

# Visual Media and Interaction

CMS 348K-W, 06935

Spring 2012

CMA 3.116

## Prof. Jürgen Streeck

jstreeck@mail.utexas.edu

CMA 7.136

471-1955

Office hours: T 12:30 - 1:30 and TH 3:30 - 4:30

T.A. Lamiyah Bahrainwala

lamiyahbahrainwala@gmail.com

Office hours: W 4.30-6.30pm, UA9 2.102

## DESCRIPTION

While communication studies is a discipline mainly concerned with verbal communication, this course is about the visual components of human interaction. It covers both what is traditionally called “*nonverbal*” *communication*—communication that we produce with our eyes, faces, hands, and so on—and communication by *visual artifacts*, including pictures, computer screens, and everyday objects. The point of the class is to understand how these various visual media function, what impact they may have on society and the individual mind, and to increase your competence as a visual communicator and future communication professional.

You can also think of this class as a course on visual persuasion or visual rhetoric. It is designed to engage you in the critical analysis of visual behaviors and artifacts, to instigate your curiosity how visual media function and how they enable communication, problem solving, thought, and imagination, and thereby to enhance your ability to assess the quality of visual information. You will investigate how visual behaviors and pictures influence, even manipulate us, in subtle ways.

## FORMAT

This is not a lecture class. It is best envisioned as a research lab or workshop: in class, you will be consistently engaged in hands-on, digital investigations of phenomena such as hand gestures, interaction in urban spaces, fashion ads, operating instructions, and photographic portraits. Through these activities, you acquire observation skills that you will be able to apply in the workplace, in family and peer life, and in other areas of social interaction. The nature of this research is microscopic: we pay attention to detail, timing, and perspective. Each project, however, also relates to a larger theme, some fundamental way in which visual practices and images shape our societies, selves, and communication. Most classes end with a brief lecture.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO DURING AND AFTER CLASS

- Bring a laptop to class; if you have ear-phones (such as those you use with your iPod), please bring these also during Sections 1 & 2 of the course;

- make sure your laptop has the appropriate software installed (PowerPoint or Keynote, as well as video playing software that allows you to play video in slow motion (QuickTime Pro or VCL Player);
- at the beginning of class, you download a work-file or files, usually a Keynote/PowerPoint presentation, or a video files with a separate slide file, from the Course Shares server;
- you 'save as' the file, using your name and the date as file-name, in this format (important!): Lastname-MM-DD (e.g. Doe-1-17);
- you complete various observational and analytic tasks on these materials, describe your findings in text-fields, and/or write other comments in text fields;
- after a class lecture, you summarize and/or respond to key ideas or concepts in a separate text-field;
- you upload the file at the end of class to the day's folder on the Course Shares folder; the College has a very fast network, and you may want to come a few minutes early and upload your work from within the CMA building;
- after class, you complete and/or edit your work and upload the modified file before the next class meeting.

As this is a **writing component class**, working on your writing not only for the two papers, but also when you edit your work on the shorter assignment is essential. You will practice the writing of various types of texts in this course, not only the writing of research papers/essays, but also the writing of short texts for brochures and presentations. You will practice describing your observations precisely and appealingly.

### **PARTICIPATION (10% of your grade)**

This class is different from many other classes because your overall grade will to a great extent be determined by your work and participation *in class*. This means two things: (a) your work on research assignments in class (and polished at home); (b) your active communicative (oral) participation in class. Your participation will be continuously evaluated by the instructor and T.A., according to the criteria listed in the rubric in the appendix.

### **ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA**

Course grades will be full letter grades (no +/-).

#### **Small research assignments (50%)**

You will complete most of the work on research assignments in class, but you are expected to complete and edit your work and bring it into presentable form as a portfolio item (a brief slide show) at home. You can make an average maximum of 2 points on each assignment. These count for 50 percentage points of your grade; because the total number of points in the curriculum add up to 55, you can miss (an average of) some assignments without being penalized. If you complete all assignments and make more than 50 points, these points will compensate for a less than perfect grade on the final or one of the two papers.

#### **Observation assignment (5%; due February 16)**

2 pp. paper based on observations of visual interaction on the UT campus. (Detailed instructions will be given.)

### **Research study (15%; due May 3)**

An “ethnographic” study of the visual communication management of one person of your choice; you will observe, photograph, and interview someone about the way they visually structure their work or home environment to facilitate the flow of information and their work-flow. 6 pp. plus pictures and other documentation. (Detailed instructions will be given.)

You can complete both paper assignments in collaboration with another student; the page requirements for teams are 3 pp. and 10 pp., respectively.

Your work on all assignments will be evaluated by these criteria:

- A In addition to meeting all criteria for a "B", the work shows an extra-effort at creativity, research, or writing. It has professional quality.
- B Assignment perfectly completed; no significant flaws; demonstrates knowledge of assigned readings and other resources and involves serious effort to apply all relevant principles, information, and concepts. Good writing; writing perfectly edited (no spelling, grammatical, or formatting errors).
- C Assignment completed, but without dedicated effort and/or with flaws in content, presentation, or writing.
- D Work has major flaws in content, presentation, or writing and/or shows minimal effort.
- F Insufficient effort, resulting in a flawed product.

**For a detailed grading grid see the appendix.**

### **Portfolio:**

Over the semester you will be able to build a portfolio of original, analytic work and writing samples by which you can demonstrate to future employers that you have a good grasp and judgment of the properties, functions, and social implications of a broad range of visual communication media, that you are able to present your work and insights in professional and visually pleasing fashion, using digital media as your tools, and that you are able to write clearly, precisely, and engagingly on a variety of topics of visual communication.

### **Final:**

The final exam covers assigned readings and select class lectures; format TBA. (date TBA; 20%)

### **COMPOSITION OF GRADE**

In-class work/Portfolio	50%
Participation	10%
Observation paper	5%
Ethnographic study/paper	15%
Final exam	20%

## GENERAL POLICIES

### **No use of digital devices other than for in-class research activities:**

Learning communities thrive on joint, focused attention, and multi-tasking is detrimental not only to collective, but also to individual learning. The use of cell-phones and text messaging, surfing the internet for purposes other than the research, doing e-mail etc., are not allowed in this class. If you violate this rule, you will be counted as absent, and your participation grade will be lowered. Please sign the form at the end of this syllabus acknowledging that you are aware of this policy.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on an exam or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information, please see: [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php).

The policy for this class is that *any* academic dishonesty will lead to a failing grade for the course, and the student will not be allowed to return. Academic dishonesty also includes submitting a research assignment without having attended class. (If your absence on a certain day is excused because of documented illness, a job interview, etc., you can make up the assignment. Absences for reasons other than illness must be cleared with Dr. Streeck beforehand.)

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**University of Texas Honor Code:** The core values of the University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

**Documented Disability Statement:** Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

**Accommodations for religious holidays:** By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## READING

### Book

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.

### Reading Packet (PDF-files in folder on Blackboard)

- Carr, N. (2010). *The Shallows. What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W.W.Norton. Ch.3: Tools of the mind, Ch.4: The deepening page, Ch.6: The very image of a book, Ch.7: The juggler's mind
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in public places*. New York: The Free Press. Ch.1:Face engagements
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in Public. Microstudies of the Public Order*. New York: Basic Books. Ch.1: The individual as unit
- Goffman, E. (1976). *Gender Advertisements*. London: Macmillan. Various sections
- Hess, H. (1974). *How Pictures Mean*. New York: Pantheon Books. Ch.1: The pre-history of modern art.
- Horn, R. E. (2000). Information design: The emergence of a new profession. In R. Jacobson (Ed.), *Information Design* (pp. 15-34). Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1994 (1964)). *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Ch.6: Media as translators, Ch.9: The written word.
- Norman, D. (1988). *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Doubleday. Ch.1: The psychopathology of everyday things; Ch.4: Knowing what to do (pp.81-92)
- Norman, D. (1993). *Things that Make Us Smart*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley. Ch.3: The power of representation, Ch.6 Distributed Cognition, Ch.7 A place for everything
- Norman, D. (1992). *Turn Signals are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles*. Reading, MA: Wesley. Ch. 4, Refrigerator doors and message centers.
- Streeck, J. 2006 Gestures: Pragmatic Aspects. In: Keith Brown, (Editor-in-Chief). *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics, Second Edition*, volume 5, pp. 71-76. Oxford: Elsevier. (optional reading)
- Streeck, J. (2008) Depicting by gestures. *Gesture* 8:3, 285–301 (optional reading)
- Streeck, J. (2008) Gesture in political communication. A case study of the Democratic presidential candidates during the 2004 primary campaign. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 41, 1, 154-186 (optional reading)
- Tufte, E. R. (1984). *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press. Ch.5: Chart junk
- Tufte, E. R. (1990). *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press. Ch.5: Color and information

# CURRICULUM AND SCHEDULE

## 1. The visual components of social interaction

We begin by investigating some of the oldest forms of visual communication—what is also known as nonverbal communication. Instead of learning what others have found out about it, you will investigate it yourself, concentrating on gaze (what do people get done by looking at and away from one another?) and hand gestures (which we will investigate more extensively). You will prepare slides that explain to viewers how people manage their interaction by gaze and gesture and how hand gestures are used by humans to develop a joint understanding (representation) of the world.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research prompt</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Points</b>
1/17	Why do we laugh about the “Talking Twins”?- A YouTube favorite tells a brilliant story about human interaction	<b>Introduction to the course</b>		
1/19	What do the Talking Twins know about human conversation, and how do we know that they know?	<b>Pre-verbal interaction as a model of multimodal communication</b>	Return signed acknowledgment form (at the end of the syllabus).	3
1/24	When and why do we look away from one another when we talk to one another?	<b>The role of gaze and gaze direction in social interaction</b>	Goffman, Face engagements	2
1/26	What do you see the hands to be doing in this conversation?	<b>The different functions of hand gestures in social interaction</b>	(optional: Streeck, Pragmatic aspects of gesture)	3
1/31	Do you see what I mean?	<b>Gesture as a technology for visual depiction and representation</b>	(optional: Streeck, Depiction by gesture)	2
2/2	What do politicians reveal to us by the way they move their hands, if anything?	<b>Gesture in political and public communication</b>	(optional: Streeck, Gesture in political communication)	2

## 2. Social signals in urban life

We conduct research about visual signals by which people in public places—such as the streets, sidewalks, and squares of cosmopolitan cities—communicate social meanings to one another. In particular we investigate how people through movements and subtle gestures signal to passers-by that they are with one another, members of a set, and what aspects of their social identities pedestrians convey by their clothes, their postures, and other visible behaviors. With your portfolio entries about social signals you will establish credentials as a close observer of international communication, because the materials come places with an culturally diverse population.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research prompt</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Points</b>
2/7	How do you know who belongs to whom?	<b>Postures and movements of togetherness in urban life</b>	Goffman, The individual as unit	3
2/9	How do people make their social identities visible in public?	<b>Identity coding in public places</b>		2
2/14	What do graffiti say? (Film presentation and short assignment)	<b>Analysis of a new urban sign system</b>		1
2/16	Class discussion	<b>The multiple sign systems of urban communication</b>		1

### **3. Pictures: Their roles in society and communication**

With this theme we move beyond those visual signals that humans can produce with their unaided bodies alone and move into the area of communication by means of visual artifacts. This move into a new area is also a move forward in history: a culture such as ours that is crowded with pictures is a relative novelty, reaching back not more than 600 years—or 5000, if we locate the beginning of our pictorial civilization in Egypt, rather than the Italian Renaissance. Pictures, and especially pictures produced according to certain conventions such as linear perspective, are extremely important instruments of human knowing and communication. And yet, we are hard-pressed to explain what it means to see something as a picture, how the perception of pictures differs from other forms of visual perception.—You will uncover hidden view-points in pictures and how viewers are unknowingly made to see the picture from a particular vantage point.

What is also interesting is that through the developing art of painting artists studied human interaction with ever more precision and in ever more detail. For centuries, a single group of interactants—the Holy Family—kept their exclusive attention, and we can reconstruct how painters showed the relationship between the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ with increasing complexity.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research prompt</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Points</b>
2/21	How do you see that something is a picture?	<b>The three elements of pictures and pictorial perception in the West: framing, figure-ground, and perspective</b>		3
2/23		<b>Optical illusions</b>		1
2/28	Can you see the viewer in the picture?	<b>How pictures assign the viewer a viewpoint; picture perception as implicit social interaction</b>	Berger, Ch.I	2
3/1	What does the Holy Family communicate with their hands?	<b>Social interaction in religious paintings</b>	Hess, The pre-history of modern art	2

#### 4. Visions of self

Pictures—and in particular portraits—have also enabled humans to take a new look at themselves. Pictures at first were like mirrors. Or rather, they allowed people to see what they look like *to others*. Picturing oneself—self-representation—thus became an important component of the way people thought about and fashioned their identity. We will look at expressions of identity—including *gender* and racial identity—in photographs. In this way we will be able to understand how modern identity—as well as ideals of femininity and masculinity—have been shaped by pictures. We explore how people communicate by pictures on Facebook and other social networks.

Another important medium of visual communication by which people display their identity is fashion. People use fashion to present idealized versions of themselves. We investigate how systems of fashion function.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research prompt</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Points</b>
3/6	What do we say about ourselves by pictures? And what do we learn about	<b>Pictures and the rise of modern identity;</b>		3

	ourselves from them? (Have at least two scanned pictures of yourself for this assignment.)	<b>portraits and self-knowledge</b>		
3/8	How do social-networking sites shape our identities?	<b>Facebook conventions</b>		3
3/20	How are masculinity and femininity staged in picture ads?	<b>The normative representation of gender in visual media</b>	Goffman, Gender advertisements, pp.1–10, 29-37, 57-62	2
3/22	When you look at a picture, do you look at it as a man, a woman, or none of the above?	<b>How commercial pictures manipulate the perspective from which they are seen</b>	Berger, Ch.III	2
3/27	How do you know that you are superior to the people in the picture?	<b>Photography, colonialism, and ethnic prejudice</b>		2
3/29	Can you read a Zoot Suit?	<b>How fashion communicates</b>	Lurie, The language of clothes	2

## 5. Visual information design

Visual communication extends beyond bodily signals and their replicas in pictures. Our whole human-made environment is visualized meaning or information: the way simple things such as door-handles and light-switches are designed tells us how to use them, signs show us the way, maps tell us where we are and how we get from one place to another. From the very beginning humans have manipulated their environment so that it contains and preserves information, but in recent decades the new fields of industrial design and information design—as well as interface design—have really taken off and become important fields of application for research on visual communication. Information design has become a new profession, and designing information is also an important task for communication professionals in many lines of work.

We uncover the structure and operation of visual information in everyday objects, architecture/interior design, marketing, operating instructions—and, finally, street art, a new trend in turning urban environments into art.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research prompt</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Points</b>
4/3	(lecture)	<b>What is</b>	Horn,	1

		<b>information design?</b>	Information design; Tufte, Color and information, Chart Junk; McLuhan, Media as translators	
4/5	How does a thing tell me what to do with it?	<b>The role of affordances and constraints in the perception and design of everyday objects</b>	Norman, Psycho-pathology of everyday things, Knowing what to do	3
4/10	How do I know where to sit?	<b>How furniture, workplace design, and built space shape social interaction</b>	(read Norman, 'Refrigerator doors as message centers' and 'Distributed cognition/A place for everything' for your research project)	2
4/12	How does this package compete for my attention, and how does the outside tell me what's on the inside?	<b>Surface and internal representations; design in marketing and technology</b>	Norman, Knowledge in the head and in the world	2
4/17	Group work	<b>(A) The visual language of dashboards and control panels (B) The visual language of operating instructions</b>		2
4/19		<b>Street art as communication</b>	Berger, Ch.VII	

## 6. From writing to the internet: How visual technologies enlarge and reduce our cognitive abilities

In this last unit of the course you will learn about the evolution of one of the most important technologies of visual communication, writing, how it has developed and how it has enhanced human knowledge and communication, and we will discuss some of the impact that the most revolutionary cognitive technology, the Web, has on the cognitive abilities of individuals.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research prompt</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Points</b>
4/24	(Lecture)	<b>The evolution of writing systems</b>	McLuhan, The written word; Carr, The Shallows, Ch.3	1
4/28	Class discussion	<b>How reading enhances our intelligence</b>	Carr, The Shallows, Ch.4	1
5/1	Class discussion	<b>The cognitive advantages and downsides of the Web</b>	Carr, The Shallows, Chs.6 & 7	1

5/3		<b>Concluding discussion; review session for final exam</b>		
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