

CMN 538-CF: Visual Rhetoric

Spring 2016

Wednesdays, 2-4:50 pm

4103 Lincoln Hall

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Course Web Site: <https://learn.illinois.edu/course/view.php?id=15052>

Library Resources for Rhetorical Studies:

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/cmxc/guides/course/rhetresource.html>

Course Description

This seminar will take up theoretical, critical, and historical approaches to the study of visual rhetoric through an extended case study of the Farm Security Administration's documentary photography project (1935-1943). After an introduction to the history and status of scholarship in visual rhetoric, we will read published work on the FSA from within the field of Communication as well as Art History, History, and American Studies. Students will develop a set of critical practices for reading photographs, learn strategies for working with archives, and identify conceptual resources that help us understand various aspects of the FSA's work.

Assignments (total of 250 points)

Final Paper Project Assignment (2 options; must choose one by Spring Break) (150 points)

Critical Analysis of Visual Rhetoric in Essay Form: Student produces a seminar paper of approx. 25-30 pages that examines a specific aspect of the FSA's corpus. Essay should include literature review of relevant scholarship, historical contextualization of the case, and development of a critical argument using relevant conceptual resources. Choose this option if you are most interested in exploring the rhetorical components of a specific instance or example of visual discourse and/or would like to extend your project into a conference submission or later revise it into a draft of a journal article.

Critical Analysis of Visual Rhetoric in a Multimedia Project: Student produces a multimedia project (e.g., online exhibit, video, or other multimedia work) that offers a critical analysis of a specific aspect of the FSA's corpus. Choose this option if you wish to share the results of your critical scholarship in a more public setting, if your discipline's norms include multimedia work, and/or if you wish to learn or practice doing scholarship with multimedia tools. Note: because multimedia projects must be designed thoughtfully from the ground up, students will not be

allowed to “default” to the seminar paper option; all students must make a final choice of seminar project by Spring Break and stick with it. No exceptions.

Regardless of which option you choose, you will be asked to turn in the following documents to update me on the progress of your projects.

Project proposal (15 points) due March 16.

Progress report/bibliography/image bank (15 points) due April 13. (can submit via email)

Final project presentation (conference-style 8-minute presentation of research; 20 points) due May 4.

Final draft of project (100 points) due May 11.

Scholarly Framing Analysis (25 points). The goal of this assignment is to invite you to think about how scholars frame the very diverse projects that engage the FSA’s work. After reading the essays by Raeburn; McEuen; Carter; Natanson; Spirn; McDannell, write a 4-5 page (double-spaced) analytical essay in which you take up at least three of these readings in order to compare/contrast/elucidate how scholars articulate their various research questions, disciplinary commitments, reading/viewing practices, and the like. Due in class Jan. 27; your papers will frame our discussion for the day.

Visual Essay/Discussion Leader (50 points). For an assigned week beginning Feb. 24, you and a partner will (a) create a visual essay inspired by that week’s readings and share it with the class as a way to frame our discussion, and (b) lead class discussion for the full period.

The visual essay may take a variety of forms (e.g., sequence of images; concept map or other infographic; Wordle/tag cloud; video; etc.) and use any kind of delivery system you find appropriate (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezi, Tumblr, Omeka, pen and ink, sticky notes, etc.). Whatever you produce, you should focus on prompting our collective thinking about the topics of the week. Essays will not be evaluated for their technological savvy or visual virtuosity, but for the way that they thoughtfully invite conversation about that week’s topics.

You should also prepare discussion questions/points/prompts to share with the group. During your discussion, be sure to include the following two activities: (a) lead the class in a *collaborative close reading of at least one image* related to that week’s readings; here, you should rely on the compositional analysis techniques presented early in the semester and (b) walk us through the scholarly framing of one selected reading for that week by highlighting how that reading frames its research questions, disciplinary commitments, and reading/viewing practices.

Seminar Participation (25 points). You are successfully participating in the seminar when you (a) read/view carefully and bring detailed reading notes and questions to class; (b) engage

productively in class—that is, ask questions, raise issues, deliberate with others in the room; (c) listen and respond to others critically yet charitably; (d) avoid behaviors that block productive classroom conversation, such as monopolizing discussion, remaining silent, or offering comments that are merely informational or (un)appreciative.

Administrative Miscellany

- (1) Use Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) for all class writing. For CMS help see <http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/howdoi/citations.html#chicago>
- (2) I will refuse to read work that does not conform to minimum standards of grammar, spelling, mechanics, and citation for graduate-level work. Proofread all papers carefully. Double-space everything.
- (3) All written work should be turned in on paper and in person unless indicated on the syllabus or we have mutually agreed otherwise. I do not accept assignments via email or Moodle unless otherwise specified in the syllabus.
- (4) Students who are found to have violated the University's academic integrity policies should expect to fail the course.
- (5) Barring serious family or medical emergencies, I will give no incompletes for this course.
- (6) If you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, feel free to contact me to discuss your specific needs.
- (7) Laptops, tablets, etc. are welcome in class for notetaking, referring to readings, and other activities directly related to class discussion. I reserve the right to declare "screens down" at any point during class. Please turn off your cellphones or set them on silent mode when you come to class. No text messaging during class.
- (8) You should not miss a meeting of a graduate seminar. If something terrible happens to you or to someone you love, or if you have a time-bound professional commitment (e.g., a conference), let me know that you will need to miss class.

Schedule of Readings

Jan. 20 Course Introduction

Before class: Spend at least 60 minutes exploring FSA-OWI project archive at Library of Congress and Yale Photogrammar site

Jan. 27 Framing Scholarly Projects: Theirs and Yours

For background, read: Fleischhauer and Brannan; Musher

For essay assignment, read: Raeburn; McEuen; Carter; Natanson; Spirn; McDannell

Due: Scholarly Framing Analysis paper

- Feb. 3 Key Texts in the History of Visual Rhetoric Scholarship
Read (in this order): Wingspread; Scott; Mitchell; Stroupe; Barnhurst, Vari, and Rodriguez; Olson, Finnegan & Hope; Ott and Dickinson; Hahner; Finnegan, "FSA Photography"
- Feb. 10 The FSA Project as Archive(s)
Read/view Levine; Trachtenberg, "Reading the File"; Doud interview with Javitz; Morris et. al., R&PA Archive Forum; Conway; Lesy; B. Natanson web article, "Sampling Slices"; please also revisit the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division FSA-OWI archive and the Photogrammar site from Yale
- Feb. 17 NO CLASS (CF out of town) but focus this week on Compositional Analysis 101
Read/view: Finnegan, "Studying Visual Modes"; Rose; Kress and Van Leeuwen
Due: Post 500-word compositional analysis of any selected FSA photograph to Moodle for discussion; each student must interact with at least 3 other students' analyses in comments section.
- Feb. 24 Exploring a Single Photographer (Dorothea Lange) (discussion leader begins)
Read: McEuen; Spirn; Coles; Gordon, "Agricultural Sociologist"; Davidov
- Mar. 2 Exploring Topoi of the File: Race, Class, Gender, Religion part one
Read: Natanson, "Ben Shahn"; Natanson, "Arthur Rothstein"; Natanson, "The FSA Black Image"; Street, "A Record of Human Erosion"; Shiffman; Young
- Mar. 9 Exploring Topoi of the File: Race, Class, Gender, Religion part two
Read: McDannell, "Religious History"; McDannell, "The Negro Church"; Kozol; Ellis; Kidd; Davis
- Mar. 16 Exploring Topoi of the File: Space and Place
Read: Foulkes, introduction; "High Life/Low Life"; "Citizens"; Montgomery; Murphy; Trachtenberg, "Minnesota"; Jensen
Due: Final Project Topic Proposal
- Mar. 23 NO CLASS (Spring Break)
- Mar. 30 Exploring Genres: The Photobook
Read on reserve at UG Library: Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (skim text, study images carefully); Lange and Taylor, *American Exodus*. Read also Goggans; Street, "Facts and Fiction"; Stott; Lucaites; Allred
- Apr. 6 Exploring Circulation, Appropriation, and Reception
Finnegan, "Naturalistic Enthymeme"; Finnegan, "Magnitude"; Raeburn, chapters 9-10; Hariman and Lucaites, "Visual Rhetoric" and "Migrant Mother"; Gray; Finnegan, "Spectacle"

Apr. 13 NO CLASS (CF out of town)

Due: Progress report/bibliography/image bank (submit via email by Apr. 13)

Apr. 20 The FSA Project in History and Memory

Read: Hurley; Sandweiss; Katz; select two of the following Richard Doud oral history interviews to read: Stryker, Lange, Parks, and/or Post; browse Ganzel and Williamson rephotography projects online and on reserve at UGL; Preston p. vi-21 and 178-230

Apr. 27 Rough Draft Workshop

Due: Bring 2 copies of a *rough draft* of your final project/paper for writing workshop with peer group (this draft must include an attempt at a complete introduction/preview/statement of your argument); if writing a paper, bring also a slideshow or handout with images to share with your critique partners

May 4 FSA Mini-Conference (last class period)

Due: Due: 8-minute oral presentation of your project or viewing/walkthrough of roughcut if not a paper.

May 11 Due: Final project

If a paper, turn in to CF in person, in 4098 Lincoln, 2-4 pm. If a multimedia project, CF must receive final version no later than 4 pm on this day.

(may turn in earlier with previous arrangement, but CF must receive it in person)