

Winter term 2025/26 | Wednesday, 15:40-17:20 | Credits: 2.0 | ECTS: 4.0

Visual Theory and Practice: mandatory elective

Instructor: Ulrich Meurer | meureru@ceu.edu

The instructor will be available for individual questions after every class.

You can book additional OFFICE HOUR slots by sending an email.

You have access to all readings, videos, web-resources via MOODLE:

<https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/login/index.php>

Link for selecting a topic/date for your PRESENTATION until FRIDAY JANUARY 09, 2026 (see section on 'assignments'):

<https://nuudel.digitalcourage.de/iP3iqQquP4FxMipJ>

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"It is a commonplace" – states visual theorist W. J. T. Mitchell – "that images have a power in our world undreamed of by the ancient idolaters." In fact, the sheer number and impact of images determine much of our social, political, historical and epistemological views: they constitute the very fabric of our audio/visualized reality.

In light of this, the course explores modern *techno-images* (photography, film, video, VR environments, digital holograms, etc.) not as mere "re-presentations." Instead, it focuses on their operative ability to create arguments, truths, and experiences. Combining case studies and seminal theoretical approaches, it will discuss the ► visual production of SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE (its claims to objectivity, its traits of gender and biopolitics), ► reconstructions of HISTORICAL PASTS, and ► visualizations of POLITICAL POWER, DEMANDS AND IDEAS.

Finally, the course aims at deepening the participants' critical awareness of their own reception and use of imagery by providing a platform for students to create their own audio/visual works.



LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will be introduced to ► various APPROACHES IN IMAGE THEORY. They will gain insight into the operations of ► images in SCIENTIFIC, HISTORICAL, AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS from the 19th century to the present, especially with respect to photographic, cinematographic and digital media, and ► establish connections between specific VISUAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THEORETICAL CONCEPTS. The discussion of texts and images will contribute to their abilities ► to STRUCTURE AND CRITICALLY EVALUATE academic arguments. The participants will train their ► SKILLS OF SYNTHESIS AND COMMUNICATION through in-class presentations and papers. They will have the opportunity to ► APPLY THEIR PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE in the form of image/video works.


WEEKLY SCHEDULE + READINGS:

- ▶ Participants are expected to prepare MANDATORY readings, videos and web-resources (printed in BLACK) prior to the respective class.
- ▷ GREY font indicates OPTIONAL readings and material: it serves as additional basis for your presentations, further explorations of the topic, and inspiration for your final course works ...
- ▷ 'Archive' sections [highlighted in yellow] provide a choice of further texts & material on adjacent subjects

To Lie and to Act	
01 07.01	<p>(Half)Truths – Images, Knowledge, Illusion</p> <p>[+ COURSE SUBJECT / SCHEDULE / ASSIGNMENTS ...]</p> <p>▶ William Kentridge: "Drawing Lesson One: In Praise of Shadows" (Video, Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, Harvard University, 2012): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdKkmSqYTE8</p>  <p>[TEXT VERSION: William Kentridge: "Drawing Lesson One: In Praise of Shadows", in: <i>Six Drawing Lessons</i>. Cambridge, London: Harvard UP 2014, 1-32.]</p> <p>▷ Plato: <i>The Republic</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2000, 220-225.</p>
02 14.01	<p>Nothing but the Truth – Images, Evidence, Testimony</p> <p>▶ Jacques Derrida, Bernard Stiegler: <i>Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews</i>. Cambridge: Polity 2002, 89-99.</p> <p>▶ Richard K. Sherwin, Neal Feigenson, Christina Spiesel: "Law in the Digital Age: How Visual Communication Technologies are Transforming the Practice, Theory, and Teaching of Law", in: <i>Boston University Journal of Science and Technology Law</i> 12 (2006), 227-270.</p> <p>▶ <i>JFK</i> (Oliver Stone, 1991) [Excerpt: "The Zapruder Film" / extended version available on MOODLE]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nmGS8rVuIM</p>  <p>▷ Jennifer L. Mnookin: "The Image of Truth: Photographic Evidence and the Power of Analogy", in: <i>Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities</i> 10/1 (January 1998): https://www.sfnesbitt.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/The-Image-of-Truth.pdf</p> <p>▷ W.J.T. Mitchell: "From CNN to <i>JFK</i>", in: <i>Picture Theory</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994, 397-416.</p>
/ ARCHIVE / Truth in Photographic and Digital Media	
<p>▷ Barry M. Goldstein: "All Photos Lie: Images as Data", in: Gregory C. Stanczak (ed.): <i>Visual Research Methods: Image, Society, and Representation</i>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press 2007, 61-81.</p> <p>▷ Tom Gunning: "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs", in: Karen Redrobe Beckman, Jean Ma (eds): <i>Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography</i>. Durham: Duke UP 2008, 39-49.</p> <p>▷ Brian Winston: "'The Camera Never Lies': The Partiality of Photographic Evidence", in: Jon Prosser (ed.): <i>Image-based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers</i>. London, Philadelphia: Falmer Press 1998, 53-60.</p>	

03	From Truth to Action – Images, Teleaction, Operation
21.01	<p>► Lev Manovich: "To Lie and to Act: Cinema and Telepresence", in: Thomas Elsaesser, Kay Hoffmann (eds): <i>Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable? The Screen Arts in the Digital Age</i>. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 1998, 189-199.</p> <p>► Harun Farocki: "Phantom Images", in: <i>Public</i> 29 (2004), 12-22.</p> <p>► <i>War at a Distance</i> (Harun Farocki, 2003) [SUBTITLED MOVIE in HD ON MOODLE]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fh16wGxG4Q8&t=1209s</p>  <p>▷ Aud Sissel Hoel: "Operative Images: Inroads to a New Paradigm of Media Theory", in: Luisa Feiersinger, Kathrin Friedrich, Moritz Queisner (eds): <i>Image – Action – Space: Situating the Screen in Visual Practice</i>. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2018, 11-28.</p> <p>▷ Volker Pantenburg: "Working Images: Harun Farocki and the 'Operative Image'", in: Jens Eder, Charlotte Klonk (eds): <i>Image Operations: Visual Media and Political Conflict</i>. Manchester: Manchester UP 2017, 49-62.</p>
Imaging Knowledge	
04	Imaging Affect – Cases of Hysteria
28.01	<p>► Magloire Désiré Bourneville, Paul Regnard: <i>Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière (Service de M. Charcot)</i>. Versailles: Imprimerie Cerf & fils 1878: http://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/12429</p>  <p>► Georges Didi-Huberman: <i>Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2003, xi-xii; 29-48.</p> <p>► Beatriz Pichel: "From Facial Expressions to Bodily Gestures: Passions, Photography and Movement in French 19th-Century Sciences", in: <i>History of the Human Sciences</i> 29/1 (2016), 27-48.</p> <p>▷ Marta Braun, Elizabeth Whitcombe: "Marey, Muybridge, and Londe: The Photography of Pathological Locomotion", in: <i>History of Photography</i> 23/3 (1999), 218-224.</p>
05	Imaging Microbiology – Microphotography & Virus Visualization
04.02	<p>► Olaf Breidbach: "Representation of the Microcosm: The Claim for Objectivity in 19th Century Scientific Microphotography", in: <i>Journal of the History of Biology</i> 35/2 (Summer 2002), 221-250.</p> <p>► Roberta Buiani: "Innovation and Compliance in Making and Perceiving the Scientific Visualization of Viruses", in: <i>Canadian Journal of Communication</i> 39 (2014), 539–556.</p>  <p>► Colette Gaiter: "Visualizing the Virus", <i>The Conversation</i> (09 April 2020): https://theconversation.com/visualizing-the-virus-135415</p> <p>▷ Jennifer Tucker: "Chapter IV: Photography of the Invisible", in: <i>Nature Exposed: Photography as Eye Witness in Victorian Science</i>. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 2005, 159-193.</p>

Imaging History

06	Interrupting History – Photography (& the Archive)
11.02	<p>► Walter Benjamin: "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in: <i>Illuminations: Essays and Reflections</i>. New York: Schocken 2007, 253-264.</p> <p>► Eduardo Cadava: <i>Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History</i>. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1997, 3-4 ("History"); 11-13 ("Ghosts"); 59-66 ("Caesura" / "Traces"); 84-87 ("Language").</p> <p>► <i>Shooting the Past</i> (Stephen Poliakoff, 1999 / Episode 1): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edRP5lphiTE</p>  <p>▷ Elizabeth Edwards: "Photography and the Business of Doing History", in: Gil Pasternak (ed.): <i>The Handbook of Photography Studies</i>. London, New York: Routledge 2020, 170-186.</p> <p>▷ Trond Lundemo: "Towards a Technological History of Historiography?", in: Alberto Beltrame, Giuseppe Fidotta, Andrea Mariani (eds): <i>At the Borders of (Film) History: Temporality, Archaeology, Theories (XXI International Film Studies Conference, University of Udine 2014)</i>. Udine: Forum 2015, 149-155.</p>
07	Layering History – Video Essay & Montage
18.02	<p>► <i>Histoire(s) du cinéma</i> (Jean-Luc Godard, 1988-1998, <i>excerpts</i> – episode 3A [subtitled] available on MOODLE): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJbdUUmXzWo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPzzbEzXXs</p>  <p>► Michael Witt: <i>Jean-Luc Godard: Cinema Historian</i>. Bloomington 2013, 10-44.</p> <p>▷ Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli: "Noli me tangere: Jean-Luc Godard's <i>Histoire(e)s du cinéma</i>", in: Tom Conley, T. Jefferson Kline (eds): <i>A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard</i>. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2014, 456-487.</p> <p>▷ Trond Lundemo: "Godard the Historiographer: From <i>Histoires du cinéma</i> to the <i>Beaubourg Exhibition</i>". in: Tom Conley, T. Jefferson Kline (eds): <i>A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard</i>. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2014, 488-503.</p> <p>▷ Jacques Rancière: "The Saint and the Heiress: A propos of Godard's 'Histoire(s) du cinéma'", in: <i>Discourse</i> 24/1 (Winter 2002), 113-119.</p>
08	Experiencing History – Virtual Reality & Immersion
25.02	<p>► <i>September 1955 - A Virtual Reality Documentary of the Istanbul Pogrom</i> (Deniz Tortum, 2016): https://deniztortum.com/september-1955</p> <p>► <i>A Virtual Reality Experience: September 1955</i> (Lecture by Deniz Tortum at the Hafıza Merkezi Research Center, Istanbul 2019): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-m-XlwknxA</p>  <p>► Angela Andersen: "Empathy and the Creation of Virtual Space: Review of <i>ΣΕΠΤΕΜΒΡΙΑΝΑ/September 55</i>, Keller Gallery, Cambridge, MA", in: <i>Architectural History</i> 6/1 (01. Oktober 2018), 4-6: https://journal.eahn.org/articles/10.5334/ah.334/</p> <p>► Grant Bollmer: "Empathy Machines", in: <i>Media international Australia</i> (2017), 1-14.</p>

Imaging Politics

09 Images of the People – Composite Pictures

04.03

► Dario Gamboni: "Composing the Body Politic: Composite Images and Political Representation, 1651-2004", in: Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel (eds): *Making Things Public*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2005, 162-195.

► *America* (Bernie Sanders Campaign Ad, 2016):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nwRiuh1Cug>



► Ulrich Meurer: "Composite Congress: On Dispersal Patterns in Mathew Brady's Political Imagery", in: *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung ZMK1* (2014), 151-164.

/ ARCHIVE / Composites and Eugenics

► Francis Galton: "Composite Portraits, Made by Combining Those of Many Different Persons into a Single Resultant Figure", in: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1879), 132-144.



► Suzanne Bailey: "Francis Galton's Face Project: Morphing the Victorian Human", *Photography & Culture* 5/2 (July 2012), 189-214.

► Joan Fontcuberta: "Eugenics Without Borders", in: *Pandora's Camera: Photogr@phy After Photography*. London: MACK 2014, 65-89.

10

Images from Above – Drones and Vertical Perspective

11.03

► Hito Steyerl: "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment in Vertical Perspective", in: *efflux* 24 (April 2011):

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqV1L12GFGk&t=11s>

► Paula Amad: "From God's-eye to Camera-eye: Aerial Photography's Post-humanist and Neo-humanist Visions of the World", in: *History of Photography* 36/1 (2012), 66-86.

► *Drone* (Justin S. Lee, 2015):

<https://vimeo.com/185265101>



► Paul B. Rich: "Cinema, Drone Warfare and the Framing of Counter-Terrorism", in: *Defense & Security Analysis* 34/2 (2018), 144-160.

11 18.03	<p>Images of Migration – Thermal Surveillance</p> <p>► Public Delivery Magazine (5 June 2019): "Richard Mosse's <i>Incoming</i>": https://publicdelivery.org/richard-mosse-incoming/</p>  <p>► Richard Mosse: <i>Grid (Moria)</i>: video excerpt available on MOODLE ► Richard Mosse: <i>Artist's Statement</i>: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1YSbBMBE-s ► Richard Mosse: "Transmigration of Souls", in: <i>Incoming</i>. London: Mack 2017, n.p. ► Giorgio Agamben: "Biopolitics and the Rights of Man", in: <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i>. Stanford: Stanford UP 1998, 75-79.</p> <p>▷ Anthony Downey: "Scopic Reflections: Incoming and the Technology of Exceptionalism", in: <i>Richard Mosse (The Curve 27)</i>. London: Barbican 2017, 21-25. ▷ Niall Martin: "As 'index and metaphor': Migration and the Thermal Imaginary in Richard Mosse's <i>Incoming</i>", in: <i>Culture Machine</i> 17 (2019): https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/34968378/Niall_Martin_.pdf ▷ <i>How Richard Mosse Documents Life in Photography</i> (Bloomberg TV: "Brilliant Ideas" S1 E75, 19 March 2018): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru-asZsOC2E</p>
12 25.03	<p>The People as Image – Spectral Democracy</p> <p>► <i>Holograms for Freedom</i> (MIT Docubase): https://docubase.mit.edu/project/holograms-for-freedom/ ► <i>No somos delito: "Holograms for Freedom"</i> (DDB Worldwide, 19 May 2015): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehwBUe5O3zg</p>  <p>► <i>Spain's New 'Gag Law' and the Media</i> (Al Jazeera, London: "The Listening Post", 18 April 2015): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJu0j-iCPDM ► Maria Boletsi: "Towards a Visual Middle Voice: Crisis, Dispossession, and Spectrality in Spain's Hologram Protest", in: <i>Komparatistik. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft 2017</i>. Bielefeld: Aisthesis 2018, 19-35.</p> <p>▷ Judith Butler: "Body Vulnerability, Coalitions, and Street Politics", in: Marta Kuzma, Pablo Lafuente, Peter Osborne (eds): <i>The State of Things</i>. Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway 2012, 161-197. ▷ Vanaj Vidyan, Shikhar Yadav: "Protests in a Pandemic: Holograms Lead the Way", <i>Social Policy Blog</i> (London School of Economics, June 25, 2020): https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2020/06/25/protests-in-a-pandemic-holograms-lead-the-way/</p>

ASSIGNMENTS :

<p>Attendance and ACTIVE PARTICIPATION in discussions / image interpretations / 15% of the final grade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Students are expected ► to REGULARLY TAKE PART in the discussions, comment on the presentations, the instructor's input and questions, address relevant aspects of the topic, reflect on the readings and audiovisual material. ► Participation is ASSESSED with respect to its relative QUANTITY AND QUALITY (targeted engagement with the concepts and/or readings, conclusiveness of argumentation, contextualization).
<p>1 in-class PRESENTATION / 30% of the final grade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ The presentations ► introduce the MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS FROM THE READINGS (depending on the size of the group: mandatory and optional) and ► give ADDITIONAL INPUT (for instance, on historical contexts). They ► engage with the topic in a CRITICAL WAY (<i>no mere summaries of the text material</i>), present the main argument/s of the texts or audiovisuals, reflect on their approach to the subject, assess their validity, ► give IMPULSES FOR DISCUSSION, and point out ► aspects that are DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND, remain opaque or raise further questions.▷ Ideally, the student/s giving a presentation act/s as 'co-instructor' for the session, for example by ► preparing QUESTIONS OR ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION (which can be included in the handout [see below]).▷ Every participant ► selects a TOPIC/DATE from the syllabus for their presentation and enters their name in the respective DOODLE until JANUARY 09, 2026: https://nuudel.digitalcourage.de/iP3iqQquP4FxMipJ▷ Depending on the number of course participants, every topic can be ► presented BY 1 TO MAX. 3 STUDENTS (group presentation = JOINT preparation, structuring of the material, handout, etc.): in most cases, the list of readings will provide enough material for a general overview and a discussion of partial aspects of the topic. <u>However, please do not select a topic/date already assigned to another student as long as there are unallocated slots!</u>
<p>1 concise PRESENTATION HANDOUT / 10% of the final grade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ For their presentations, the participants are required to create a 1-page handout which shows ► the ORDER of the presented points, the MAIN ARGUMENTS, CONCLUSION, and further QUESTIONS.▷ The handout should be ► structured in short passages, keywords or bullet points – no continuous text. Ideally, the structure and central ideas of the presentation become visible at first glance. It serves as ► INFORMATION SHEET and, afterwards, as memory aid for the other course participants.▷ The ► handout is ASSESSED with respect to its STRUCTURE, ACCURACY, AND CLEARNESS (<i>visual material and critical statements can of course be included</i>).▷ The handout ► should be handed in NO LATER THAN 24 HOURS BEFORE the respective class. Please, send it as .doc/.docx/.pdf file to the instructor who will upload the document on MOODLE.
<p>Final PAPER or final AUDIOVISUAL WORK / 45% of the final grade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Participants can produce either a written FINAL PAPER or an AUDIO/VISUAL RESEARCH WORK.▷ The ► SUBJECT OF THE FINAL PAPER OR AUDIOVISUAL WORK is chosen by the student. A discussion of the subject with the instructor is not obligatory but recommended. ► It must NOT ADOPT A SUBJECT FROM THE COURSE SESSIONS AND SYLLABUS but should be connected to the overall theme of the course.

- ▷ Upon consultation, ► the final work CAN ALSO BE PRODUCED IN GROUPS OF TWO – in this case, students can opt for a SHARED OR INDIVIDUAL GRADE. For individual grading, they must clearly indicate who produced which part of the work.
- ▷ The final paper ► should have a LENGTH OF ~2.500 to 3.000 WORDS / double word count for group works (*excl. cover sheet, list of contents, bibliography, etc.*). IMAGES should be inserted in the text (no separate part with illustrations). The STYLE FOR REFERENCING and quoting can be freely chosen but should be consistent throughout the paper. Papers should be in .doc, .docx or .pdf format.
- ▷ Papers are ► SUBMITTED VIA E-MAIL. The ► DEADLINE will be Friday, APRIL 15, 2026.¹
- ▷ Instead of a written paper, ► students may also prepare an AUDIO/VISUAL WORK (PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO, INSTALLATION, PODCAST, SCRAPBOOK, WEBSITE, ETC.): the work can be ► composed of SELF-PRODUCED MATERIAL AND/OR FOUND FOOTAGE. ► Formal and technical issues, extent or intended length should be coordinated with the instructor.
- ▷ Final audio/visual theses will ► not be graded according to technical criteria but based on the ORIGINALITY OF THE APPROACH AND THE POTENTIAL TO VISUALIZE OR CONVEY THE MAIN ARGUMENT.
- ▷ Audio/visual ► theses MAY BE COMPLEMENTED BY A WRITTEN COMMENT to elucidate their conceptual or theoretical approach.
- ▷ Deadlines are the SAME FOR WRITTEN AND AUDIO/VISUAL works.

¹ Please take note of CEU's PLAGIARISM POLICY: <https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/p-1405-1>.