

**Introduction to Visual Culture**  
**VISL.140.03 – Mondays, 5:00pm-7:50pm - Online**  
**Spring 2023**



René Magritte – *The Treachery of Images* – 1929

**Instructor:** Matthew Ballou

**Class Meetings:** Mondays 5:00pm-7:50pm

**Zoom URL:** <https://rit.zoom.us/j/96526603803>

**Email:** mhbgs@rit.edu

**Office Hours:** Mondays 10:00am-12:00noon

**Additional Office Hours by Appointment**

# Syllabus

**I reserve the right to modify this syllabus as appropriate and with reasonable forewarning of any changes.**

## Course Format

This is a remote (online) course that will take place via Zoom. As this course is scheduled only one day a week and for a three-hour period of time, the class will be structured as part lecture and part discussion. Engagement with the material and your fellow classmates is essential to ensuring an enjoyable and productive use of our time.

## Course Description and Objectives

This course serves as an introduction to Visual Culture – its history and the theories that define the field. Primarily we will investigate the ways in which visual materials are produced, circulated, and interpreted. In our investigations, we will consider issues of power, gender, sexuality, race, and beyond as these cultural facets intersect in paintings, photographs, advertisements, digital worlds, and other mediums that both reflect and produce the world in which we live. Through careful analysis and application of theoretical frameworks, we will develop your ability to engage with and communicate to others in words *what you see*.

## Course Readings

There is no set textbook for this course. All readings will be provided on MyCourses as PDFs. You are expected to have read each week's assigned reading before the class begins that day.

So that there is no confusion: the assigned readings will appear under the date for which they should be completed. For example:

### **January 30<sup>th</sup>** – Varying Methodologies in Visual Culture

- Readings – “Iconography and Iconology” by Erwin Panofsky and “Rhetoric of the Image” by Roland Barthes.

You are expected to come to class having read and prepared to discuss both “Iconography and Iconology” and “Rhetoric of the Image” on **January 30<sup>th</sup>**.

## **Course Requirements and Assessment**

All course work and participation should follow RIT's code of conduct. As a courtesy to classmates, please turn off cell phones, social media, and other applications before class begins. Any students requiring course accommodation should inform the instructor as soon as possible.

### **Class Attendance and Participation (10% of Final Grade)**

Attendance and participation in class is both encouraged and required. Attendance is rather straight forward as your presence is necessary to participate in class discussions and assignments. Furthermore, because there is no set textbook for the course, you will be tested and otherwise assessed based on in-class lectures and discussions of reading assignments that will require your presence and attention.

As this course is scheduled once-a-week, you are allowed to miss **1** day of class without any effect on your grade. Any additional days missed, unless otherwise cleared by me, will result in a deduction of your attendance and participation grade.

Things do come up however and if you are unable to attend class on any particular day, please email me at [mhbgsh@rit.edu](mailto:mhbgsh@rit.edu) as soon as possible and get in touch with a fellow student for notes on what you missed that day. While I will make myself available to clarify any confusion or questions that you may have regarding missed material, it is your responsibility to first ask a fellow student or students for their notes prior to contacting me.

### **Reading Responses (10% of Final Grade)**

**[see assignment sheet on your MyCourses page]**

Over the course of the semester you will be asked to read one or two texts each week unless otherwise indicated. You can find this readings in PDF form on your MyCourses page. You are asked to submit a reading response to at least **5** of these texts by midnight the night before they are assigned for class discussion. This is to allow me time, before class, to read through the responses and use them to facilitate our discussions and consider any questions that you may have with the readings. You are only required to respond to 5 of the readings throughout the semester but are invited and encouraged to respond to as many or all of the readings. You will be graded as Pass/Fail for this assignment. At the end of the semester I will use your top 5 grades from your responses and use those to determine your final grade.

### **Visual Analysis: First Draft (10% of Final Grade) – Due February 6<sup>th</sup> by 5:00pm**

**[see assignment sheet on your MyCourses page]**

Visual Analysis is an integral part of the field of Visual Culture. A visual analysis goes beyond mere description as it asks and attempts to answer *why?* and *how?*

visual objects are produced and received within the world. While this might seem like a rather straight forward exercise, it really is a skill that one must develop and, as such, we will be working throughout the semester to cultivate your ability to engage with visual material and communicate your interpretations of such material to others.

For this assignment, you are asked to choose a visual object and write a **3-6-page** paper addressing how and why the object “looks” the way that it does. Your paper must be submitted via your MyCourses page as a Word doc or Pages doc (no PDFs) no later than 5:00pm on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Failure to submit the assignment on time will result in a deduction of points.

I will then mark and provide feedback on your paper and return it to you as quickly as possible so that you may begin working on the second and final draft of the assignment (see below).

**Visual Analysis: Final Draft (15% of Final Grade) – Due February 27<sup>th</sup> by 5:00pm**  
**[see assignment sheet on your MyCourses page]**

You are asked to incorporate feedback provided on your first draft into a second and final draft of your Visual Analysis as described above and submit via your MyCourses page as a Word doc or Pages doc (no PDFs) by 5:00pm on February 27<sup>th</sup>. Failure to submit the assignment on time will result in a deduction of points.

**Midterm Exam (15% of Final Grade) – In Class on March 6<sup>th</sup>**

Your midterm exam will assess your understanding of key concepts and ability to analyze visual material through multiple choice questions, short answer responses, and in essay form. Due to the nature of the course, this exam will be open-note and be administered during regular class time via your MyCourses page. We will have a review of material prior to the test on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Comparative Analysis: Proposal (10% of Final Grade) – Due March 27<sup>th</sup> by 5:00pm**  
**[see assignment sheet on your MyCourses page]**

As with a Visual Analysis, a Comparative Analysis is a common tool within the field of Visual Culture. Through an analysis of similarities and differences between two or more visual objects we can further consider the *hows* and *whys* of visual culture.

You are asked to choose two visual objects and submit a **2-page** (minimum) proposal identifying the works and outlining your expected thesis and any theoretical frameworks you intend to use within your analysis. As this is a proposal and not a finished essay, you are not expected to have fully flushed out your ideas. Rather, this should be seen as a way to organize and think through

your project which you will then later present to the class and finally construct a final paper.

After you have submitted your proposals, I will provide feedback and we will have one-on-one meetings to discuss your topic and outlined approach.

**Presentation (15% of Final Grade) – In Class April 17<sup>th</sup>, April 24<sup>th</sup>, and May 1<sup>st</sup>**  
**[see assignment sheet on your MyCourses page]**

One of the main objectives for this course is to be able to communicate your own ideas and interpretations to others clearly. As such, for this assignment, you are asked to prepare a **5-minute** presentation illustrating the subject and thesis of your Comparative Analysis. After your presentation, we will take 5 mins as a class to provide feedback and suggestions that may prove beneficial to your Comparative Analysis Final Paper (see below). It is imperative and expected that every student will attend all weeks of presentations (not just the week that you are presenting).

I will provide a signup sheet via your MyCourses page closer to the dates of presenting. As you will notice, there are three separate weeks dedicated to this assignment with pros and cons of presenting for each available day.

**Comparative Analysis: Final Paper (15% of Final Grade) – TBD**  
**[see assignment sheet on your MyCourses page]**

You are asked to choose two visual objects and write a 5-10-page analysis of their similarities and differences using formal description and applying theoretical frameworks that address *how* and *why* the objects exist within our visual world. Your paper must be submitted via your MyCourses page as a Word doc or Pages doc (no PDFs).

## Final Grade Breakdown

Your final grade will be determined by the following percentages:

**Attendance/Participation: 10%**  
**Reading Responses: 10%**  
**Visual Analysis (First Draft): 10%**  
**Visual Analysis (Final Draft): 15%**  
**Midterm Exam: 15%**  
**Comparative Analysis (Proposal): 10%**  
**Presentation: 15%**  
**Comparative Analysis (Final Paper): 15%**

## Grading Letter Breakdown

**A 93+**  
**A- 90-92**  
**B+ 87-89**  
**B 83-86**  
**B- 80-82**  
**C+ 77-79**  
**C 73-76**  
**C- 70-72**  
**D 60-69**  
**F 0-59**

## Academic Integrity Statement

As an institution of higher learning, RIT expects students to behave honestly and ethically at all times, especially when submitting work for evaluation in conjunction with any course or degree requirement. RIT Online encourages all students to become familiar with the RIT Honor Code and with RIT's Academic Integrity Policy.

### D.08.0 Student Academic Integrity Policy

IV. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY A breach of student academic integrity falls into three basic areas: cheating, duplicate submission, and plagiarism

A. **Cheating:** Cheating is any form of fraudulent or deceptive academic act, including falsification of data, possessing, providing, or using unapproved materials, sources, or tools for a project, exam, or body of work submitted for faculty evaluation.

B. **Duplicate Submission:** Duplicate submission is the submitting of the same or similar work for credit in more than one course without prior approval of the instructors for those same courses.

C. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the representation of others' ideas as one's own without giving proper attribution to the original author or authors. Plagiarism occurs when a

student copies direct phrases from a text (e.g. books, journals, and internet) and does not provide quotation marks or paraphrases or summarizes those ideas without giving credit to the author or authors. In all cases, if such information is not properly and accurately documented with appropriate credit given, then the student has committed plagiarism. If you are caught cheating on any assignment or exam, appropriate academic disciplinary action will be taken to the fullest extent allowed by the University. Refer to your “Students Rights and Responsibilities” handbook for further guidance on the Academic Dishonesty policy at RIT.  
<https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/d080> .

### **Accommodations**

RIT is committed to providing academic adjustments to students with disabilities. If you would like to request academic adjustments such as testing modifications due to a disability, please contact the Disability Services Office (DSO). Contact information for the DSO and information about how to request adjustments can be found at <https://www.rit.edu/disabilityservices/> . After you receive academic adjustment approval, it is imperative that you see me during office hours so that we can work out whatever arrangement is necessary.

### **Internet Connection**

As this class is an Online/Remote class, a reliable internet connection is imperative. Please make sure that you have access to a reliable internet connection. While the occasional technical difficulty is to be expected, repeated failure to attend and engage in class discussions and lectures due to technical issues will be treated as absences.

### **Course Copyright Policy**

All material (including this syllabus) is protected by copyright laws. Materials provided over your MyCourses page should be treated as such and not disseminated outside of class without my express permission.

## Class Schedule

- January 16<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS – MLK Jr Day
- January 23<sup>rd</sup> – Introduction: What is Visual Culture
- January 24<sup>th</sup> – Last Day of Drop/Add
- January 25<sup>th</sup> – Drop Class with “W” on Transcript
- January 30<sup>th</sup> – Varying Methodologies in Visual Culture
  - Readings – “Studies in Iconography: Introductory” by Erwin Panofsky and “Rhetoric of the Image” by Roland Barthes
- February 6<sup>th</sup> – Spectatorship/Authorship
  - Reading – “What is an Author” by Michel Foucault
  - Visual Analysis: First Draft due by beginning of class (5:00pm)
- February 13<sup>th</sup> – The Gaze
  - Reading – “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey
  - Film Viewing – *Rear Window* by Alfred Hitchcock
  - Individual Meetings
- February 20<sup>th</sup> – Representation(s)
  - Readings – “Why have there been no Great Women Artist?” by Linda Nochlin and “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order” by Timothy Mitchell
- February 27<sup>th</sup> – High and Low Culture
  - Readings – “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” by Clement Greenberg and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin
  - Visual Analysis: Final Draft due by beginning of class (5:00pm)
- March 6<sup>th</sup> – Midterm Review & Exam due by end of class (7:50pm)
- March 13<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
- March 20<sup>th</sup> – The Photograph
  - Readings –and “The Photographic Message” by Roland Barthes and “In Plato’s Cave” by Susan Sontag
- March 27<sup>th</sup> – Moving Pictures
  - Reading – “The Oppositional Gaze” by bell hooks
  - Comparative Analysis Proposal due by beginning of class (5:00pm)



- **April 3<sup>rd</sup> – Out in the Street**
  - Readings – TBD
  - Film Viewing – *Style Wars* by Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant
  - Individual Meetings
- **April 7<sup>th</sup> – Last Day to Drop Class with “W” on Transcript**
- **April 10<sup>th</sup> – Advertising, New Media, and the Digital World**
  - Reading – “Superflatlands: The Global Cultures of Takashi Murakami and Superflat Art” by Kristen Sharp
- **April 17<sup>th</sup> – Presentations Day 1**
- **April 24<sup>th</sup> – Presentations Day 2**
- **May 1 – Presentations Day 3**
- **May 3<sup>rd</sup> – May 10<sup>th</sup> – Final Papers Due**
  - Your final Papers will be due at the end of the assigned testing period as scheduled by RIT. **Exact Date - TBD**