

Visual Cultures of Repair and Resistance

MCM 0902G / Fall 2018

Henkle Room, 155 George Street

Tuesdays 4:00-6:30pm; Monday 7:00-10:00pm screenings

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10am-noon, and by appointment

Course Description

This seminar will explore the poetics and politics of visual culture that engages war, colonialism, state violence, and the formation of intersecting race, gender, and class inequalities through processes of resistance, refusal, and repair. We will examine how images—from art works in galleries to music videos on YouTube to viral photos of street protests—shape the political imagination as they challenge historical narratives and archival silences, represent and refract contemporary realities, and speculate about possible futures. We will pay special attention to the politics of looking and being looked at, exposing and concealing, witnessing and failing to witness, through concepts such as “the right to look” (Mirzoeff) and “the right to opacity” (Glissant). We will also parse the meanings of “repair,” “refusal,” and “resistance” as modes of ethico-political engagement, distinguishing among varied approaches to socially committed image-making. As we consider a wide range of historical and political contexts, we will zoom in on a few primary loci: Afrofuturism and what Saidiya Hartman calls “critical fabulation” in the “afterlife of slavery”; acts of witnessing and speculation in Palestine-Israel; and transnational resistance to surveillance, drone warfare, and global networks of control.

Learning Goals

To introduce students to: 1) visual culture as a field of study and methodology; 2) key concepts in visual culture, cinema studies, media theory, and cultural studies; 3) significant practices of repair and resistance in global cinema, video, photography, performance, and literature; and 4) critical tools for conceptualizing the global production of categories of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, citizenship status, and their intersections, as well as cultural, political, and intellectual responses to these formations.

To develop: 1) Critical thinking and writing skills, especially in the field of cultural analysis and criticism; 2) communication and presentation skills; and 3) awareness of a transnational set of cultural, political, and theoretical approaches to questions of race, gender, citizenship, difference, and social justice.

Course Requirements and Expectations

In compliance with University accreditation guidelines, students will spend 2.5 hours in class and an average of 2 hours at screenings each week, to the total of 58.5 hours over the course of the semester. Students are expected to perform roughly 123 hours of out-of-class work throughout the semester, which will vary by student. This number takes into consideration the following: 6 hours per week (78 hours total) for required readings, Canvas posts, and preparation for seminar discussion; 15 hours for writing the midterm paper; and 30 hours for researching and writing the final paper.

Attendance and participation in class discussion is essential to success in this course, and students should complete all readings for the day prior to coming to class. Students must bring copies of all readings to class for reference and discussion.

Assignments are designed to facilitate close reading and in-depth engagement with the texts each week, as well as support students in completing a final research paper, and include:

Weekly Responses

Our Canvas discussion section is an interactive platform to facilitate, enrich, and expand our class discussion. Each week, students are required to post a short (150-250 word) response to the readings, screenings, and/or class discussion. These responses are not meant to be summaries of the readings or screenings; you can assume that your readers (your peers and your instructor) have familiarity with the material and proceed to analyze those passages and problems that feel most urgent, compelling, or unclear to you. You are encouraged to use these written responses to pose questions for further discussion on Canvas and in class, and you are welcome to write in response to other students' comments from class or Canvas.

These posts are not graded on content, but simply on whether you do them or not. However, thoughtful work on these posts is important for three reasons: 1) They allow your instructor to get a sense of how you are processing the material and to structure class time around the topics most interesting and/or unclear to everyone. 2) They give you a chance to see what your peers are thinking and to engage with their posts. 3) They allow you to identify and explore the concepts that you will go on to examine at greater length in your papers and presentation.

Presentations

Students will each help lead discussion once during the semester by presenting on the readings and screenings assigned that particular week. These presentations are informal, but should raise key questions about the texts at hand and help stimulate consequential discussion. Engagement with pertinent artworks or media objects that have not been assigned is welcome. Presentations should be approximately 15 minutes long.

Papers

There will be two papers assigned for the course: one 4- to 5-page midterm paper and one 8- to 10-page paper due at the end of the semester. Papers should be double-spaced, with 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Proper MLA or Chicago formatting and citation should be followed. Prompts will be provided for the midterm paper. Students will be expected to develop their own topic and meet with the instructor to discuss it ahead of the final paper.

Grading

Attendance and Participation	10%
Canvas Posts	10%
Presentation	10%
Midterm Paper	20%
Final Paper	40%

Late assignments will be marked down a letter grade for every day (Monday-Friday) if prior approval for an extension has not been given by the professor.

Course Materials

The following books are required (and available at the Brown University Bookstore):

1. Gil Hochberg, *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015)
2. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002)

All other readings are available as PDFs or URLs via Canvas.

Academic Integrity

Please be aware that plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration are extremely serious offenses and are more harmful to students than to the university. The Academic code explaining Brown's principles, along with the consequences for violation, can be found at:

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/degree/policies/academic-code>

Accommodations, Support Services and University Resources

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can also contact one of the deans in the office of the Dean of the College.

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Inclusion and Diversity

The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion works to promote a diverse and inclusive community at Brown. If you have any concerns about these issues or would like to know about their resources, please see:

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/institutional-diversity/resources>

If you have concerns about sexual or gender-based discrimination, harassment, and/or violence, please contact Brown's Title IX office; see: <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/title-ix/>.

Commitment to Respectful Dialogue, Debate, and Difference

Our class discussions will delve into challenging and unresolved political and social issues, many of which are likely to elicit strong feelings. It is important to remember and to respect that we come to these issues with varied experiences and beliefs, and that we are living at a particularly unsettling historical conjuncture, which places difficult material and emotional burdens on many of us, and does so unequally, depending on our circumstances. In this context our course will afford opportunities to open our minds to other perspectives and possibilities, and to experience and enact the conscientiousness, empathy, and imagination we wish to see in the world. In our engagement with texts, images, and each other, we will challenge ourselves not only to see *what* another person sees, but *why* they see it. The hope is that by proceeding with openness and respect—and providing supportive space for constructive debate and disagreement—we will collectively produce a class that

functions as a space of radical, caring dialogue, where we can all articulate new ideas, pose questions, and at once expand and change our ways of seeing others, ourselves, and our world.

Course Schedule

The schedule is subject to change due to identified needs of the class or unforeseen events.

Week 1 (9/11): Introduction

Week 2 (9/18): Decolonizing Vision(s)

Frantz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 1967), 109-140.

Edward Said, "The Scope of Orientalism" (excerpt), *Orientalism* (Penguin Classics, 1979), 31-49.

Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination* (Verso, 2012), 11-27.

Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Duke UP, 2011), 1-47.

Screening: *The Battle of Algiers* (dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966, 120 minutes)

Week 3 (9/25): Documentary and Its Discontents

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Picador, 2004), 3-73.

Judith Butler, "Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag," *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2009), 63-100.

Teju Cole, "What Does It Mean to Look at This?" *The New York Times Magazine*, May 24, 2018: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/magazine/what-does-it-mean-to-look-at-this.html>

Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty." *re-visiones* #1, 2011: <http://re-visiones.net/antiores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html>.

Screening:

Oraib Toukan, *When Things Occur* (2016, 28 minutes)

Standard Operating Procedure (dir. Errol Morris, 2008, 118 minutes)

Week 4 (10/2): Refusal, Resentment, and Resistance

Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement" [1977], *How We Get Free* (ed. Keeanga Yamahatta-Taylor), (Haymarket Books, 2017), 15-27.

Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Crossing Press, 2007), 124-133.

Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Snap," *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke UP, 2017), 187-212.

Audra Simpson, "Consent's Revenge," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, 326-333.

Glen Sean Coulthard, "Seeing Red," *Red Skin, White Masks*, 105-130.

Screening:

Born in Flames (dir. Lizzie Borden, 1983, 90 minutes)

United in Anger: A History of ACT UP (dir. Jim Hubbard, 2012, 90 minutes)

Week 5 (10/9): Reconstructions, Reparations, and Returns

Ariella Azoulay, "Potential History: Thinking Through Violence," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Spring 2013), 548-574.

Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics." *Theory & Event* 5, no. 3 (2001).

Robin D.G. Kelley, "'A Day of Reckoning': Dreams of Reparations," *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2002), 110-134.

Ghassan Kanafani, "Returning to Haifa," in *Palestine's Children: Short Stories*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1984), 99-138.

Screening: *The Look of Silence* (dir. Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014, 103 minutes)

Midterm assignment distributed

Week 6 (10/16): Critical Fabulation in the Afterlife of Slavery

Octavia E. Butler, "Bloodchild," *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (Seven Stories Press, 2005), 3-32.

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer 1987): 65-81.

Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe* 26 (12:2), June 2008, 1-14.

No Screening: We will be attending Hortense Spillers' departmental lecture as a class at 5:30pm, so our seminar discussion will be shorter than usual this week.

Week 7 (10/23): Afrofuturist Speculations

Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Duke UP, 1994), 179-222.

Kodwo Eshun, "Further Reflections on Afrofuturism." *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Volume 3, Number 2, Summer 2003, 287-302.

W.E.B. DuBois, "The Comet," *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (Warner Books, 2000), 5-18.

Hannah Black, "Superpower," *Artforum* (May 2018).

<https://www.artforum.com/print/201805/hannah-black-on-black-panther-75050>

Screening:

The Last Angel of History (dir. John Akomfrah, 1996, 45 minutes)

Janelle Monae, "Many Moons" (2008, 7 minutes)

Black Panther (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018, 135 minutes)

Midterm Assignment Due by Friday, October 26, 11:59pm

Week 8 (10/30): Decolonial Futures: Afrofuturism and Arabfuturism

Robin D.G. Kelley, "Dreams of the New Land" and "Keeping It (Sur)Real: Dreams of the Marvelous," *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2002), 13-35, 157-194.

Sofia Samatar, "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism," *Research in African Literatures*: Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2017), 175-191.

Lama Suleiman, "Afrofuturism and Arabfuturism: Reflections of a Present-Day Diasporic Reader," *Tobu Magazine*, June 2016. <http://tohumagazine.com/article/afrofuturism-and-arabfuturism-reflections-present-day-diasporic-reader>

Screening:

Wanuri Kahiu, *Pumzi* (2009, 21 minutes)

Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate* (2013, 9 minutes)

Larissa Sansour, *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2015, 29 minutes)

Week 9 (11/6): Re-Animating History: Palestine/Israel and the Animated Documentary

Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate," *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994* (Vintage, 1995), 247-268.

Gil Hochberg, "Introduction: Visual Politics in a Conflict Zone" and "Shooting War: On Witnessing One's Failure to See (On Time)," *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Duke UP, 2015), 1-34, 139-155.

Kamran Rastegar, "'*Sawwaru Waynkum?*' Human Rights and Social Trauma in *Waltz with Bashir*," *College Literature*, Volume 40, Number 3, Summer 2013, 60-80.

Screening:

Waltz with Bashir (dir. Ari Folman, 2008, 90 minutes)

The Wanted 18 (dir. Amer Shomali and Paul Cowan, 2014, 75 minutes)

Week 10 (11/13): Fantasies of Resistance: Subversive Border Crossings in Palestine/Israel

Hamid Dabashi, "In Praise of Frivolity: On the Cinema of Elia Suleiman," *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* [ed. Hamid Dabashi], (Verso Books, 2006), 130-160.

Gil Hochberg, "From Invisible Spectators to Spectacles of Terror," *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Duke UP, 2015), 57-75.

Rasha Salti, "From Resistance and Bearing Witness to the Power of the Fantastical: Icons and Symbols in Palestinian Poetry and Cinema," *Third Text Vol. 24*, Issue 1, 2010, 39-52.

Tanya Shilina-Conte, "Imaginal Border Crossings and Silence as Negative Mimesis in Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention*," *Border Visions: Identity and Diaspora in Film* (ed. Jakub Kazecki et al.), Rowman & Littlefield, 2013, 21-36.

Screening:

Divine Intervention (dir. Elia Suleiman, 2002, 90 minutes)

Week 11 (11/20): The World as Target: Borderless Wars, Militarized Borders

Rey Chow, "The Age of the World Target: Atomic Bombs, Alterity, Area Studies," *The Rey Chow Reader* (Columbia UP, 2010), 3-19.

Derek Gregory, "From a View to a Kill; Drones and Late Modern War." *Theory, Culture & Society*. Vol. 28, no. 7-8, 2011 (188-215).

Anjali Nath, "Stoners, Stones, and Drones: Transnational South Asian Visuality from Above and Below," *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare* (ed. Caren Kaplan and Lisa Parks), Duke UP, 2017, 241-258.

Ricardo Dominguez, "Border Research and the Transborder Immigrant Tool," *Media Fields Journal* no. 12, 2017, 1-5.

Thomas Prasch, "Aquaterrorists and Cybracers: The Dystopian Borderlands of Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer*," *Border Visions: Identity and Diaspora in Film* (ed. Jakub Kazecki et al.), Rowman & Littlefield, 2013, 55-66.

Screening:

Heems, "Soup Boys (Pretty Drones)" (2012, 5 minutes)

Omer Fast, *5,000 Feet Is the Best* (2011, 30 minutes)

Sleep Dealer (dir. Alex Rivera, 2008, 90 minutes)

Week 12 (11/27): Looking Back/Black Looks: Counterveillance, Dark Sousveillance, Queer Opacity

Simone Browne, "Notes on Surveillance Studies," *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Duke UP, 2015), 31-62.

Zach Blas, "Informatic Opacity," *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest* 9, 2014, 1-14.

Gil Hochberg, "The (Soldier's) Gaze and the (Palestinian) Body," *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Duke UP, 2015), 79-95.

Rita Raley, "Dataveillance and Countervailance" in *Raw Data Is an Oxymoron* [ed. Lisa Gitelman] (MIT Press, 2013), 121-145.

Screening:

Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Communiqué: Fag Face* (2013, 8 minutes)

Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013, 16 minutes)

Sharif Waked, *Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* (2003, 7 minutes)

Yazan Khalili, *Hiding Our Faces Like a Dancing Wind* (2016, 8 minutes)

Coco Fusco, *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* (2004, 31 minutes)

Week 13 (12/4): Opacities and Withdrawals

Edouard Glissant, "For Opacity," *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan, 1997), 189-194.

TJ Demos, "The Right to Opacity: On the Otolith Group's *Nervus Rerum*," *October* 129, Summer 2009, 113-128.

Chad Elias, *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post-Civil War Lebanon* (Duke UP, 2018), 1-37.

Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (Forthcoming Books, 2009), 11-34.

Screening:

Mounira Al Solh, *Now Eat My Script* (2014, 25 minutes)

The Atlas Group, *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (2001, 16 minutes)

The Otolith Group, *Nervus Rerum* (2008, 32 minutes)

Final Paper Due Friday, December 14, 11:59pm