

## **Visual Communication**

### **Persuasion and Politics in a World of Images**

**Professor Damien Pfister**

**Location Burnett 204**

**Tuesday & Thursday, 11-12:15**

**dpfister2@unl.edu**

**Office Hours Tuesday 1-3**

**By appointment**

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### **Mission of the Department of Communication Studies**

The role and mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, and societies. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages. The department's research, teaching, and service devote particular attention to understanding the ways in which communication erodes and sustains collaboration within and among local, national, and global communities.

### **ACE Student Learning Outcome #2**

Demonstrate communication competence in one or more of the following ways: (a) by making oral presentations with supporting materials, (b) by leading and participating in problem-solving teams, (c) by employing a repertoire of communication skills for developing and maintaining professional and personal relationships, or (d) by creating and interpreting visual information.

This course is primarily concerned with creating and interpreting visual information. Students will have an opportunity to meet this learning outcome by examining how visual images communicate in a variety of contexts. Through regular graded short papers, students will demonstrate their facility to interpret and critique visual images. The final project entails creating a photo or video essay.

### **Course Summary and Objectives**

The study of visual communication should, quite simply, change the way a student sees the world. This course aims to make students better citizens by teaching them how to observe, analyze, and critique visual images. Traditionally, we educate students how to think critically about speaking and writing, but not about visual modes of address. This course will demonstrate the ascendancy of images in our contemporary world, will provide ways of thinking about how images do persuasive work, and will equip students with a vocabulary for critiquing images.

Students will increase their ability to interpret visual information by (1) increasing understanding of the importance of iconic and everyday images in shaping contemporary culture; (2) enhancing appreciation of how images select and deflect rather than merely reflect reality; (3) expanding the analytical vocabulary for understanding and criticizing images. Students will increase their ability to create visual information by (4) learning the basics of digital image production and circulation; (5) understanding how to produce images that influence others' attitudes.

## **Required Texts**

Readings will be made available through Blackboard.

## **Course Requirements**

*Class Contribution: 25 points.* Students will be expected to post five “class contributions” to the course blog during the course of the semester, each worth 5 points. Class contributions can include: links to a contemporary news story about visual communication, a rumination on this week’s readings, links to additional materials that can help us understand course material, demonstrations of critical readings of images, etc. The basic idea is to contribute something to our understanding of visual communication beyond the formal course readings. There will be regular ‘blog prompts’ at the end of lecture that you may (but do not have to) use as a way to initiate your post. TWO of these posts must include original images (i.e. billboards, architecture) taken by the student (they should be in ‘public’ spaces and appropriate). Three posts must be completed by the Thursday class (March 17) before Spring Break.

1. Makes a mark.
2. Is a page in length.
3. All of the above, plus identifies interesting artifact and conducts strong analysis.
4. All of the above, plus draws on course readings or concepts with sophistication.
5. All of the above, plus links to another course contribution blog post (*or* posts comments on external blog) as part of conversation.

*Attention & Participation: 75 points.* At the end of the Thursday class, each student will fill out a participation sheet and evaluate their attention and participation on a 1-5 scale. The instructor will adjust the self-grade as necessary. A 3 is the highest grade to be earned if a class is missed that week. Grading criteria is as follows:

0. Did not attend either class.
1. Attended class and was a distraction to others.
2. Attended class but did not do the readings and did not speak and paid little attention.
3. Attended class, did the readings, but did not participate in large or small groups.
4. Attended class, did the readings, was attentive to lecture, and spoke or nonverbally participated.
5. Attended class, did the readings, was attentive to lecture, made key contributions to class discussion.

Intoxicated students will receive a 1 for the week, no exceptions.

\*3-5 times throughout the course of the semester, a reading quiz will replace the weekly attendance self-grade. The quiz will ask questions about the major concepts from that week’s readings.

*Short Papers: 25 points each; 50 total.* Two short, 4-6 page papers will be due during this semester. For each paper, choose an image (or set of related images) and analyze it according to one of the methods that we discuss in class (i.e. visual rhetoric or visual storytelling).

*Final Project: 50 points.* The final project will be a photo or video essay that uses images to demonstrate a principle of visual communication that we discussed in class; for example, a video essay could explain the concept of encoding/decoding, or ways of seeing, or anchoring. Creative projects are highly encouraged. Projects should be uploaded to YouTube and links sent to DSP.

*Final Exam: 100 points.* The final exam will be a combination of multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the blank, and short essay.

*300 points total.*

### **Grade Scale**

100-97: A+	76-73: C
96-93: A	72-70: C-
92-90: A-	69-67: D+
89-87: B+	66-63: D
86-83: B	62-60: D-
82-80: B-	59 and below: F
79-77: C+	

### **Procedures**

*Accommodations.* Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

*Plagiarism.* I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarists. The Student Code of Conduct defines plagiarism as “presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source) and submitting examinations, theses, reports, speeches, drawings, laboratory notes or other academic work in whole or in part as one's own when such work has been prepared by another person or copied from another person.” It is my responsibility to report any cases of cheating or plagiarism to the administration. All assignments must be your own original work and must be prepared specifically for this course. When in doubt, cite. Plagiarists will receive an F for the course—no exceptions.

*Grievances.* I will work hard for you to be fair and responsible when it comes to your grades. You will receive detailed comments on your performances. Despite my professed even-handedness, there might arise some issues concerning evaluation on an assignment. If there is an issue you must a) wait 24 hours before doing ANYTHING, b) submit to me via email an exhaustive explanation of your issue, c) schedule a meeting with me to discuss your performance. One of my pet peeves is when a student grumbles publicly about a grade or the class rather than taking the issue up privately with me. Your concerns are rarely a public matter.

*Late policy.* Late assignments lose one letter grade for every 24 hours it is late.

## Norms

*Preparation.* This is not a “reading optional” class. Each student must read the reading assignments for comprehension and critical engagement—be able to summarize the main arguments and have a well-reasoned opinion on insights from the reading. If the conversation is slow and participation is light, I reserve the right to add more reading quizzes that will be factored in to overall grades.

*Decorum.* I expect everyone to act as befits mature college students. An inexhaustive list of what I think that means: don’t speak while others are speaking, utilize the principle of charity when responding to others’ comments, don’t pack up when there’s five minutes left in class, don’t behave uncivilly to others, don’t use derogatory language, **don’t text during class**. Don’t come to class when ill. Really don’t come to class when swine flu-ed. Calibrate caffeine intake appropriately to be prepared for class.

*Attention.* Each student is expected to pay full attention each class period. Students with laptops must sit on the right side of the classroom with their desks slightly tilted so as not to be distractions to others.

All written assignments: 1 inch margins, double spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point, no ‘before and after’ paragraph spacing. No games.

## Schedule of Readings

### FOUNDATIONS OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

#### **Week 1: Introduction to Visual Communication**

Thursday, January 13

Syllabus review and introductions

#### **Week 2: Images in Our World**

Tuesday, January 18

Kiki Adatto, "Introduction," *Picture Perfect: Life in the Age of the Photo Op* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008): 1-40.

Neil Postman, "The Age of Show Business," *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985): 83-98.

Thursday, January 20

Kevin DeLuca, "Making Waves," *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1999): 1-24.

Jean Burgess & Joshua Green, "How YouTube Matters," *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Polity, 2009): 1-14.

#### **Week 3: Semiotics**

Tuesday, January 25

John Berger, "1," *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1977): 7-34.

Arthur Asa Berger, "Semiotic Analysis," *Media Analysis Techniques* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 3-18 & 30-37.

Thursday, January 27

Gillian Rose, "The Good Eye: Looking at Pictures Using Compositional Interpretation," *Visual Methodologies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2001): 33-53.

Scott McCloud, "The Vocabulary of Comics," *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Books, 1994): 24-37.

#### **Week 4: Representation**

Tuesday, February 1

Sut Jhally, "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture," in *Gender, Race, and Class: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003): 249-57.

Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," in *Gender, Race, and Class: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003): 89-94.

Imani Perry, "Who(se) Am I?": The Identity and Image of Women in Hip-Hop," in *Gender, Race, and Class: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003): 136-48.

View *Dreamworlds 3* in class.

Thursday, February 3

Jean Kilbourne, “‘The More You Subtract, the More You Add’: Cutting Girls Down to Size,” in *Gender, Race, and Class: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003): 258-267.

Kylo-Patrick R. Hart, “Representing Gay Men on American Television,” in *Gender, Race, and Class: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003): 597-607.

Paul Martin Lester, “Visual Symbolism and Stereotypes in the Wake of 9/11,” *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*, ed. Paul Martin Lester and Susan Ross (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002): 43-50.

View *Killing Us Softly 4* in class.

## VISUAL RHETORIC: IMAGES AS ARGUMENTS

### Week 5: Pictures as Arguments?

Tuesday, February 8

David Birdsell and Leo Groarke, “Outlines of a Theory of Visual Argument,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Winter and Spring 2007): 103-113.

Thursday, February 10

David Fleming, “Can Pictures be Arguments?” *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Summer 1996): 11-22.

David Birdsell and Leo Groarke, “Toward a Theory of Visual Argument,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Summer 1996): 1-10.

### Week 6: The Basics of Visual Rhetoric

Tuesday, February 15

Kevin LaGrandeur, “Digital Images and Classical Persuasion,” in *Eloquent Images: Word and Image in the Age of New Media*, ed. Mary Hocks and Michelle Kendrick (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003): 117-36.

Thursday, February 17

Sonja Foss, “A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery,” *Communication Studies* (1994): 213-224.

Valerie Peterson, “An Alternative to Foss’s Schema,” *Southern Communication Journal* (Fall 2001): 19-32.

### Week 7: Visual Enthymemes

Tuesday, February 22

No class—instructor at Western States Communication Association Conference

Thursday, February 24

J. Anthony Blair, “The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments,” in *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, eds. Charles A. Hill & Marguerite H. Helmers (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004): 41-62.

Richard Pineda and Stacey Sowards, “Flag Waving as Visual Argument: 2006 Immigration Demonstrations and Cultural Citizenship,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Winter and Spring

2007): 164-74.

Kathryn Olson and G. Thomas Goodnight, "Entanglements of Consumption, Cruelty, Privacy, and Fashion: The Social Controversy Over Fur," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1994): 249-76.

### **Week 8: Manipulation**

Tuesday, March 1

Cara Finnegan, "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument: Photographic Representation in the 'Skull Controversy'." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37 (2001): 133-149.

Jim Lewis, "Don't Believe What You See in the Papers: The Untrustworthiness of News Photography," <http://www.slate.com/id/2147502/>.

Hany Farid, "Photo Tampering Through History," <http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/farid/research/digitaltampering/>.

Thursday, March 3

Janis L. Edwards, "Echoes of Camelot: How Images Construct Cultural Memory Through Rhetorical Framing," in *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, eds. Charles A. Hill & Marguerite H Helmers (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004): 179-194.

### **Week 9: Images and Influence**

Tuesday, March 8

Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, "What is Propaganda, and How Does It Differ From Persuasion?," *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006): 1-48.

Thursday, March 10

View *Merchants of Cool* in class.

### **Week 10: Appropriation and Ideographs**

Tuesday, March 15

Anne Demo, "The Guerilla Girls Comic Politics of Subversion," *Women's Studies in Communication* (Spring 2000): 133-56.

Thursday, March 17

Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler, "Representative Forms and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Image in Editorial Cartoons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1997), 289-310.

\*Short paper #1 due

### **Week 11: Spring Break**

No class

\*3 blog posts due

## **VISUAL STORYTELLING: IMAGES AS NARRATIVES AND DRAMAS**

### **Week 12: Visual Narrative**

Tuesday, March 29

Walter Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument" *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 1-22.

Learning video-editing basics

Thursday, March 31

Trischa Goodnow, "Using Narrative Theory to Understand the Power of News Photographs," *Handbook of Visual Communication : Theory, Methods, and Media*, eds. Ken Smith, Sandra Moriarty, Gretchen Barbatsis, and Keith Kenney (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 2005): 356-61.

**Week 13: Visual Dramatism**

Tuesday, April 5

Joseph Harry, "A Burkean Analysis of a Television Promotional Advertisement," *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, Media*, eds. Ken Smith, Sandra Moriarty, Gretchen Barbatsis, Keith Kenney (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005): 539-51.

Thursday, April 7

Phyllis Japp and Debra Japp, "Purification through Simplification: Nature, the Good Life, and Consumer Culture," in *EnviroPOP: Studies in Environmental Rhetoric and Popular Culture*, ed. Mark Meister and Phyllis Japp (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002): 81-94.

**Week 14: Visualizing Environmental Dramas**

Tuesday, April 12

Anne Marie Todd, "Prime-Time Subversion: The Environmental Rhetoric of the Simpsons," in *EnviroPOP: Studies in Environmental Rhetoric and Popular Culture*, eds. Mark Meister and Phyllis Japp (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002): 63-80.

Thursday, April 14

Carol Adams, "What Pornography," "More than Meat," and "Man to Man," in *The Pornography of Meat* (New York, NY: Continuum Publishing, 2004): 11-38.

\*Short paper #2 due

**Week 15: Final thoughts**

Tuesday, April 19

Catch-up and final project workshop

Thursday, April 21

Final project workshop

**Week 16: Review**

Tuesday, April 26

\*Final projects due

Final project film festival

Thursday, April 28

Final exam review

**Week 17: May 5**

Thursday, 3:30-5:30

\*Final exam