Visual and Critical Studies Courses

VISC 2006-01
Histories of Film, Part Two 1955-present
Tina Wasserman
Tuesdays 2:00-5:00, B311
The two Histories of Film courses are sequential, single semester courses that may be taken separately, but are created as a year-long inquiry into the art of cinema. Constructed as a foundational course we will examine the development of cinema from its inception in the late nineteenth century through to the present. Using a broad historical, theoretical and critical framework, this course will introduce the student to the study of cinematic representation in a roughly chronological manner by focusing on the first half of its development in the fall and the second half of its development in the spring. By investigating the aesthetic, formal and stylistic devices of film as well as its narrative codes and structures we will consider the evolution of its rich and complex language.

The two courses will focus on such noteworthy film movements as the early International Avant-Garde, German Expressionism, Soviet filmmaking of the 1920s, the classical studio Hollywood film, postwar cinemas in France and Japan, the American Avant-Garde, International New Wave Cinemas of the 1960s, post-classical American Cinema, World Cinema, and contemporary independent and experimental film and video practices and more. The presentation of films will be paired with noteworthy essays that engage a variety of methodologies and readings of the films while positioning them within critical, interpretive and historic contexts.

- You may register for this course even if you did not take it first semester.
- Fulfills the film track of the ILVS major.

VISC 2022-01
Neo-Noir and Its Contexts
Tina Wasserman
Tuesdays 6:00-9:00, B311
This course will introduce the student to a group of historic American films produced between 1941 and 1958 that are often identified as "film noir." We compare this historic group of films with later incarnations of film noir, examining how this original historic body of work profoundly influenced a wide range of neo-noir practices. We will contextualize these films through broad historical, aesthetic and critical frameworks and analyze a range of common underlying themes and preoccupations including: the creation of a dark and brooding pessimism; the representation of the noir woman as a "femme
fatale;" modernity, postmodernity, urbanism, postwar paranoia and anxiety, the existential impulse of noir, issues of race, gender and more. The work of such directors as Billy Wilder, Jules Dassin, Roman Polanski, Ridley Scott, David Lynch, Bill Duke, Rian Johnson, Christopher Nolan, Chan-wook Park, the Coen Brothers and more will be considered.

- Students of all years welcome to register.
- Fulfills the film track of the ILVS major.

VISC 2025-01
**History and Aesthetics in Hitchcock**
Tina Wasserman
**Wednesdays 2:00-5:00, B311**
This course will provide the student with an overview of the cinematic work of Alfred Hitchcock. Using critical, psychoanalytic and feminist film theory we will investigate the various historic, aesthetic, thematic and formal concerns threaded throughout his film work. In our study we will examine his skillful narrative coding of the suspense thriller using point-of-view/spectator identification techniques, his powerful but often disturbing representation of women, the patterns of looking and voyeurism inscribed in his work and much more.

- Students of all years welcome to register.
- Fulfills the film track of the ILVS major.

VISC 1012-01
**A History of Photography Through Ideas, Part II**
Jim Dow
**Mondays 2:00-5:00, B311**
John Tagg writes that it is impossible to teach the history of photography as a "discrete and coherent field or discipline" when the medium has been employed across such a disparate set of fields as forensic science and abstract expressionism, to name just two. With that in mind, it is perhaps more useful to approach photographic histories through ideas and topics, such as the family unit, worth, propaganda, supervision, record keeping, obsession and so forth. Over the course of a year we will address different artistic, cultural, political and social premises, generally in two-week cycles and investigate any intersections with photography over the past two hundred years. Presentations will draw on written and visual material from the late 18th century forward through today. There will be numerous background readings, discussion groups and assigned research papers and projects.

- Please note that this is the second half of a yearlong course. While it is certainly possible to take the second semester without having taken the first, the lectures are sequenced with the content covered in fall, 2016 in mind. Those earlier presentations will be available on the Course Site.
- Fulfills the visual studies track of the ILVS major.
Encounters with Modernity: Art in Global Contexts, 1840-1920
Emily Gephart

Wednesdays and Fridays 12:30-2:00, B311

This class considers the multiple ways in which the experience of the modern world was addressed in art, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Artists used traditional as well as new media to give visual shape to historical and cultural forces such as rising urbanism, new technologies and scientific discoveries, shifting socio-cultural demographics, and changing habits of work and domestic life. The course concludes with the global upheavals of the early twentieth century, during which the art world witnessed the rise of multiple ‘isms.’

Although we will examine traditional accounts of modern art’s rise, we also challenge these models, seeking parallel and counter-narratives. We will set art in the context of the social events shaping the emergence of the political and cultural avant-gardes, examining global networks of exchange fostered by the spread of European colonialism and its aftermath. We will look at the development of multiple modernisms, considering the point of view of artists commonly excluded from canonical stories, as well as those who embraced social change and esthetic challenges more tentatively.

In this reading-intensive class, theoretical and historical texts complement close, sustained analyses of individual works of art. Selected issues, artists, objects, practices, exhibitions, manifestos, and essays serve as case studies of specific problems.

- This course has no prerequisites, but prior experience with a general introduction to art history, such as the SMFA First Year Program, is strongly recommended.
- Fulfills the visual studies track of the ILVS major, and can satisfy the ILVS Cultural Theory requirement.

Theorizing Film and Gender
Hilary Binda

Thursdays 9:00-12:00 and additional screening session weekly, B311

Theorizing Film and Gender is a course that uses film and contemporary visual art to access and enliven philosophical debates about gender and race in what has become known as the field of critical theory. This is not a course in the history or sociology of women. Rather, this is a course that explores the way gender and sexuality has operated both in the service of a liberatory politics and in the service of oppressive ideologies. In order to develop a richer analysis of gender and sexuality in our own moment, we will explore multiple theoretical contexts that, since the onset of modernism, have framed ideas about sexuality, race, and the very concept of the human. We will begin by tracing the legacy of Ferdinand de Saussure through Jacques Derrida, asking how linguistics and deconstruction have come to bear on interpretations of sexuality and gender. Donna Haraway's feminist critique of "nature" will provide the link between the semiotic analysis and the early 20th-century critique of technology and culture. This theoretical foundation will enable us to engage the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan in conjunction with several of its queer and feminist appropriations and critiques. We will ultimately ask how these lines of thought in what we might call
deconstructive psychoanalysis complicate and enrich a feminist, queer, gender-queer, and trans analysis of visual culture.

To answer this question, we will read films by, among others, Asgar Farhadi, Jennie Livingston, Pedro Almodovar, Charlie Kaufman, Kimberly Pierce, and Michael Haneke in conjunction with readings from among the following writers: Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Jacqueline Rose, Kobena Mercer, Lee Edelman, Lauren Berlant, José Esteban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, Sandy Stone, and Slavoj Žižek. We will end by considering ways that critical theory might ground a politics, and we will do so by taking war as our test case and considering the impact of war and survival on our ideas about sex and identity.

- In order to register, you must have already taken both the First Year Program (or equivalent if you are a transfer or Post Bac student) and the first year writing requirements (Writing 1 or 3 and Writing 2 or the equivalent).
- The course is especially suitable for Combined Degree students and BFA students in the Senior Thesis program and will provide a forum for a discussion of students' issues relating to their own work.
- Fulfills the visual studies track of the ILVS major, and can satisfy the ILVS Cultural Theory requirement.

VISC 2017-01

**Contemporary Art: The Present**

Jim Dow

**Thursdays, 2:00-5:00, B311**

A single-semester class that presents an overview of contemporary art on exhibit primarily but not exclusively in New York City galleries, specifically in Chelsea and the Lower East Side. While the class is linked with *Contemporary Art: The Prequel* it is not a requirement for admission. That said, *Contemporary Art: The Present* is not an introductory level course and should not be the first Visual & Critical Studies class taken at the SMFA. A significant degree of experience in looking at and talking about art is necessary, since the emphasis will be on a discrete viewing and commentary on exhibitions with additional background provided when required.

- In order to register, you must have already taken both the First Year Program (or equivalent if you are a transfer or Post Bac student) and another Visual and Critical Studies course.
- Fulfills the visual studies track of the ILVS major.

VISC 2007-01

**Reassessing Museums, Collections, and Art Culture: Biting the Hand that Feeds**

Eulogio Guzman

**Wednesdays, 9:00-12:00, B311**

Since their inception, museums have been created to collect, house, and exhibit art and culture. As museum collections have expanded so have their responsibilities, making these institutions one of the premier disseminators of knowledge. In some instances, museum collections can reflect the values of collectors wanting to advance and secure both their economic and social interests and not necessarily the interest of the public at
large. Some museums also act as receptacles of social artifacts and artistic objects organized to display the historical development of specific cultures.

This course examines the constantly changing role of the museum and their complicated social, political and cultural agendas. The wide existence of museums worldwide (over 100,000 by some accounts) makes it clear, there is no single way to understand their complicated workings. However, by studying a variety of institutions and issues related their exhibiting and acquiring collections, students will explore the ways these institutions operate in class lectures, readings, museum visits, and class discussions.

- **In order to register, you must have already taken both the First Year Program (or equivalent if you are a transfer or Post Bac student) and another Visual and Critical Studies course.**
- **Fulfills the visual studies track of the ILVS major, and satisfies the ILVS Cultural Theory requirement.**

VISC 1031-01
**The Art of Building Empire**
Eulogio Guzman
Tuesdays, 9:00-11:20, B311
The art and architecture of Inca and Aztec people are a testimony of their brilliant past and offer clues about the role art and architecture play in disseminating the ideas of expanding political governments. What were the social factors that led the Inca and Aztec to achieve the domination of such vast areas in such short periods of time (roughly one hundred years) and how did visual culture help them assert their social control? This class examines the strategies sovereign polities can use to assert political control among multi-ethnic governments. The lectures and readings in this course are designed to help students explore how visual strategies can be used to co-opt dominion, negotiate power conflicts, and disseminate the ideological interests of dominating political groups and classes. Through the presentation and discussion of case studies students will explore the ways painting, sculpture, ritual performance, architecture, and writing systems are used to underwrite and disseminate the ideological interests of expanding governments. Although the course focuses mainly but not exclusively in the ancient Americas, students will be expected to apply the concepts presented in class readings to contemporary political circumstances. (Upper Division, Theory and Methods).

- **In order to register, you must have already taken both the First Year Program (or equivalent if you are a transfer or Post Bac student) and another Visual and Critical Studies course.**
- **Fulfills the visual studies track of the ILVS major, and satisfies the ILVS Cultural Theory requirement.**

VISC 3018-01
**Poetry Writing: Textual Image / Visual Text**
Hilary Binda
Mondays, 2:00-5:00, A207 (plus Mondays 9:00-12:00 MacLab)
This seminar in reading and writing poetry culminates in the development of a poetry-based autobiography that is image/design-based as well as written. As a result, students
will take this writing course in conjunction with the Graphic Arts course, Textual Image / Visual Text. This half of the two-part class will concentrate on writing and reading. We will approach poetry through different, often conflicting, discourses: the historical, the biographical, the literary-linguistic. Partially an introduction to intellectual history, this class will introduce several philosophical shifts occurring during the historical periods known as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Romantic, the Modern, and beyond as these became manifest in poetic texts – both in poems themselves and in literary texts about poetry written by poets. In some cases we will also explore the more local histories of a poem or poet, but, ultimately, this is a course in poetic language, a study of the way that language itself inflects, indeed creates, meaning. A class about art for artists, we will often approach poetics through the lens of visual art, not only by considering poems on or alongside paintings but also by relating the signifying strategies of poems and visual art. Expect to write and read continuously in creative and analytical modes and to participate regularly in discussions and workshop-critiques, during which students will share and comment upon one another’s work.

- Due to the studio component of this course, students must also register for Graphic Arts Course Textual Image / Visual Text, Mondays 9:00-12:00 in the Mac Lab classroom. Credit in one course depends on credit in the other.
- In order to register, you must have already taken both the First Year Program (or equivalent if you are a transfer or Post Bac student) and another Visual and Critical Studies course.
- Fulfills the literature track of the ILVS major, and satisfies the ILVS Visual Theory requirement.

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**Writing Courses**

**All first year students must register for English 2, as long as you have already taken English 1 or 3 or placed out of these.**

ENG 0011-03  
**English 2: Writing Composition and Research: Monstrous (Con)texts**  
Kim Hebert  
Mondays 2:00-5:00, C111 (Mission Hill)  
This course will examine literary and visual texts — film, music, literature, the built environment and visual art — in their historical contexts, asking how context necessarily impacts, distorts, or disfigures an interpretation of a text, artwork, or event. Readings will explore notions of the monstrous and the Gothic alongside ideas about genre and family, pleasure and pain. Among the texts we will consider are David Fincher’s film *Fight Club* and Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain*. Through close textual readings, we will also explore the borders of monstrosity, purity and impurity, normativity and obscenity.
English 2 builds on the writing skills students develop in English 1 (and English 3) while also cultivating students' research skills, again through engagement with a set of theme-based literary, visual, and cinematic texts. Among the multiple revision-based writing assignments in English 2 that further develop students' critical thinking, argumentation, and close textual reading skills is a properly cited research essay. With an additional library information literacy component, this course helps students to develop strategies for thinking critically about information-seeking and information resources and for reflecting on the research process. English 2 fulfills the second half of the college writing requirement.

ENGS 0011-04

English 2: Writing Composition and Research: Last Things
Adam Spellmire
Wednesdays 2:00-5:00, C111 (Mission Hill)
We will analyze and write about art that imagines catastrophe. The course material will include a post-apocalyptic novel, but we will also consider last things in other artistic and historical contexts. How do artists represent the end of human experience? What happens at the end? Who remains? What cultural anxieties produce these texts? Why does a disaster genre persist? What are its central concerns? To investigate these questions, we will examine work by Margaret Atwood, Samuel Beckett, and Stanley Kubrick, and each student will also choose a visual artwork to research. Although the essay assignments and class discussion will involve these texts and ideas, the course will focus on students' writing.

English 2 builds on the writing skills students develop in English 1 (and English 3) while also cultivating students' research skills, again through engagement with a set of theme-based literary, visual, and cinematic texts. Among the multiple revision-based writing assignments in English 2 that further develop students' critical thinking, argumentation, and close textual reading skills is a properly cited research essay. With an additional library information literacy component, this course helps students to develop strategies for thinking critically about information-seeking and information resources and for reflecting on the research process. English 2 fulfills the second half of the college writing requirement.

ENGS 0011-01

English 2: Writing Composition and Research: Horrific Beauty
Cheryl Alison
Thursdays 2:00-5:00, C111 (Mission Hill)
This course will explore material that portrays difficult, even horrific content in what might be called aesthetically compelling ways. We will consider what it means for something violent or brutal to be simultaneously attractive, and we will ask how such work accesses us, as viewers and readers, differently. We will consider works of film, literature, and visual art ranging in focus from the historical and political to the private and familial, and we will venture to understand both how these texts work as compositions and how they work on us. In order to investigate horrific beauty, we will read a long novel by Curzio Malaparte and watch films by Darren Aronofsky and John Hillcoat. We will also attend to work by visual artists including Francis Bacon and
Hieronymus Bosch. Students should be aware that course content will deal with challenging subject matter, including violences related to race and religion, sex and gender, and addiction. Students must be prepared to engage with this material as well as take part in respectful, analysis-driven discussion with their peers.

English 2 builds on the writing skills students develop in English 1 (and English 3) while also cultivating students' research skills, again through engagement with a set of theme-based literary, visual, and cinematic texts. Among the multiple revision-based writing assignments in English 2 that further develop students' critical thinking, argumentation, and close textual reading skills is a properly cited research essay. With an additional library information literacy component, this course helps students to develop strategies for thinking critically about information-seeking and information resources and for reflecting on the research process. English 2 fulfills the second half of the college writing requirement.