

Welcome to COMS 369

Winter 2017

Visual Communication

Instructor: Luciano Frizzera, PhD Student in Communication Studies

Email: lucaju@gmail.com

Time: Wednesdays from 1:15pm-4pm

Location: CJ 4.240

Office hours: 11am-12:30pm (Office CJ 4.260), or by appointment.

Website: <http://coms369.fluxo.art.br>

Questions we will be exploring

- Why is there an emphasis on ‘visual’ communication and not the other senses?
- How has certain media framed how we literally see and experience the world?
- What is the role of technology in visual communication?
- What are the visual strategies to communicate an idea?
- How can we interrupt/intervene on and with such visual practices?

Course Description

This course introduces the basic principles of visual forms of communication, and considers the relationship of visual and verbal components within media messages. It also presents various modes of visual communication, considers their place within cultural understandings of representation, and examines the place of the visual within contemporary culture.

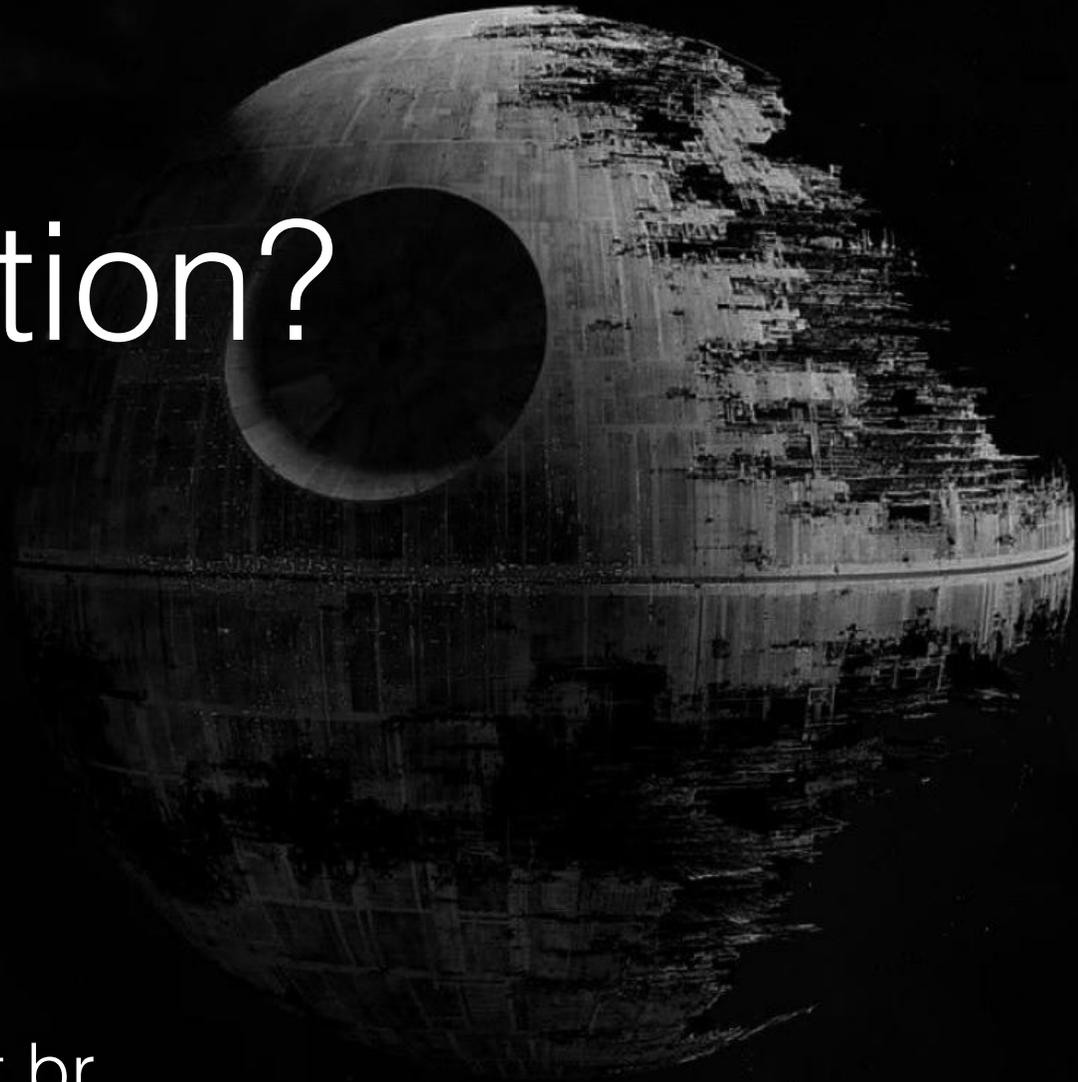
Objectives

- To understand a range of concept and theories applicable and useful in visual communication.
- To explore and analyze a variety of theories on image reception and meaning making.
- To engage in critical ways of “seeing” and evaluate the complexities of what it means “to see”.
- To consider major debates in visual communication and mobilize an ethical response in relation to issues involving visual communication.

Week 1

Why Visual Communication?

- <http://coms369.fluxo.art.br>



A composite image where the iris of a human eye is replaced by a detailed, blue-toned globe of the Earth. The globe shows continents and oceans, with a white bird perched on the right side. The eye's pupil is a dark, circular void in the center of the globe. The surrounding sclera and eyelids are visible in a light, naturalistic tone.

Week 2

Human Perception and Visual Cognition

- Lester, P. M. (2014). Visual Cues. In *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (6 edition, pp. 14–41). Boston: Wadsworth Publishing.

Week 3

Mass Media: Simulation and Politics



- Baudrillard, J. (1983). Simulations [Excerpt]. (pp. 1–30). Semiotex(e).

Week 4

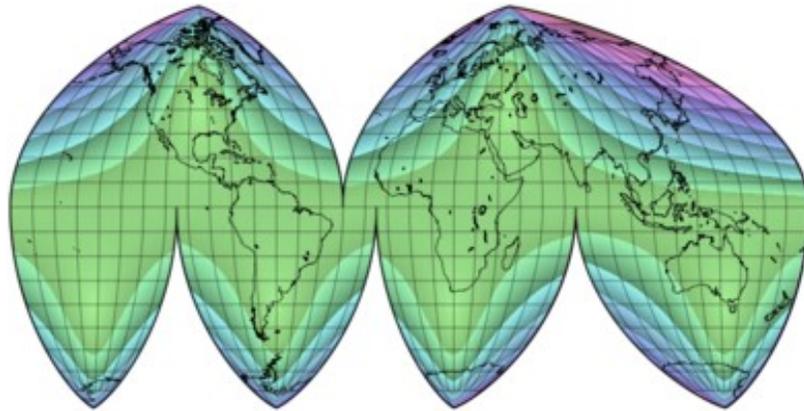
(in)Visibility and Surveillance

- Foucault, M. (1995). The means of correct training. In *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (REP edition, pp. 170–194). New York: Vintage
- Fuster, G. G., Bellanova, R., & Gellert, R. (2015). Nurturing Ob-Scene Politics: Surveillance Between In/Visibility and Dis-Appearance. *Surveillance & Society*, 13(3/4), 512–527.



Week 5

Semiotic, Space, and Maps



- De Certeau, M. (2002). Walking in the city. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2nd ed., pp. 91–110). Berkeley, CA, USA; Los Angeles, CA, USA; London, UK: University of California Press.
- Shields, R. (1989). Social spatialization and the built environment: the West Edmonton Mall. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 7(2), 147 – 164.



Week 6 Images in Advertising

TASTE THE FEELING™



- Barthes, R. (1977). The Rhetoric of the Image. *Image-Music-Text*, 15–27.
- Soar, M. (Ed.). (2003). The advertising photography of Richard Avedon and Sebastião Salgado. In *Image ethics in the digital age* (pp. 269–294). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Week 7



**KEEP
CALM
IT'S
READING
WEEK**

Week 8

Visual (re)Production



- Benjamin, W. (2008). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In M. W. Jennings, B. Doherty, & T. Y. Levin (Eds.), *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (1st ed., pp. 19–55). Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press

Week 9

Gendered Gazes



- Mulvey, L. (1989). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In *Visual and other pleasures* (pp. 14–26). Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing* (pp. 45–64). New York: Penguin Books and British Broadcasting.

Week 10

Race and Representation

- Roth, L. (2009). Looking at Shirley, the ultimate norm: Colour balance, image technologies, and cognitive equity. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 34(1), 111–136.
- Dyer, R. (2005). On the manner of whiteness. In *White privileges: Essential readings to the other site of racism* (pp. 9–14). Paula Rauthenberg.



Week 11

Digital Culture and Social Media



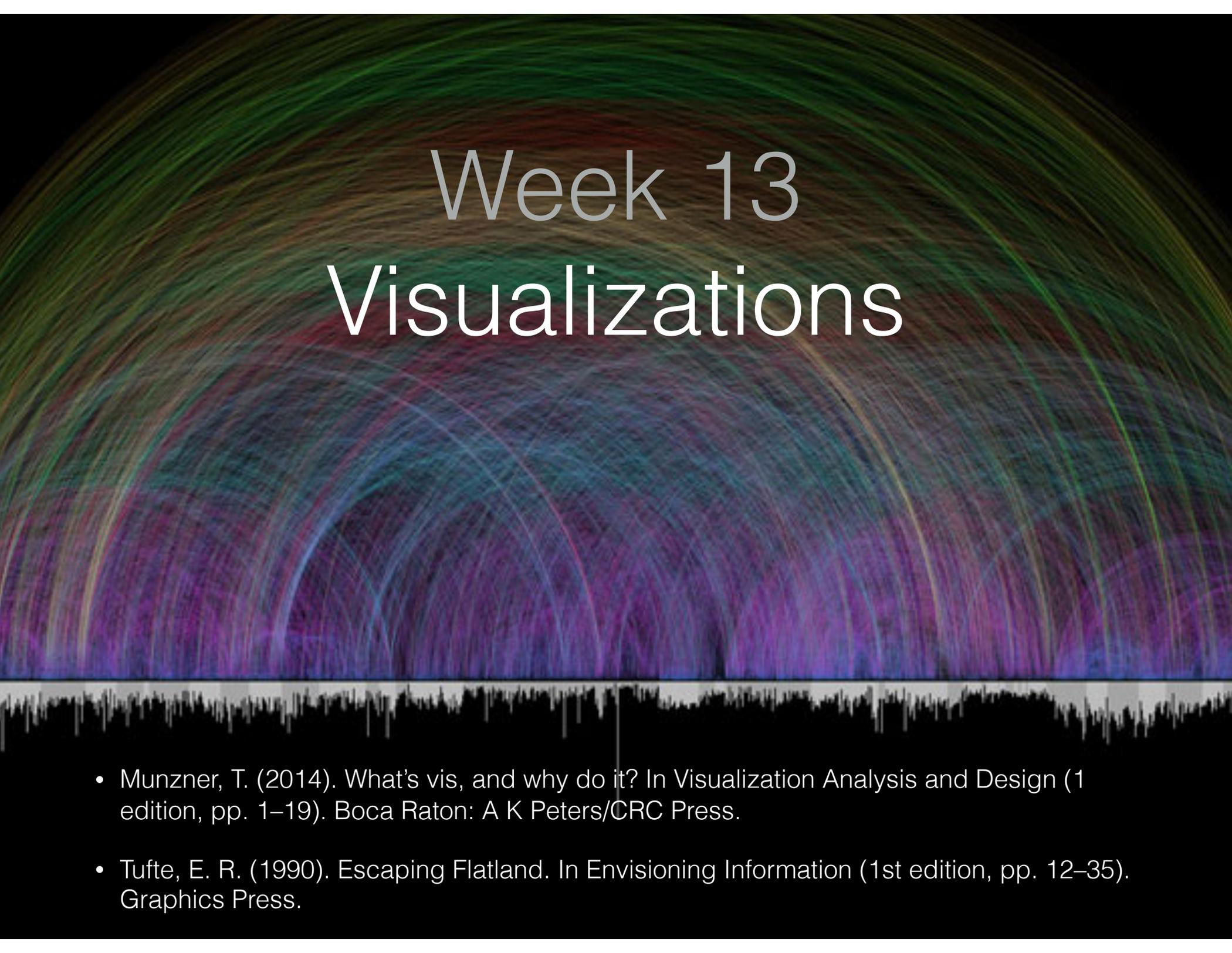
- Manovich, L. (2016). Instagrammism and contemporary cultural identity. In *Instagram and Contemporary Image* (pp. 1–25).
- Tifentale, A. (2016). The Networked Camera at Work: Why Every Self-portrait Is Not a Selfie, but Every Selfie is a Photograph. In *Riga Photography Biennial 2016* (pp. 74–83). Latvia: Riga Photography Biennial.

Week 12

Virtual Worlds and Avatars

- Ducheneaut, N., Wen, M.-H., Yee, N., & Wadley, G. (2009). Body and mind: a study of avatar personalization in three virtual worlds. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1151–1160). ACM.
- Neustaedter, C., & Fedorovskaya, E. (2009). Presenting Identity in a Virtual World Through Avatar Appearances. In Proceedings of Graphics Interface 2009 (pp. 183–190). Toronto, Ont., Canada, Canada: Canadian Information Processing Society.
- Turkle, S. (1994). Constructions and reconstructions of self in virtual reality: Playing in the MUDs. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 1(3), 158–167.





Week 13

Visualizations

- Munzner, T. (2014). What's vis, and why do it? In *Visualization Analysis and Design* (1 edition, pp. 1–19). Boca Raton: A K Peters/CRC Press.
- Tufte, E. R. (1990). Escaping Flatland. In *Envisioning Information* (1st edition, pp. 12–35). Graphics Press.

Week 14



TBA

Readings

- All course readings will be available on the online course reserves under the course code COMS 369 or in the e-journal database. There is no course pack.

Assignments Breakdown

- 10% Course participation
- 25 % Group-led class intervention (20%) and individual reflection paper (5%)
- 15 % Reading Reports
- 20% Critical visual reflection
- 30% Final original paper/project

Participation

- 10% of final grade.
- Your full participation is essential. This includes completion of assigned readings, attendance, and contribution to class discussions and activities. You should arrive having read and thought the assigned readings, bringing questions, examples, and comments to share with the class.
- We will begin each class with close readings of different passages, both suggested by you and picked by me, and discuss what we find compelling and/or problematic about these passages.
- If you are uncomfortable speaking in front of your peers due to your own personal reasons, please speak with me at the beginning of the term and we will make alternative arrangements.
- Your participation mark will also be affected by how supportive they are to fellow classmates: collegiality is very important inside and outside the classroom.
- If you miss three classes without contacting me within 24 hours of class, you will receive a mark of zero for participation. Please note you must have proper documentation for your absence.

Group-led intervention

- 20% class intervention and 5% individual reflection.
- Groups of 4 (no more or less) sign up for one week to organize a class-led intervention motivated by the course readings of that week.
- Interventions may include an artistic activity, a debate, a storytelling exchange, social media interaction, etc.
- Your group intervention must run between 25-30 minutes.
- After your intervention, we will have a quick class dialogue about what we took from your activity.
- One week after your intervention, each group member is required to submit a 1-page reflection on your activity, its application of the course readings, the general response of your classmates, and situate what you would have altered.
- Your reflections must be emailed by 10 am one week after your group intervention.

Reading Reports

- 15% of final grade.
- Submit 2 reading reports each worth 7.5%
- Reading report should be 500~700 words (no more than 2 pages).
- Short summary of the readings of the week you choose, including questions the reading raised, connections the readings have to prior readings, class discussions, or contemporary media, or critiques of the readings.
- Reading reports starts from week 3 and you should pick at least 1 before the reading week.
- You can submit up to 3 reports. If you do, your lowest mark will be dropped.
- The reading reports must be emailed by 10 am the day of the class they are assigned

Critical Visual Reflection

- 20% of final grade.
- Due week 6 (February 15 @ 10am) by email
- Choose a Montreal-specific site (park, statue, building, etc) and applying two course readings (other than ones used for your group intervention). You should reflect on what issues of visual communication are being energized by the chosen site.
- Some of the questions to consider: What are the ethical complexities of this site? What kind of seeing practices emerge? How is it being framed in the backdrop of Montreal? What are the cultural implications of its visual qualities?
- Your discussion must consistently apply and articulate your selected course readings.
- Your paper should also include 4-5 pictures that must be referred to in the text of your paper. Please take this opportunity to explore a part of Montreal that you encounter everyday and issues that are relevant to you personally.
- Your reflection must be approximately 4-5 pages long, in addition to a bibliography and your photographs.

Final original paper

- 30% of final grade.
- Due April 12th (last class) @ 10am by email
- Your final essay will be an original topic of your choice.
- Consider writing on issues we have covered over the duration of this course: gender and racial representation; visibility, perception, and sensation; ethics; technology; ideology; political economy; videogames, visualization, social media, etc.
- In a 10 pages paper, you should respond to your selected issues, and use a minimum of 3 course readings to articulate what is at stake
- I encourage you to use non-academic articles to contextualize and familiarize yourself with your topic more. However, please remember the emphasis needs to be on the course readings and your application of them with your selected issue.

Specifications for written submissions

- All written submission should include the following:
- the title of your text (give your work a meaningful title); the name of the assignment (e.g., Critical Visual Reflection); your name and student number; the course title and number; the submission date.
- Your Work should be: double-spaced, in 12-point Times font; 1.5 inch margins all around; page numbers on the lower right; and include a separate reference page with full source citations. You can choose the citation style of your preference, but please use it consistently throughout your text.
- Send your work by email: lucaju@gmail.com
- PDF and Word file are preferable.
- *** Attention: Written feedback will not be given on late assignments.



KEEP

CALM

IT'S

BREAK

TIME

15 min

What is visual communication?

- Fine Arts
- Pop Culture
- Mass Media
- Propaganda
- Science
- Law
- Memory
- Ideology



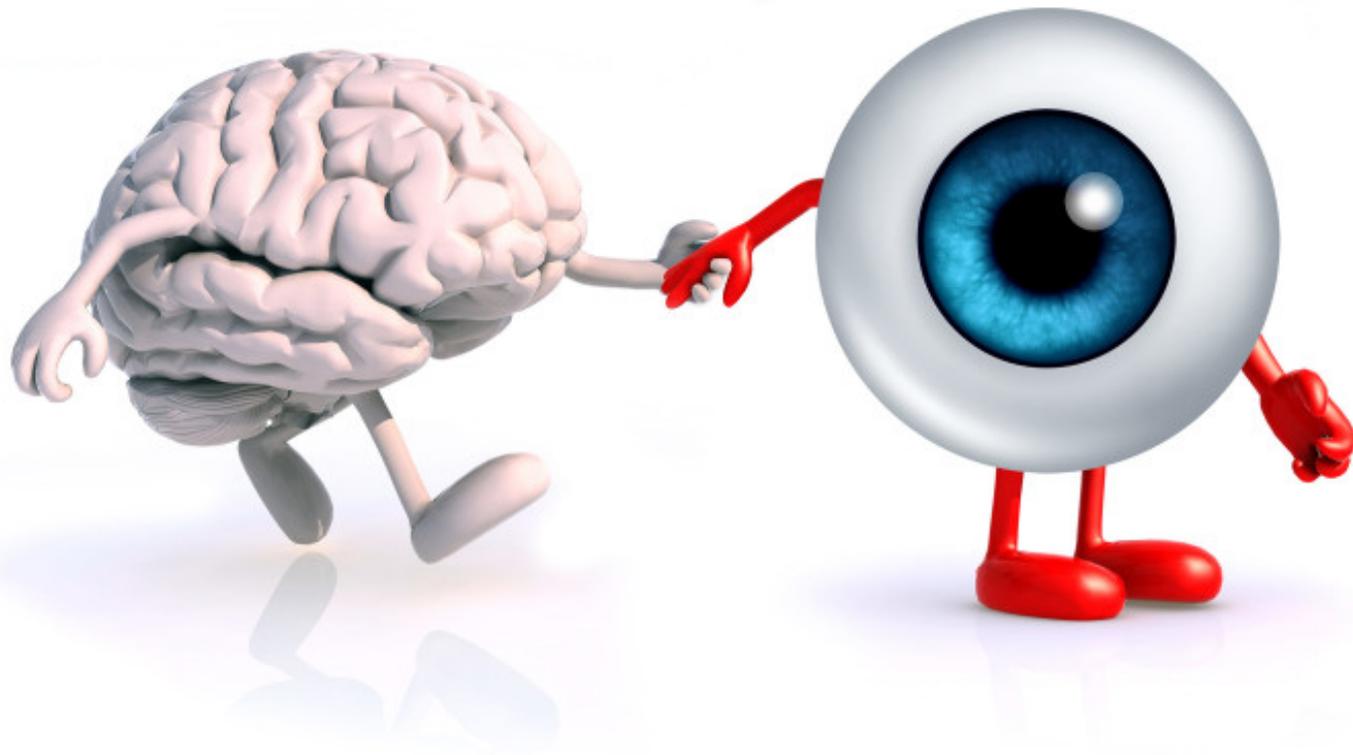




- Perhaps the first and foremost fundamental question is not what we look at, but what we see.



Visual communication = physiological functions + cognitive functions.



Sensing
Selecting
Perceiving
=
Seeing

(Huxley)

Sensing
Selecting
Perceiving
=
Seeing

(Huxley)

Sensing
Selecting
Perceiving
=
Seeing

(Huxley)

Consider for a moment all the visual messages that are part of your life?

What are you most vivid memories?

Now, think about all the other messages
you have been exposed but may have
forgotten.

Why there are a few memories easily to recall while many ambiguous memories are lost?

“There Are No Visual Media”

- “Visual media’ is a colloquial expression used to designate things such as television, film, photography and painting ... but it is highly inexact and misleading” (Mitchell, p. 259).
- Whatever we call visual media is not exclusively “visual,” but a combination of different modalities of communication, such as the sound, verbal, tangible, aural, emotional, etc.

Visual Culture

- “When we have an experience with a particular visual media we draw on associations with other media and other areas of our lives informed by visual images” (Sturken & Cartwright, p.2).

Culture

- The term culture can also be perceived as an “anthropological definition,” refers to a “whole way of life,” meaning a broad range of activities within a society: popular music, print media, art, and literature contribute to the daily lives of “ordinary people.”
- Stuart Hall: “It is the participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects, and events... it is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them — how we represent them — that we give a meaning” (as cited in Sturken & Cartwright, p. 4).

Language

- This argument seems to lead us to a need for a verbal communication to accompany every image: without language, there is no image.
- As Barthes shows that, even if we strip all symbolic meanings of an image, we still have much to observe, but it is not a purely visual sensation.

Visual Communication

- Field of study that refuses to take vision for granted, that insists on problematizing, theorizing, and critiquing the visual process as such.
- Not merely to examine the concept of 'the visual' in relation to the notion of culture, or visual culture as the 'spectacle' wing of cultural studies.

Visual Culture

- Our goal is to be critical about the image production in our society, to uncover and expose meanings so the viewer can get a better sense of what she is experiencing.
- Our goal is to use theories and a critical perspective to understand how images function in a broader cultural sphere, and how looking practices inform our lives beyond our personal perception of images.



- Without systematically analyzing an image, you may sense it and not notice the individual elements within the frame. You might not consider its content as it relates to a story. Without considering the image, you will not gain any understanding or perhaps personal insights. The picture will simply be another in a long line of forgotten images.

Questions to consider

- How do we see?
- How are we able to see?
- How are we allowed or made to see?
- How do we understand the seen and unseen?
- How is this culturally framed?

Visuality

- Visuality: “The quality or state of being visual. It is believed by some that visuality characterizes our age because so much of our media and everyday space is increasingly dominated by visual images. Some of the theorists who consider visuality in a culture or era, and not necessarily specific entities (such as photographs, for example) that are designed to be seen. Visuality can concern how we see everyday objects and people, and not just visual texts.” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 466).
- Visuality is coated with rhetoric and representation with overlaying social powers. When we look at something, there is “a natural hierarchy of sight.”

Normative Ways of Seeing

- Consider a traditional perspective- we see something and we come to understand it empirically true and universally valid. This can be seen as a Cartesian perspectivalism. There is a need to question this model.
- Digital images and imaging technologies increasingly facilitate cultural expression, communication, and everyday social interaction. Consider how many of use Instagram, - Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat to share just a quick glimpse of our lives.
- Seeing produces subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Historical practices of seeing have popularized dominant practices and also critical resistances (implicitly and explicitly). (Foster, ix-x)

How do we...

- How do we disturb our normative way of seeing?
- How do we move from this conventional way of seeing?
- Consider this as an invitation for your group-led class interventions.
- What do we lose when we look a certain way?
- Or what is lost if we start seeing a new way?

Alternatives Offer

- Foster says that a critique lies “the search of alternative visualities, whether these are to be located in the unconscious or the body, in the past (e.g., the baroque) or in the non-West (e.g., Japan), and it emerged for similar reasons: not to foreclose such difference, but to open them up, so that alternatives might not be merely appropriated as the same or strictly distanced as other- so that different visuality might be kept in play, and difference in vision might remain at work.”

Strategy and Tactics

- Strategy: "...to describe the practices by which dominant institutions seek to structure time, place, and actions of their social subjects. This in contrast to the tactics by which those subjects seek to reclaim a space and time for themselves. For example, the television programming schedule is a strategy to make viewers watch programming in a particular order, whereas an individual's use of a remote control or a TiVo is a tactic to decide viewing in their own way." (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 461). Consider this was written in 2009- a year when television were not necessarily placing their programs online, unless you downloaded it illegally.

Strategy and Tactics

- Tactic: “...to indicate those practices deployed by people who are not in positions of power to gain some control over the spaces of their daily lives. De Certeau defined tactics as the acts of the weak that do not have a lasting effect. He contrasted this with strategies of institutions. For example, sending a personal email while at work might be a tactic to give oneself a small feeling of empowerment in the alienation of one’s workplace. (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 463).