, this course proceeds by way of close visual analysis of key works, while exploring their historical, technological, social and artistic contexts.

This course follows a methodology informed variously by art history, cultural studies, media theory, the history of technology, and graphic design. One might broadly call this approach that of the study of “visual culture.” Nicholas Mirzoeff defines “visual culture as “concerned with visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with [...] any form of apparatus designed to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to television to the Internet.” (Mirzoeff, *What is Visual Culture*, 3). Following Mirzoeff’s narrative, the course proceeds roughly chronologically, passing from 16th century painting through revolutions in print, mass media and digital communications; students will discover that the meaning of terms “information,” “image” and “communication” are constantly in flux, depending on developments in media technology, artistic style and social change.

The objectives of the course are: to facilitate a general understanding of the techniques of visual communication as they have developed over six centuries of Western modernity; to introduce a number of key texts and scholarly voices, representing the diversity of approaches to these histories available to students of media and visual culture; to encourage a critical engagement with images as we encounter them across numerous media platforms; to cultivate student aptitudes in visual and verbal analysis of images.

**Attendance:**
Attendance is mandatory for all class meetings and will be tracked by the instructor. Absences due to illness will be excused only if presented to and confirmed by the instructor at least two hours in advance; no absences due to work, travel, or scheduling conflicts will be admitted. Your attendance and participation grade can only be negatively affected by attendance. Students with two unexcused absences will receive a grade no higher than a B and students with more than two will fail the course entirely.

**Readings:**
Because this course approaches a broad set of subjects, forms, themes, and historical periods, no one textbook will be used; most readings will be distributed electronically in the form of PDFs, and will also be held on reserve in the McMurtry building library. However, students are encouraged to purchase Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (metaLABprojects; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) as well as *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, Mitchell, W.J.T., and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Students will be responsible for all primary readings assigned in the syllabus, are expected to come to class prepared to discuss these readings, and are encouraged to prepare one or two questions in advance. In addition to the primary readings, there will be at least one additional
Every student will be responsible for a short (≤10 minutes) presentation of one additional reading to the class at some point in the quarter. This presentation can either be a synopsis of the argument as a whole or an in-depth discussion of a specific aspect thereof, but the presentation must include some visual component. The exercise is designed both to introduce new material to the course, and to help foster visual communication skills among students.

Writing Assignments:
In addition to the presentation, students will produce two essays. For the first assignment, the student will concentrate on a single image produced before 1900 to produce a short (4 page, not including images) visual analysis of an object of his or her choosing, to be approved by the instructor. For the second (8-10 pages, not including images) paper, the student will choose from a list of prompts to write a comparative analysis of two images; students are expected to meet with the instructor to discuss their approach. Papers are graded on a point scale (100 maximum) and will be graded down for each day a paper is late (9 points for the first day, 7 points each subsequent day); after four days, late papers will not be accepted. Extensions are generally not allowed, but will only be considered if a request is made in person during office hours. Papers must be in standard 12 point font, with 1” margins. Students are required to be familiar with and abide by the Stanford University Honor Code: https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/student-conduct-process/honor-code-and-fundamental-standard.

Exam:
There will be a final take-home exam, consisting of image identifications, short answer questions and an essay question. Exam will be distributed via e-mail after the final review session (held in the last class meeting on Wednesday Aug. 10), and will be due via email by 4:45 PM on Friday the 12th. Late exams will not be accepted.

Grade breakdown:
Attendance and participation: 25%
Reading Presentation: 10%
First Paper: 15%
Second Paper: 25%
Exam: 25%

Field Trips:
There will be two on-campus field trips during the quarter: one to the new David Rumsey Map Center in Green Library (during the week of June 27), and one to the Cantor Center to view an exhibit of Lewis Hine photographs (during the week of July 18). Please do not miss these class meetings—while make-up visits will be allowed, even excused absences on field trip dates will affect your grade.

Technology:
Students are allowed to use laptops and tablets for the purpose of note-taking and consulting readings; phones should be turned off at the beginning of class and wi-fi should be disabled on other devices. Students using technology for non-class-related purposes will be asked to share their activities with the class!
Course Schedule:

**Week 1: Introduction to Images and Information**

**June 20: What is Visual Communication? What is an Image?**
Readings: Oliver Sacks, “The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,” 8-22

**June 22: Iconography**
Readings: Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology” (26-54)

**Week 2: Maps and Prints: Knowledge, Power, and Identity**

**June 27: Maps** (Note: Class meets in David Rumsey Map Center, to be confirmed)
Bernhard Siegert, “White Spots and Hearts of Darkness: Drafting, Projecting and Designing as Cultural Techniques,” 121-146

**June 29: Drawing, Printmaking and Images of Science**

**Week 3: Print Culture I: 18th to 19th Century**

**July 6: Propaganda and Print**
Readings: William Ivins, excerpts from *Prints and Visual Communication*
Bryan Wolf, “All the World’s a Code: Art and Ideology in Nineteenth Century American Painting” (328-337)
*Additional reading:* Marcus Wood, “The Irrecoverable: Representing the ‘middle passage’” (14-40)

**Week 4: Print Culture II: 19th to 20th Century**

**July 11: Newspapers** *(FIRST PAPER DUE at start of class)*
Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Modern Life” (11-19)
Excerpts from Felix Feneon, “Novels in Three Lines”
*Additional Reading:* Robert Rosenblum, “Picasso and the Typography of Cubism,” (49-75)
Johanna Drucker, “Apollinaire: Figuring the Vernacular” and “Tzara: Advertising Language of Commodity Culture” (140-168, 193-222)
**Week 4: Print Culture II (cont’d)**

**July 13: Advertising**  
Readings: Raymond Williams, “Advertising: The Magic System” (170-195)  
Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image” (32-51)  
*Additional Reading TBD*

**Week 5: Photography**

**July 18: Social Photography**  
(Note: Class meets in the Cantor Arts Center)  
Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave” and “America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly”  
*(On Photography, 3-50)*  
Roland Barthes, excerpts from *Camera Lucida*  
*Additional Reading: Martin Berger, “Fixing Images: Civil Rights Photography and the Struggle Over Representation” (1-20).*

**July 20: Photography as Evidence and Information-Gathering**  
*Additional Reading: Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive” (3-64).*

**Week 6: Film and the Information Age**

**July 25: The Information Explosion**  
N. Katherine Hayles, “Cybernetics” and Bruce Clarke, “Information,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (145-171)  
*Additional Reading: Lisa Parks, "Our world, Satellite Televisuality, and the Fantasy of Global Presence" (74-93); Aubrey Singer, "Television: Window on culture or reflection in the glass?" (303-309).*

**July 27: Film, Documentary and Digital Cinema**  
(Note: Please watch *Zodiac* (2007) or *Readings: Dirk Eitzen, “When Is a Documentary?: Documentary as a Mode of Reception” (81-102)  
Lev Manovich, “What is Digital Cinema” (1-16)  
Amy Taubin, “Nerds on a Wire” (24-27)  
*Additional Reading TBD*

**Week 7: Databases, Graphs, Charts and Interfaces**

**Aug 1: New Media and Database Aesthetics**  
Readings: Mark B.N. Hansen, “New Media,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (172-185)  
Lev Manovich, “Database as Symbolic Form” (80-99)  
*Additional Reading: Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse” (3-22).*
Week 7: Databases, Graphs, Charts and Interfaces (cont’d)

Aug 3: Data Visualization and the Interface
Readings:  Warren Sack, “Aesthetics of Information Visualization” (1-21)
           Johanna Drucker, “Interface and Interpretation” (138-179)
           Additional Reading: Edward Tufte, Envisioning Information

Week 8: Paranoia and other social diseases

Aug 8: Images of surveillance and sharing (SECOND PAPER DUE at the start of class)
Watch: Citizenfour (Poitras, 2014)
Readings: “Techniques of the observer: Hito Steyerl and Laura Poitras in conversation” (306-317)
           Hito Steyerl, “A Sea of Data: Apophasia and Pattern (Mis-)Recognition”
           Additional Reading: Jenny Kennedy, “Rhetorics of Sharing: Data, Imagination and Desire” (127-136); Nadav Hochman and L. Manovich, “Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the local through social media.”

Aug 10: Review