PERCEPTIONS

VISCR-602-01/GELCT-680-02

Visual & Critical Studies Program

California College of the Arts

Fall Semester 2013

Instructor: Matteo Bittanti

Meeting place & time:

San Francisco Campus, Building GCC1 Room GC5

Mondays, 4-7 pm

Start Date: Monday, September 9, 2013

End Date: Monday, December 9, 2013

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1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Perceptions provides an overview of Visual and Critical Studies in relation to approaches, frameworks, and theories of visual perception. This course explores a series of key topics in the field of Visual and Critical Studies concerning the interplay between images and media with the aim of developing a critical understanding of these complexities. As this survey course looks into a number of theories concerning this evolving connection, the main focus of our inquiries will be a cluster of consistently recurring ideas about vision, technology, media, and their influence on our understanding on culture, society, and art.

Specifically, we will examine different versions of the premise that "modes of perception" change alongside transformations in visual technology. We will discuss several examples of visual experiences, from painting to photography, from television to advertising, from cinema to new media and their relationship to notions of subjectivity, knowledge, power, and politics. Our investigation will be supported by close readings of important contributions to the field of critical and visual studies by a variety of thinkers, including Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, Slavoj Žižek, John Berger, Jonathan Crary, Richard Grusin, Roland Barthes, Vilém Flusser, Jean Baudrillard, and Philip Auslander.

Students will: a) compare and contrast the scholars' different analytical approaches and rhetorical styles in order to develop a critical strategy to assess the category of the "Visual"; b) Use principles of Visual and Critical Studies to analyze works of contemporary visual culture; c) Sharpen their research, verbal and written skills through weekly readings, formal and informal presentations, and the development of critical papers on topics related to images, media, and perception.

1.1 Course Format & Requirements

Classes will consist of lectures, screenings, discussions, and student presentations. Attendance is mandatory. Students are required to attend the full length of all classes. Students are expected to come to class with the reading/viewing done and demonstrate ability to participate appropriately - that is, using the pertinent critical terminology - in a seminar-style intellectual community. All papers, assignments, presentations, and final projects must be completed on time and in full. No exceptions, no extensions. Try to think of class meetings as a resource session in which you can get your questions answered and at the same time, learn what concerns are driving your colleagues. One

of the primary goals of Perceptions is to help the students develop a critical eye. This class presents elements of both seminar and lecture courses. As such, students will be asked to provide relevant input, during discussions and in-class critiques.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

In addition to the key goals described in section 1, Perceptions emphasizes the following learning outcomes:

- *Methods of Critical Analysis*: Students will learn to identify, actively engage with, and carry out exegeses of individual texts, both visual and textual. Students will be consistently required to examine written texts, visual texts and oral presentations and to articulate the primary and secondary claims being advanced. When identifying, clarifying, and posing relevant questions about the various types of assertions found in both texts and presentations, students will also incorporate into their analyses a reflexive and self-aware consideration of methodological issues.
- *Written and Verbal Communication:* Students will continue to hone their communication skills by presenting their ideas in different types of writing assignments and within class discussions and oral presentations.
- *Visual Literacy*: Students will learn how to recognize and decode different media aesthetics, conventions, and languages through an analysis of different kinds of visual artifacts that are derived from, produced using, or merely associated with specific media or machine technologies.
- *Research Skills:* Students will hone their skills in information gathering, documentation, investigation, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.
- *Interdisciplinarity:* Students will understand various ways in which different media aesthetics intersect with other areas of social, technological, and cultural history.
- *Professional development:* Students will learn to write outlines for oral presentations and essay; to present their ideas in a professional manner; to write a 10-page critical essay that balances their own interests with the course's main subject matter and its key issues.

1.3 Teaching Philosophy

The instructor's teaching philosophy is informed by the principles of the *inquiry method,* a pedagogical approach described by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner in their influential 1969 book *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (please refer to the course blog for excerpts and commentary). This Socratic method of teaching is based on an ongoing, open dialogue between the instructor and the students. Students are encouraged to interact directly with one another by leading and moderating class discussions (see 3). Students are also encouraged to ask questions that are meaningful to their practice, interests, and research challenges. As most of these questions have no easy, simple, short or definite answer, the learning process becomes an exploratory practice rather than a byproduct of static knowledge. *Perceptions* is therefore meant as an exercise in problem solving centered around key concerns of Visual and Critical Studies, first articulated by scholars, but also reframed and interpreted by both the instructor and the students.

2. REQUIRED TEXTS

2.1 Bibliography

In a seminal essay titled "New Media As Political Forms" published in *Explorations 3* (1955), Marshall McLuhan argued that the book has become an obsolete, redundant medium. Consider this passage - and please keep in mind that McLuhan wrote it before the advent of the internet, smartphones, videogames, Twitter etc:

> "It is the almost total coverage of the globe in time and space that has rendered the book an increasingly obsolete form of communication. The slow movement of the eye along lines of type, the slow procession of items organized by the mind to fit into these endless horizontal columns — these procedures can't stand up to the pressures of instantaneous coverage of the earth. [...] In *Explorations 2* it was suggested that the new situation in the modern class-room is that the adolescent today does not need information. He is hopelessly overloaded with messages from the urban environment. The classroom no longer need typically perform the function of providing facts. It must above all provide techniques of recognition and discrimination. Reality-testing can no longer follow the linear, factual recital or statistical pattern. There is far too much reality for that. We are obliged to deal with reality in constellations and clusters or not at all. If politics and the citizen are to survive the new media, we must alter our entire sighting and range-finding apparatus, which is still oriented to the printed page alone" (Marshall McLuhan)

One of the goals of Perceptions is to collectively examine McLuhan's claim and evaluate its validity. In order to do so, each student will be required to read and be able to discuss a book - *from cover to cover* - on a weekly basis. Focusing on the theme of perceptions in art, media, and culture, the bibliography features seminal contributions to the field of Visual Studies and Critical Studies but also Philosophy and (New) Media Studies. We will analyze and discuss the significance, effectiveness, and influence of each contribution, using contextual and theoretical frames both provided by the instructor and developed collectively. In short, this course will help students to connect texts and contexts, highlighting several aspects of the *liaison* between images and media, philosophies and aesthetics, technology and politics, reading and writing, power and ideology.

Required books:

- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility And Other Writings on Media*, in Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Eds.). [1936] 2008. 70 pages.

- Berger, John.*Ways of Seeing.* London: Penguin. 1972. 166 pages.

- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. London: Penguin Books. 1967. 157 pages.

- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* New York: Hill and Wang, [1979] 1981. 144 pages

- Flusser, Vilém. *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [1985] 2011. 180 pages.

- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations.* Semiotext(e), 1983. 159. pages.

- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge. 1999. 162 pages.

- Žižek, Slavoj. *How to Read Lacan,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 2007. 130 pages.

- Grusin. Richard. *Premediation. Affect and Mediality After 9/11,* London: Routledge. 150 pages. 2010.

- Dworkin, Craig. *No Medium,* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013. 141 pages (+ notes)

- Crary, Jonathan. 24/7. *Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep*, London: Verso. 144 pages.

- Robinson. T., Brett. *Appletopia: Media Technology and the Religious Imagination of Steve Jobs,* Waco, Texas: Baylor Univ Press, 2013.

Additional readings and videos will be provided on a weekly basis on the course blog.

Last but not least, *A Writer's Reference* (7th Edition) by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers will be our style guide. Please note that since the workload is considerable, it is strongly recommended to plan ahead.

2.2 Filmography

Unless otherwise noted, each reading will be paired to a film, documentary, lecture or interview. In all cases, the instructor will provide such material. In their weekly presentations, students will be

expected to discuss these texts by using the theories and concepts encountered in the book. These videos complement, expand, and enrich - often in unexpected, non-obvious ways - the written texts. Students are expected to watch and discuss the following material:

- Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message", lecture recorded by ABC Radio National Network on 27 June 1979 in Australia.

- John Berger, *Ways of Seeing. Episodes 1-4*, BBC, 1972.

- Ross McElwee, *Photographic Memory,* 2011.

- "On writing, complexity, and the technical revolutions. An interview with Vilém Flusser", *European Media Arts Festival,* 1998.

- Alex Rivera, *Sleep Dealer,* 2008.

- Matthew Akers, *Marina Abramovic, The Artist is Present*, 2012.

- Sophie Fiennes, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology,* 2012.

- Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *World on a Wire*, 1973.

- Nam June Paik, *Zen For Film,* 1962-64.

- Cory Arcangel, *Super Mario Clouds*, 2002.

- Steven Spielberg, *Minority Report,* 2002.

- Adam Curtis, *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace,* 2011.

3. CLASS DISCUSSION

Each week, one student will be asked to lead and moderate a class conversation. To do it effectively, students will be asked not simply to summarize the key ideas of the assigned texts, but also to suggest how they relate to our ongoing dialogue. Students will be asked to compare and contrast the authors' different approaches, and to develop an original position. Students will also need to propose questions for subsequent discussions. Students are strongly encouraged to prepare a formal presentation using the most appropriate visual aids for the task (slideshows, concept maps, Keynote/PowerPoint/Sliderocket/Prezi etc.). Each student will present and moderate the class conversation twice during the semester. Several presentation resources are listed on the course blog.

4. ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

Students will develop two written assignments (final project, final project proposal) and three presentations (two class discussions, one final presentation) using principles of Visual and Critical Studies. In order to complete these tasks successfully, students will be required to undertake rigorous and thorough research of the topic.

Specifically, for their presentations and papers students are expected to:

a) Develop a clear and original thesis.

b) Present the thesis and organize the supporting evidence in a logical manner.

c) Give cogent, compelling, and persuasive in-class presentations.

4.1 Final Project (December 9, 2013)

Students are required to write an essay of 3500-4000 words, that is, approximately 10 pages, excluding bibliography and footnotes. The paper is designed to help you reflect, analyze, and discuss core themes and ideas encountered in Perceptions, engaging with primary and secondary materials, and develop a background in the area that will allow you to pursue more in-depth research projects in the future, e.g. a thesis or a dissertation, but also a journal article, a proposal for an art show or a

documentary.

The essay must be critical in nature, that is, analytical and interpretative and not merely descriptive. In order to successfully complete this task, student will be required to deploy research and close visual analysis in the development of a thesis that reflects independent thought about the visual environment under consideration in a ten page paper utilizing the conventions of scholarly writing, literate English and no less than eight academic sources.

Students are encouraged to include up to eight images in the final paper, but only to make a point, not for mere decorative purposes. Images must be referenced and discussed in the text. Additionally, all images must be properly accompanied with credits and captions.

The paper will be evaluated on the basis of the students' ability to look critically and express their ideas in the form of expository writing. The assessment guide is provided below.

Technical requirements: The Final Paper must be formatted in Chicago Style and use the following parameters: Arial Font, Size 12, Spacing 1.5. Length: 3500-4000 words excluding bibliography and footnotes. For the electronic version, the paper must be saved as a .RTF or .DOC format. Other formats, e.g. .PDF, are not acceptable.

Submission method: The final paper must be submitted in two ways:

1) As a printed document handed brevi manu to the instructor on the last day of class, December 9, 2013;

2) In digital format, sent to the instructor via email no later than 4 pm on December 9, 2013.

Please note thAT Late papers will not be accepted. Failure to submit the paper on time in both printed and electronic format will result in a "F" grade.

The Final Project requires a Proposal (see below).

4.2 Final Project Proposal (November 11, 2013)

Students must submit a 1500 word (approximately 4 pages) page proposal that provides a detailed description of the final project and outlines plans for research as well as relevant questions and concerns. Like any solid proposal (for a grant or exhibition), this proposal should be persuasive and

demonstrate why this project is creative, compelling and worth pursuing. The four essential elements of this document are:

1. A title, subtitle, and description of your object of study, its significance, and the key issues or questions you want to address in your research. Do you have a novel approach or hypothesis? If so, describe it.

2. A concise, tightly-focused review of the scholarly literature on your topic. What are the most significant scholarly contributions in your area of investigation? You must explain how your work will relate to the works you cite.

3. A brief discussion of research methods. What kind of research methods will you use to answer the questions you have posed or to test your hypothesis? Why are those the methods best suited for this case? What will they allow you to discover? Do you need any special resources to complete your research?

4. A timetable. What are the key parts of your project (research, writing, etc.) and by when will you have them completed? What are the milestones?

Technical requirements: The Final Project Proposal must be formatted in Chicago Style and use the following parameters: Arial Font, Size 12, Spacing 1.5. For the electronic version, the paper must be saved as a .RTF or .DOC format. Other formats, e.g. .PDF, are not acceptable.

Submission method: The proposal must be submitted in two ways: 1) as a printed document handed brevi manu to the instructor on on November 11, 1013; and as 2) an electronic file, sent to the instructor via email no later than 4 pm on November 11, 2013.

A graded/reviewed version of the document will be returned to the student within a week.

Tip: It is essential to discuss your ideas with the instructor before developing and submitting full proposal. It is also a very good idea to look ahead in the syllabus and get started early.

4.3 Final Presentation

In the last week of the semester (December 9, 2013) students will give a 20 minute formal presentations of their final projects. These presentations must include visual material and should

demonstrate proficiency in using a digital presentation tool such as Keynote, Powerpoint, SlideRocket, and Prezi. The presentations will be followed by questions and class discussion. Students are required to make appropriate arrangements for showing visual material in advance. Students are expected to use their own computer equipment for the presentation: the instructor will not provide a laptop. All students are required to attend the presentations. Presentation resources, including tools and tutorials, are available on the course blog. No make-up presentations.

4.4 Evaluation criteria

Written assignments will be evaluated on the basis of the Visual Studies Assessment Grid (available here) which includes the following criteria: thorough research; clear, logical, and original arguments; critical and creative analysis of visual material supported by visual examples; serious effort, preparation, and engagement in the subject matter.

Visual presentations will be evaluated on the basis of the students ability to look critically and express their ideas in oral and visual form. The assessment guide is available here: Download Visual Presentation Rubric

Each area of assessment corresponds to the following numeric evaluation:

1   insufficient

2   developing skills

3   proficient skills

4   exceptional skills

5. Measurement of Student Performance

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- Attendance, participation - both in class and online: 20%
- Final Paper Proposal: 20%
- Final Presentation: 25%

- Final Paper: 35%

6. CLASSROOM CONDUCT & ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES

1) Promptness is a basic requirement. Persistent lateness lowers your class participation grade considerably. Three unjustified late arrivals (>10 minutes) will be counted as one absence.

2) The use of all electronic devices, gadgets, and gizmos - including smart phones - during class is not permitted. Note-taking on a laptop is not allowed. Please wait for the break to make phone calls, texting or to use the internet. Computers may only be used for students' presentations. In class texting will automatically result in a lower grade.

3) Sleeping, chatting in the back of the room, reading external materials, working on external projects during the class session - any of these can result in immediate ejection from the class.

4) If more than one class is missed due to illness, students must submit written verification from a physician and notify professor via e-mail or in writing immediately. Written medical documents must be submitted within two weeks of an absence. CCA has a college-wide attendance policy that3 unexcused absences can be cause for failing the course. In addition, 3 "lates" equal to an absence.

5) Students are not allowed to eat during class.

6) There are no make-up presentations and assignments.

7) Students who miss a class must collect the material discussed in class. In most cases, such material will be available on the class blog. At any rate, always make sure to contact the instructor via email about the availability of such materials.

Thank you for your cooperation!

6.1 Policy on Academic Honesty

Academic Integrity Code & Plagiarism: CCA has an Academic Integrity Code stated in our Student Handbook and plagiarism is clearly prohibited. Consequences for plagiarism can range from re-doing the assignment from scratch, to failing the course and dismissal from the college. Please read the

following excerpt very carefully:

"The reputation of a university and the value of its degrees rest upon the study and research carried on at that institution. The policy for maintaining academic honesty is:

A. Each student is responsible for performing academic tasks in such a way that honesty is not in question.

B. Unless an exception is specifically defined by an instructor, students are expected to maintain the following standards of integrity:

1. All tests, term papers, oral and written assignments are to be the work of the student presenting the material for course credit.

2. Any paraphrase, quotation, or summary (that is, any use of words, ideas, or findings of other persons, writers, or researchers) requires explicit citation of the source.

3. Deliberately supplying material to another student for purposes of plagiarism (to take and pass off as one's own ideas, writings, or work of another) is dishonest.

C. Each instructor is responsible for a learning environment supportive of academic honesty.

1. If a faculty member has reason to suspect academic dishonesty in or out of class, the faculty member should require additional and/or revised work that is unquestionably the work of the student.

2. A faculty member who has proof that academic honesty has been violated should take appropriate disciplinary action, which may include refusal of course credit.

3. A faculty member shall bring to the attention of the Vice President, Academic Affairs, all violations of academic honesty. The Vice President may place on probation, suspend, or expel any student who violates the policy on academic honesty." (CCA Academic Integrity Code)

7. SCHEDULE

Please note that the schedule is subject to change.

WEEK 1: September 9, 2013

- Introduction to Perceptions
- Syllabus Walkthrough
- Introduction to Walter Benjamin

WEEK 2: September 16, 2013

Required reading:

- Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility And Other Writings on Media*, in Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Eds.). [1936] 2008. 1-68.
- Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich & Marrinan,. Michael. *Mapping Benjamin. The Work of Art in the Digital Age*. Palo Alto: Stanford University press. 2009. 1-39

WEEK 3: September 23, 2013

Required reading:

- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects.* London: Penguin Books. 1967. 157 pages.

Required Watching:

- Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message", lecture recorded by ABC Radio National Network on 27 June 1979 in Australia.

Optional reading:

- McLuhan, Marshall. *Counterblast.* London: Penguin Books. [1969]. 2001. Berkeley, California: Ginko Press. 32 pages.

- Jeffrey Schnapp, Adam Michaels, Steven Heller, *The Electric Information Age Book: McLuhan/Agel/Fiore and the Experimental Paperback,* Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012. 240 pages.

WEEK 4: September 30, 2013

Required reading:

- Berger, John.*Ways of Seeing.* London: Penguin. 1972. 166 pages.

Required Watching:

- Berger, John.*Ways of Seeing. Episodes 1-4*, BBC, 1972.

Recommended watching:

- Jem Cohen, *Museum Hours*, 2013. Playing at Opera Plaza Cinemas in San Francisco between September 20 - 27, 2013.

WEEK 5: October 7, 2013

Required reading:

- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* New York: Hill and Wang, [1979] 1981. 144 pages

Required watching:

- Ross McElwee, *Photographic Memory,* 2011.

WEEK 6: October 14, 2013

Required reading:

- Flusser, Vilém. *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [1985] 2011. 180 pages.

Required watching:

- "On writing, complexity, and the technical revolutions. An interview with Vilém Flusser", *European Media Arts Festival,* 1998.

WEEK 7: October 21, 2013

Required reading:

- Jonathan Crary, *24/7. Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep.* London: Verso, 2013.

Required watching:

- Alex Rivera, *Sleep Dealer,* 2008.

WEEK 8: October 28, 2013

- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge. 1999. 162 pages.

Required watching:

- Matthew Akers, *Marina Abramovic, The Artist is Present*, 2012.

WEEK 9: November 4, 2013

Required reading:

- Žižek, Slavoj. *How to Read Lacan,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 2007. 130 pages.

Required watching:

- Sophie Fiennes, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology,* 2012. In movie theatres from November 1. 2013.

WEEK 10: November 11, 2013

Required reading:

- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations,* Semiotext(e), 1983. 159 pages.

Optional reading:

- Sean Joseph Patrick Carney, "*The Precession of Simulacra* by Jean Baudrillard, Translated from English into American", *Continent*, 2012.
- Ed Halter, *World on a Wire: The Hall of Mirrors*, Criterion Collection, February 26, 2012.

Required Watching:

- Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *World on a Wire*, 1973.

Final project proposal due today

Required reading:

- Dworkin, Craig, *No Medium,* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013. 141 pages (+ notes)

Required watching:

- Nam June Paik, *Zen For Film* (1962-64) & Cory Arcangel, *Super Mario Clouds*, 2002

Required reading:

- Grusin. Richard. *Premediation. Affect and Mediality After 9/11,* London: Routledge. 150 pages. 2010.

Required watching:

- Steven Spielberg, *Minority Report,* 2002.

Required reading:

- Robinson. T., Brett, *Appletopia: Media Technology and the Religious Imagination of Steve*

Jobs, Waco, Texas: Baylor Univ Press, 2013. 148 pages.

Required watching:

- Adam Curtis, *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace,* 2011. Episodes 1-3.

WEEK 14: December 9, 2013

Final presentations

Final paper due today

7.1 Important dates

Tuesday, September 3 Fall term courses begin [CCA]

Monday, September 9 Online Add/Drop period ends [CCA]

Tuesday, September 10 Course begins [Perceptions] + Restricted Add/Drop period begins [CCA]

Friday, September 13 Restricted Add/Drop period ends [CCA]

Monday, September 16 First day to withdraw from courses [CCA]

Friday, November 8 Last day to **withdraw** from courses [CCA]

Monday, November 11 Final proposal due [Perceptions]

Friday, November 15 End of registration for continuing students for spring 2014 [CCA]

Thursday, November 28 Thanksgiving -- legal holiday [CCA]

Friday, November 29 Academic and administrative holiday [CCA]

Monday, December 9 Final paper and final presentation due [Perceptions]

Friday, December 13 Fall term courses end [CCA]