



## ENCOUNTERS IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN STUDIES

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### Introduction:

#### In Between Visual Design and Culture

"Images are used to think, which is why attribution seems irrelevant. The creation is already the promise of infinite accessibility. They are not a piece of land. They are a mediating term between things and thought, between the mental and non mental. They allow the connection."

Susan Buck -Morss  
(2004:20)

Visual culture addresses the societal, cultural, economical, and political dimensions and provocations of images and the visual in our contemporary world. The architecture of the visible and how images inform our sense are issues of significant matter. The paper is an attempt to interactively employ visual design for the communicative effectiveness of the visual. The study is about a visual culture course that address both the consumption and production of visual images and therefore knowledge in visual studies. The paper at first will refer to the existing patterns of visual design and visual culture courses. Visual communication design programmes and courses will be reviewed

with respect to their content and objectives. The paper will elaborate on the conceptual framework structuring 'the' visual culture course which was specifically designed for and delivered at 'a' Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design department.<sup>1</sup> The study will underline the experience and the developed delivery of the image based teaching course with respect to its aims and objectives. The study will focus on the design of the course which has a modest attempt to explore visually a variety of socio-cultural texts. Design serves as the articulated field of the visual. The composition of the visual culture course is significant with its integrated nature encompassing the relationships of visual design and art, culture and society. The course structure will be underlined in connection to looking and seeing through case studies of images and visual representations. The main drive of the course will be noted to lie in the visual project design exercising the conceptual framework employing Herbert Zettl's "selective seeing", "emphasizing", and "ordering" principles towards the production of knowledge in visual. The study will draw on the concepts exercised formulating the image-events. Exercises as 'image events' concentrate on the 'time and place' dimension in the visual with the emphasis on how the course looks at, looks in and looks through sites of exploration to produce knowledge in visual studies.

Image is an event informed by a broad set of conditions and factors. Visual Studies is an interdisciplinary field. Visuality involves relationships that can further relationships. According to Susan Buck Mores, the transdisciplinary medium is acting in a global public sphere calling for democracy. Images are circulating the globe and sliding across without friction. What is an image?, where is it located? and how does it become an image in the mind? are questions to be answered keeping in mind the intentionality of the image and the traces left by the image.<sup>2</sup> This in return calls into attention the function

<sup>1</sup> Bahçeşehir University, Fall 2003-2004. The student works emanating from the course received acknowledgement and early acceptance for presentation at the 2004 IVSA Conference under the title "Visual Encounters in Istanbul". Unfortunately, was not realized.

<sup>2</sup> Notes gathered personally from Susan-Buck Morss's presentation on 'Visual Studies and Globalization' at the First International Visual Studies Conference organized by ARCO in Madrid, February 2004.



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of visibility, the impact of visual acts and the crossing of boundaries. Technology is constantly moving changing and transforming affecting nature of vision and 'visibility'. The themes and issues of the International Conference for Theorist and Practitioners: Image and Critique: Image-Thought and Text held by Nottingham Institute for Research in Visual Culture in september 2003 are worthy of note in this respect.

"A significant intellectual and political shift has directed focus away from textuality, towards visuality and the image but to what extend has this shift moved us on in our approach to images and theory that comes after?"<sup>3</sup>

There has been an increasing focus on the image which is a culture mediated form. Images have been looked at, looked into and looked through. How has the emphasis on the visual sculpted our ways of thinking and furthered our abilities to establish relationships? On the other hand it is important to take into account arguments not privileging the visual. The question posed here is why should image be more privileged one and why not. According to Mitchell visual culture takes visual for granted. Visual nature is both hardware and software of seeing and that visual culture is a "pictorial " term. Visuality is not natural but social and involves the other senses. The argument is that visual process could not be understood purely visual. It involves a "senses ratio". Visual Culture is the "monopolist of senses" over and underestimated.<sup>4</sup> This however should not strike a position as to why culture can not be studied visually. Better yet it could be possible to argue the importance of visual communication, therefore visual design to understand and appreciate the other senses involved. Design is an intentional and concious act. Visual culture involves encounters in the visual field and is engaged with the procedures of

sight. The proposed visual culture course puts its interest in the relationships to be examined and furthered in visuality.

Visual communication focus on visual studies inhabiting the procedures of sight, process of thinking and formulation of thought. Visual studies form a framework of expression where diciplines hybrid itself. Visual texts produce knowledge while presenting grounds for the exploration of the "fugitive" culture that is being constantly negotiated. The overwhelming image culture and culture residing in the images are exposed visions and visibilities to be seen and sensed. Nicholas Mirzoeff states that visual culture includes not only artistic works but also representation of images at time and space crossings.<sup>5</sup> The range of influences embeded in the study of visual culture bears local and global, private and public spheres. According to Keith Moxey we see in consumption in political and cultural policies. Visual Communication Design education has flourished with the new media, multimedia, web, and digital image processing giving rise to multifaceted, multicultural and multinational areas of exploration. The analysis, understanding and appreciation of the visual environment is an inevitable and integral part of visual communication design education.

The impact of visual imagery has been crossing borders in exploration. The 2004 Annual conference of the International Visual Sociology Association is worthy of note in this respect which "provides an opportunity ..... to examine how images shape social inquiries, and to explore the varied content, methods and purposes of contemporary visual studies. Below are the themes of the conference titled: The Thought of the Eye.

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<sup>3</sup> See. <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nirv/imagecritique.html>

<sup>4</sup> Notes gathered personally from W.J.T Mitchell's presentation on 'The Visual Media Do Not Exist 'at the First International Visual Studies Conference orginized by ARCO in Madrid, February 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Notes gathered personally from Nicholas Mirzoeff's presentation on 'Watching the war in Babaylon'at the First International Visual Studies Conference orginized by ARCO in Madrid, February 2004.



- public imagery and public policy
- visual representations of inequality and injustice
- visual information and public discourse
- ethics and politics of image-based work
- visual sociology, visual anthropology and the documentary film
- the public face of new and old visual media
- public images as private property
- visual dimensions of professional and public communication
- photo archives, photo illustration and social research
- image-making theory and craft
- visual culture as a public resource.
- image-based approaches to teaching: students and publics<sup>6</sup>

This is also visible in the organisation of course, department and faculty programmes in different parts of the world. James Elkins noted in his work on *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*<sup>7</sup> while in progress, that a wide range of number of departments offer visual studies courses and that it is not surprising to see art history, english, women studies, comparative literature, art education, sociology, philosophy besides

visual communication, and television, film and media studies (2002:5). Likewise it is possible to see how studies of visual culture has been operational as a concept and subject in programs marked for their scope on visual culture.<sup>8</sup> The charts show the 'intentionality' of visual studies of culture in the formulation of the departments. The online research has proved the difficulty to formulate a pattern to follow in the programmes and on the courses of visual communication design curricula in this respect. On the other hand, the nature of the courses seem promising for formulation of the visual culture course which did not appear as a discipline until the 1990's. James Elkins also notes the academic acceptance of the new field with the dissertation on visual culture in 2001 (2002:2-3). The frame of thought structuring the nature of the visual culture course involves emphasis in visual design which is the promise of the study, therefore the paper. Courses can be designed to integrate cultural, theoretical and visual theories with design. Course contents in various visual study programs can be examined to generate approaches in the cultural, visual theory and design realms. Below are course titles emanating from the university programs charted earlier.

UNIVERSITIES	UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO	NOTHINGAM TRENT UNIVERSITY	GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY	UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
PROGRAMS	Visual Culture	Graphic Design	Visual Culture	Visual Studies
UNIVERSITIES	KINGSTON UNIVERSITY	KING ALFREDS COLLEGE	CORNELL UNIVERSITY	CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
PROGRAMS	Fine Art	Film and Culture	Visual Communication	Communication Studies
UNIVERSITIES	UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE	UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX	UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM	MONASH UNIVERSITY
PROGRAMS	Arts	Cultural Studies	Graphic Design	Visual Culture
UNIVERSITIES	CAPELLA UNIVERSITY	HERO UNIVERSITY	LONDON GUILDHALL ART	ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PROGRAMS	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology/Graphics and Multimedia	Visual arts, film and media	Applied Art and Visual Culture	History of Design/ Interaction Design

<sup>6</sup> See IVSA at <http://www.visualsociology.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Information taken from <http://www.jameselkins.com/worksinprogress.html>

<sup>8</sup> James Elkins's part of the work in progress 'Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction' acted as the guiding source in the selection process of the universities to be charted.



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## Cultural Theory track

- Introduction to Visual Culture
- Reading Culture/Representing Culture/Culture and The Everyday
- Material Culture and Exchange/Consumption, production and Value
- Issues in Mass Communication
- Histories and Identities/Historical and Theoretical Studies/Antropology/Gender and Women Studies, Gender and Sexuality
- Class and Community
- History of Art and Architecture/Critical Issues In Art/ Fine Arts
- Performing Arts Studies
- Film and Media Studies
- Information Science
- Internet as a social phenomenon

## Visual Theory track

- Psychology
- Philosophy and Science of Seeing<sup>9</sup>
- Eye Mind and Image<sup>10</sup>
- Form and Meaning<sup>11</sup>
- Time and Space<sup>12</sup>
- Space and the City
- Visual Studies/Visual Foundation/ Ways of Seeing/ Ideas Generation
- Technology and the Visual Imagery
- Ritual, Performance and Spectacle

## Visual Design track

- Graphic Design Principles
- Design
- Conceptual Art
- Typography
- Image and Text
- Illustration(including sequential narrative and photography)
- Visual Art (Video Art)
- Television Program and Production
- Digital Design

- Computer Information Technology
- New Media
- Motion Media/Graphics
- Interactive media.

## Encounters in "the" Visual Culture Course Visual Design Art Culture and Society

- Looking and seeing
- Seeing and thinking
- Seeing and conceptualizing
- Conceptualization and communication

### Visual Design:

The visual culture course is to employ the basic visual design skills operating on the understanding of the potential of the elements in the visual construct. Points, lines, spots, shape, direction, scale, light, color, texture, and so forth are the visual elements that form the dynamics of visual design and therefore the visual construct. Students are expected to be able to follow the visual construct while at the same time be equipped with the ability to manipulate them towards the purposeful relationship in the construction of the visual statement. Students need to be exposed to visual literacy and must be familiar with the technologies of visual production. Visual culture course engages itself with broad definition of still and moving images including, graphic design and typography, illustration, interactive media and motion graphics.

### Art-Culture and Society:

The students need to have the exposure to case studies of images and visual representations in time from the pagan world to the transition from an industrialized modern to an electronic postmodern society. The art-culture and society background involves a close study of images ranging across a variety of media from sculpture, architecture, oil painting, to photography, film, installation and digital

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<sup>9</sup> University of Pennsylvania

<sup>10</sup> University of Pennsylvania(Visual Studies 101)

<sup>11</sup> University of Pennsylvania(Visual Studies 102)

<sup>12</sup> University of Pennsylvania(Visual Studies 103)



media transmitting social and cultural values bearer of economic and cultural capital to include the analysis of the

- the ways visual culture is built and maintained
- development of skills of visual and historical analysis of art
- critical reading and debate
- development of presentation and communication skills.

**Visual Culture:**

Visual Culture course builds on theory and practice of visual studies. There is a focus on the cultural production policy of identity and subjectivity. The course subscribes to looking into and through images while engaging itself with the other senses. The delivery and learning strategies of the course accomodates image, thinking and thought to be examined across a place. The visual environment of a city/ Istanbul is seized as political, historical, local and global grounds of exploration around topics such as photography as evidence, history and art, culture of seeing and display, space versus place and gaze. The course in the end elaborates visually how visual culture has functioned and continues to operate in the city of Istanbul. The course ties The concept of experiencing, understanding and interpreting to the concepts and content transmitted. The course is designed

- to show an understanding of the significance of the visual environment to produce knowledge.
- Undertake visual analysis.
- Critical evaluation of the relations produced by the image.
- Demonstrate skills in visual presentation.
- Demonstrate skills in research and analysis.

**VISUAL CULTURE Course Description:**

An interdisciplinary course that explores how meaning is both made and transmitted in the visual world. The focus will be on the nature of visuality as a social and perceptual construct. The students will be exposed to the modes of vision ,impact of visual imagery and ways of seeing. The course will exercise on expressions of visuality and technologies of vision

across a range of visual texts such as paintings, photographs, advertisements, films, television programs and new visual media forms.

**Thematic Content:** What is Visual Culture? Contemporary Visual Environment, Photography as Evidence, History and Art, Culture of Seeing and Display, Space and Place, Gaze and Voyeurism and New Technologies of Culture.

**Student Contact:** 3 hours per week for 15 weeks.

**Course organization:** This course is a lecture course exploring the nature of visuality through visual exercises which students will prepare and share, class discussions and visual aided lectures. The students' spatial and visual expression (exercises) forms the core of the course. Research and independent study (especially visual) is encouraged for the synthesis and application of the concepts exercised and presented in the lectures.

**Aims and Objectives:** The goal of this course is to develop the understanding of the communication impact of the visual media and technologies while exploring the subjective attitude and identity. The students will examine the mechanisms and conventions of 'seeing' and the ways in which culture informs perception. The course will offer exercises to practice the procedures of sight and participate in the exploration of the visual environment. The goal of this course is to bring together theoretical and methodological contribution of visual culture studies with method and specificity of visual design.

**Recommended Reading Materials:**

The course will follow a Reader consisting of articles from variety of books and journals noted below. The students should keep up with the readings in order to best participate and best practice the exercises.

**Indicative References:**

- Barbara Stafford, Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images, Cambridge,MIT press, 1996
- Barbara Stafford, Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images, Cambridge,MIT press, 1996
- Chris Jenks, ed. Visual Culture. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.



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John Berger. Ways Of Seeing. New York and London: Penguin, 1972.

James Elkins, The Domain of Images, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

James Elkins, Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction, New York: Routledge, 2003.

Jessica Evans And Stuart Hall, eds. Visual Culture: The Reader. Thousand Oaks, Calif. and London: Sage, 1999.

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture

Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. The Visual Culture Reader. New York and London: Routledge, 1998.

Nicholas Mirzoeff, An Introduction to Visual Culture. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

Stuart Hall, Ed. Representation: Cultural Representations And Signifying Practices. Thousand Oaks, Calif. and London: Sage 1997.

W. J. T. Mitchell. Picture Theory. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Victor Burgin: In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture (Berkeley:

## Journals

Journal of Visual culture

Visual Studies

Invisible Culture

Visual Arts and Culture

Culture, Theory and Critique

Word and Image

## Useful Internet Sites

-The Media and Communications Home Page.  
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>

-The Voice of the Shuttle Media Studies Page:  
<http://euphrates.wpunj.edu/faculty/wagner/webago/g/shuttle.htm>

-The Communications Studies, Cultural Studies and Media Studies info base by Mick Underwood:

<http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUhome>

-Aesthetics and Visual Culture Home

Page://Pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/aesthetics

## Course Conduct and Pperational Arrangements:

**Oral-Visual Presentation:** will consist of students' presentation of their visual works around the topic and concept they have researched, followed by questions and discussion. Final project presentation is meant to complement the term project. The presentation themes should be declared prior to the presentation date. In the case of group project each student will also submit a peer evaluation regarding the team collaboration.

**Exercises/Mid-Term/Final:** consist of submission and presentation of visual work in class on the day assigned. Visual works of imaging can range from photography, film, to interactive media to video and digital media. Students will be assigned five exercises in total on the concepts discussed. The exercises are inclusive of the Mid-Term and The Final Project. The medium of presentations are to be consulted.

**Final Term Project and Final Presentation:** is a furthered and illustrated/visual term project and presentation around a suggested list of research topics. Medium of exploration is free. Groups of two four need approval from the instructor. Students who do not participate in the final presentation and do not hand in their illustrated final projects without an official report or "acceptable" excuse/special permission from the instructor are not allowed to make it up.

## Exercises as Image-Events: Exploring the Physco-Geography of Istanbul

Overriding concepts: Space/Time /Culture  
Traditional/Local/Global  
Past/Present/Future

**Working Principles:** Color, Texture, Light

**Working Concepts:** Food and Drink: Fish, rakı, tea, coffee, meze .... Activity: Religion, football, traffic, shoe shine, fishing....

Place: Monumental architecture, street, bazaar, traditional housing, waterfront houses...

Things and People: Evil-eye, doorknobs...

Working concepts can be formulated by the students upon consultation.



### **Sites of Exploration:**

Bořaz-Emirgan, engelkřy, Ortakřy, Kavaklar.  
Cankurtaran  
Dolapdere  
Eminřnř  
Galata  
Hali-Fener-Balat  
Laleli  
Kadıkřy- Őskřdar  
Karakřy  
Taksim-Beyořlu  
Sirkeci  
Sultanahmet

The structure of the course formulates the urban reality of Istanbul by looking at and through the city of Istanbul. The exercises frame the moving culture of Istanbul. The exercises are designed as Norman Bryson well describes, to enhance “sensous skills,” visual skill” and “habits of viewing”. The exercises call for selective seeing, emphasizing on the context and the ordering for communication as the process with which the visual construct is to be organized. Habits of viewing and visual skills are to be employed. Challenges in the graphical sense consist of understructure, subdivision, cropping, overlapping, layering principles of organisation in the frame; balance, negative and positive space, figure-ground relationship, differentiation in tone, value, position, direction, color, texture. The sensous skills on the other hand are to be operated to pull out the physical, social, temporal, cultural and psychological inscriptions embedded in the visual nature and culture of Istanbul. The course in the overall constructs a psycho-geographical mapping of Istanbul following the traces in the images. The exercises employ, working concepts across the sites of examination to reach the overriding goal of exploration of culture, place and time.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Everyday life in our contemporary society is marked by visual encounters through the flow and circulation of images. We are caught in between an array of images surrounding us. The impact of visual imagery is inevitable. The spectacle asks for performance. Seeing, thinking and thought are mediated acts.

Past, present and future, traditional, local and global are challenging issues possessing materiality. Space and time crossings present questions regarding place and subjective attitude and identity. The production of images has revolutionized the way we communicate with and influence one another. The visual culture course presented is an ‘image-event’ promenade through the path of visual design and art-culture & society subjects. The design of the course can be taken as a model to be applied to spaces, places and different cities. The exploration in the overall is an articulated journey in themes and subjects inclusive of communication studies, media and cultural studies, sociology, history, theory and practice of visual design. The main argument of the course design lies in its integrated image-production based teaching model which underlines procedures and processes engaging in looking-seeing, seeing-thinking, seeing-conceptualizing and conceptualization and communication. The range of competencies required are extensive demanding design skills in various interactive media such as multi-media, digital and motion graphics. Visuality should be exhausted as means of inquiry rather than just a product. The claim of the paper calls for an integrated approach of visual studies of culture with the use of technology as expression.

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James Elkins,  
<http://www.jameselkins.com/worksinprogress.html>.

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[www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/publications/papers/journal2/acrobat\\_files/buck\\_morss\\_article.pdf](http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/publications/papers/journal2/acrobat_files/buck_morss_article.pdf)

Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2001). Practices of Looking. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### Internet Addresses in relation to the chart

-<http://www.otago.ac.nz/subjects/visc.html>  
-[http://www.ntu.ac.uk/prospective\\_students/course\\_finder/index.cfm?p=2&course=4790C87A-CEF6-471C-AB70-B3C3FD75B17D](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/prospective_students/course_finder/index.cfm?p=2&course=4790C87A-CEF6-471C-AB70-B3C3FD75B17D)  
-<http://www.georgetown.edu/home/arts.html>  
-<http://www.asl.rochester.edu/courses.html>  
-<http://www.upenn.edu>  
-[http://www.kingston.ac.uk/~kuweb/undergraduate/courses/found\\_design.htm](http://www.kingston.ac.uk/~kuweb/undergraduate/courses/found_design.htm)  
-<http://visarts.ucsd.edu/undergrad/viscrse.html>  
[http://www.futurestudents.ucr.edu/pdf/film\\_visual\\_culture.pdf](http://www.futurestudents.ucr.edu/pdf/film_visual_culture.pdf)  
-<http://www.wkac.ac.uk/courses/CourseDetails.asp?CourseNum=509&CourseType=Undergraduate&CourseName=Film+%26+American+Culture>  
-<http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/comm230-scherer/VISUALLITERACY&INTERPRETATION>

-<http://www.chapman.edu/sca/>  
-<http://www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/ugprospectus/courses/histart.html>  
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-[http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/visual\\_culture/about/careers.html](http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/visual_culture/about/careers.html)  
-[http://www.hero.ac.uk/uk/culture\\_\\_sport/groups\\_\\_courses\\_and\\_workshops/visual\\_arts\\_\\_film\\_and\\_media549.cfm](http://www.hero.ac.uk/uk/culture__sport/groups__courses_and_workshops/visual_arts__film_and_media549.cfm)  
-<http://www.forumjam.co.uk/univ/europe/uk/uk-lgu.html>  
-[http://www.rca.ac.uk/pages/research/professor\\_sandra\\_kemp\\_30.html](http://www.rca.ac.uk/pages/research/professor_sandra_kemp_30.html)