HNRS 122-008: Reading the Arts
Spring 2018 | Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:30-2:45 pm | Krug Hall 19
Instructor: Caroline West | E-mail: cwest9@masonlive.gmu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00-4:00pm, and by appointment | Location: Enterprise, Room 329

COURSE OVERVIEW
This course will examine interdisciplinary scholarship and research on the role of photography and film in society, with particular focus on the documentary mode. The central concerns of this class will be to ask what kind of work images do? In what ways do images participate in social, cultural, political and economic discourses of power? How do images derive meaning as they circulate in historical and ahistorical ways? To understand such questions, this class will look to the field of visual culture and to techniques of visual analysis to consider the evolving technologies of photography and film and the practices of making and looking.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
• Understand theories associated with visual culture, photography and film in society
• Acquire, expand, and deploy a conceptual vocabulary appropriate for the analysis of photographs and film.
• Apply relevant theoretical perspectives to the exploration of visual culture and its functioning within contemporary societies

REQUIRED READINGS
All the readings, films, assignments, weblinks, etc. are available on either our course Blackboard (BB) page located at MyMason or on Reserve in Gateway Library in the Johnson Center (JC). The syllabus is located on BB.

Lecture slides shown in class will be made available on Blackboard after each lecture for study purposes. Please note that these materials are for personal study use only; they may not be printed or otherwise distributed.

IMPORTANT DATES
First day of classes: January 22
Last day to drop (no tuition penalty): January 29
Last day to drop (33% tuition penalty): February 12
Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition penalty): February 23
Selective Withdrawal Period: February 26-March 30
Spring Break, no classes: March 12-18
Last day of classes: May 5
Reading Days: May 7-8
Exam Period: May 9-16
ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW:
Attendance, Participation & in-class Quizzes: 100 points (10%)
  Midterm assessment: 50 points
  Final assessment: 50 points
Short Essays: 400 points (40%)
  Visual Description Essay: 200 points
  Visual Analysis Essay: 200 points
Course Project: 500 points (50%)
  Photographic Essay Proposal & Presentation: 150 points
  Photographic Essay Presentation: 100 points
  Photographic Essay: 250 points
Total: 1000 possible points:
  A+ 970 – 1000 points  C+ 770 – 799 points
  A  940 – 969 points  C  740 – 769 points
  A- 900 – 939 points  C- 700 – 739 points
  B+ 870 – 900 points  D  600 – 699 points
  B  840 – 869 points  F  0 – 599 points
  B- 800 – 839 points

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS
Attendance, Participation & in-class Quizzes: 100 points (10%)
Attendance is mandatory and grades will suffer if students do not attend class regularly. If there is a good reason you need to arrive late or leave early, I need to know in advance. Absences are unexcused unless you see me prior to your absence and can provide necessary documentation. In case of absence, it is a good idea to exchange contact information with another classmate so that you can arrange to get information/notes missed in class.

You and your peers benefit from your active participation in this learning community. Through class discussions and individual assignments, you will have the opportunity to discover new perspectives and examine ideas that were previously unchallenged. Open discussion depends on the development of trust and safety among participants, as well as risk-taking and effective facilitation. I encourage you to bring to class relevant materials for discussion from other classes, the media, or other learning experiences.

There is one scheduled quiz, a syllabus quiz, administered in the second week of classes. This quiz is included on the syllabus. Pop quizzes may be given on the assigned readings of the day, if necessary. All quizzes will be given in the first 10 minutes of class. There are no quiz make-ups if you are absent or late to class.
Short Essays: 400 points (40%)

**Short Essay #1: 200 points (20%)**
First short writing assignment will be a visual description essay. More details will be discussed in class and provided in the Assignment tab on BB. Due Thursday, March 1 on BB.

**Short Essay #2: 200 points (20%)**
Second short writing assignment will a visual analysis essay. More details will be discussed in class and provided in the Assignment tab on BB. Due Thursday, April 5 on BB.

Course Project: 500 points (50%)
The final Course Project is a Photographic Essay that has three graded parts: the project’s proposal & presentation, the final photographic essay, and its presentation. Details will be discussed in class and provided in the Assignments tab on BB.

**Project Proposal & Presentation: 150 points (15%)**
Proposal Presentations will be in-class on March 6 & 8. Project Proposals due at 11:45pm on March 8 on BB.

**Photographic Essay Final Presentation: 100 points (10%)**
Presentation days are April 24, 26, and May 1. ALL PowerPoint Presentations due at 11:45pm on Monday, April 23 on BB (regardless of when you present).

**Final Photographic Essay: 250 points (25%)**
Due at 11:45pm on Thursday, May 3 on BB

Extra Credit Assignment
“Sally Mann: A Thousand Crossings” is an exhibition that will open on March 4 at the Smithsonian’s National Gallery of Art, located on the mall in Washington D.C. Up to 20 extra credit points will be given for going to the exhibition and writing a visual analysis essay response. **Essays will be due no later than Tuesday, May 1 at 11:45pm on BB (no late essays will be graded)**. More details provided on BB.


**GRADING NOTES AND PROCEDURES**

**Late Policy for Assignments:**
You are responsible for completing assignments on time. Due dates are clearly indicated throughout this syllabus. All assignments will be submitted online on Blackboard (BB).

I understand that ‘life happens’ and there are times when you need a small amount of extra time to complete an assignment. For all BB assignments, I do allow a 15 minute grace period. If you need more than 15 minutes I will accept late assignments up to 12 hours after the
deadline (except for extra credit assignments). Points will be deducted from the final assignment grade. The point deductions are as follows:

- Assignments submitted between 15 min and 1 hour late: minus points equivalent to one grade variation (ex. A to A-, B- to C+)
- Assignments submitted between 1-6 hours late: minus points equivalent to two grade variations (ex. A to B+, B- to C)
- Assignments submitted between 6-12 hours late: minus points equivalent to three grade variations (ex. A to B, B- to C-)
- Assignments submitted over 12 hours after the deadline: receive a grade of zero (0)

I will not extend any assignment deadlines unless previous arrangements have been made. This means that if you anticipate not being able to complete your assignment on time whether it is due to a documented excuse or an unfortunate conflict, you must come to me in advance, well before the assignment is due. Unless you communicate with me and get direct permission in a timely manner, you will not be eligible to turn in your assignment late even if your excuse is documented.

- Here are two permissible personal reasons for asking for an extended deadline: A serious illness (upset stomach or case of the sniffles is not) or accident, a serious family emergency or death.
- Situations that are not considered acceptable reasons for asking for an extended deadline: computer crashed/files are corrupted, a busy school week, a busy work schedule, going out of town for personal or family business, interviews, a doctor appointment. It is your responsibility to plan ahead – this is why you are given a syllabus with all due dates at the beginning of the semester.

**Grade Disputes**

If you have a question or a concern with a grade given in the course, you should follow the following procedure to ask for a re-evaluation of the grade: (a) Wait at least 24 hours to think about the grade, (b) Write a short, one-page letter that describes your reasons for asking for a re-evaluation. In short, present a measured and articulate argument for why you deserve a better grade on your work. Then, (c) email me this letter. I will then re-read your work and re-consider the mark. The final decision (whether it results in an improved grade, or, potentially, a less favorable mark) will be made before the end of the semester. Further appeals of grades should follow the procedure outlined in the George Mason University catalog under Academic Policies. Finally, should you have a concern about the grade you received on a specific exam or assignment, you should contact me within three class periods of receiving your grade for that assignment. I will not review grades re-submitted after this time period has elapsed.

**COURSE POLICIES AND INFORMATION**

**Class Discussion:** Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing
ideas, perspectives, and traditions. You are adults and I expect that you approach our class with seriousness, critical thinking, and respect for your peers, your instructor, and the material. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask me or guidance and clarification.

**Laptops:** Laptops are permitted in class in order to access course readings only. Reading notes should be brought to class and discussion notes should be written by hand in class. If I do not think accessing the readings is necessary for discussion, I will instruct you to put away your laptops. If the use of laptops proves to be a distraction to you and/or others, I reserve the right to amend this policy at any time for the whole class or for individual students.

**Cell phones:** These are not permitted in class. Please silence all electronic devices before class begins. If you must use your cell phone during class time for a personal emergency, please leave the room and alert me beforehand if you know you will have to leave or check your phone.

**Email Policy:** In compliance with a University-wide initiative, our correspondence will be only through GMU assigned email accounts. Please check your email account regularly for updates and important announcements.

**Academic honesty:** George Mason University has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity: 1) all work submitted must be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations. While collaboration and learning from others is not only encouraged but also required, using someone else’s words or ideas without giving them credit is plagiarism. If you are unclear about what you should document, consult with me. The official GMU policies are available from the Office of Academic Integrity: [http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/](http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/). A great online resource for resources on writing and citation is the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/).

**Diversity Statement:** George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

**Communication:** Please bring any questions and concerns you may have to me in a timely manner. Do not hesitate to ask for guidance and clarification, whatever the issue is. I am available during my office hours and by appointment to discuss and advise you. I will assume that the class is comfortable and satisfactory and the material I present is clear unless I hear from you otherwise. If you are struggling with readings, assignments, and/or meeting deadlines, it is very important that you come to me for assistance before you fall too far behind.
### Tentative Course Schedule

This is a tentative schedule and subject to change. Check Blackboard frequently for amendments. Any changes will be announced and discussed in class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 1</th>
<th>Intro &amp; What is Visual Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>January 23</strong></td>
<td>• Introductions/Syllabus overview/Expectations</td>
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  • Mirzoeff, Nicholas, “What is Visual Culture?” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, 1998  

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<th>WEEK 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>January 30</strong></td>
<td>• Sturken, Marta. “Chapter 1: Images, Power, Politics” in <em>Practices of Looking</em></td>
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<td><strong>Syllabus Quiz today</strong></td>
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<td><strong>February 1</strong></td>
<td>• Barrett, Terry. Defining Criticism section in Chapter 1 (pgs. 2-4) &amp; Chapter 2: Describing Photographs (pgs. 16-37) in <em>Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images</em></td>
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<th>WEEK 3</th>
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| **February 6**                | • Barrett, Terry. Chapter 3: Interpreting Photographs (pgs 38-59) in *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images*  
  • Visual Rhetoric/Visual Analysis: Film. Writing Studio, Duke University |
| **February 8**                | • Principles of Photographic Composition:“20 Compositional Techniques to Improve your Photos” [https://petapixel.com/2016/09/14/20-composition-techniques-will-improve-photos/](https://petapixel.com/2016/09/14/20-composition-techniques-will-improve-photos/)  
  IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Course Project |
### WEEK 4

**February 13**

**February 15**

### WEEK 5

**February 20**
- Rosler, Martha. “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography),” 1981

**February 22**

### WEEK 6

**February 27**
- Adams, Shelby Lee “Preface” in *Appalachian Portraits*, 1993
- Goldberg, Vicki “Appalachia in Another Light” & Shelby Lee Adams “Making Photographs” in *Appalachian Lives*, 2003
- Adams, Shelby Lee “The Roots of Inspiration” in *Salt & Truth*, 2011

  **WATCH IN-CLASS: The True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams’ Appalachia, 2003**

**March 1**
- Black, Matt. “Geography of Poverty”: MSNBC News Page & Instagram
- Malik, Om. “In the Future, We Will Photograph Everything and Look at Nothing” *New Yorker*


### WEEK 7

**March 6**
- Course Project Proposal Presentations

**March 8**
- Course Project Proposal Presentations

*Project Proposals due **today at 11:45pm** on BB*
### WEEK 8
March 13 & March 15  
Spring Break: NO CLASS

### WEEK 9
March 20  
- Picturing Frederick Douglass: An illustrated biography of the nineteenth century's most photographed American by John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd & Celeste-Marie Bernier: Look through images and do an overview reading [on reserve in JC]

March 22  
- Carrie Mae Weems: Peruse her photographic work, paying special attention to the series “The Kitchen Table Series, 1990” and “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried, 1995–1996”: [http://carriemaeweems.net/work.html](http://carriemaeweems.net/work.html)
- Kelsey, Robin; Hall, Katori; Tillet, Salamishah; Bey, Dawoud; Blessing, Jennifer. “Around the Kitchen Table.” Aperture, Summer 2016, Issue 223, p 52-57.

### WEEK 10
March 27  
WATCH IN-CLASS: Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People, 2014

March 29  

### WEEK 11
April 3  
- Sturken, Marta. “Chapter 3: Spectatorship, Power and Knowledge” in Practices of Looking

April 5  

**Short Essay #2: Visual Analysis due **today** at 11:45pm on BB**

- Richard Mosse’s Photographs:
  - View Mosse’s three 2017 projects: Incoming, Heat Maps, Grid (Moria) [www.richardmosse.com](http://www.richardmosse.com)
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<th>WEEK 12</th>
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<td>April 10</td>
<td>NO CLASS: Individual Research and Writing workday/Mental Health Breather</td>
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| April 12             | • Mckenzie Funk, “Sebastião Salgado Has Seen the Forest, Now He’s Seeing the Trees” Smithsonian Magazine, [Link](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/sebastiao-salgado-forest-trees-180956620/)  
|                      | • Steven Hoelscher & Richard Misrach, “A Collision between Beauty and Ugliness”: An Interview with Richard Misrach” Read 451-455, Skim 455-466, Read 466-486. [PDF] |

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<th>WEEK 13</th>
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| April 17             | • Ailise Bulfin, “Popular culture and the ’new human condition’: Catastrophe narratives and climate change”  
|                      | • Christopher Schmidt, “Why Are Dystopian Films on the Rise Again?” JSTOR Daily, [Link](https://daily.jstor.org/why-are-dystopian-films-on-the-rise-again/)  
|                      | WATCH IN-CLASS: Snowpiercer (Part 1)                                                                  |
| April 19             | WATCH IN-CLASS: Snowpiercer (Part 2)                                                                  |

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<th>WEEK 14</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>Photographic Essay Presentations</td>
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<td>All Presentations due at 11:45pm on Monday, April 23 on BB</td>
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<td>April 26</td>
<td>Photographic Essay Presentations</td>
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<th>WEEK 15</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>Photographic Essay Presentations</td>
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<td>Extra Credit due no later than today at 11:45pm on BB</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Photographic Essays due today at 11:45pm on BB</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3</td>
<td>• NO CLASS (Tentative, barring excessive school-wide cancellations)</td>
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**IMPORTANT ACADEMIC RESOURCES**

**Office of Disability Services:** (703-993-2474; SUB I, Room 2500) assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will provide a form to give to your instructor at the beginning of every course. [http://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu)

**GMU Library:** There are two libraries on Fairfax Campus: **Fenwick** and **Gateway in the Johnson Center.** You should be acquainted with these locations and how to use the library online catalog and databases. To find these pages go to the library homepage [http://library.gmu.edu/](http://library.gmu.edu/). If you need any help with the library please do not hesitate contacting the library staff: [http://library.gmu.edu/help/](http://library.gmu.edu/help/)

**Counseling Services:** (703-993-2380; SUB I, Room 3129) provides, confidential and free of charge, individual and group sessions for personal development and assistance with a range of emotional and relational issues.

**Writing Center:** (703-993-1824; Robinson A 114, main office; Enterprise 076) provides, at no charge, tutors who can help you develop ideas and revise papers. The Writing Center is also available online at [http://wcenter@gmu.edu](http://wcenter@gmu.edu).

**Learning Services:** (703-993-2380; Student Union Building I, Suite 3129) provides, at no cost, study skills workshops can help you improve your academic performance. These workshops include, but are not limited to: strategies for note-taking, reading, exams, memory and organization, time-management, performance anxiety, and improving concentration. They are offered multiple times throughout the semester. You can find descriptions, schedule and links to register online at [http://tuscany.gmu.edu/depts/unilife/learningservices.gmu.edu/academic-skills-workshops/](http://tuscany.gmu.edu/depts/unilife/learningservices.gmu.edu/academic-skills-workshops/)