**HUMA 3226 Visual Cultures and the Natural World**

**ADDITIONAL COURSE INSTRUCTOR/CONTACT DETAILS**

Instructor: Joan Steigerwald  
Contact: steiger@yorku.ca  
Office: 215 Vanier College

**EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The course fosters critical reflection on how visual images of nature affect our understanding of nature. Its philosophical focus is the notion of representation, as a crucial common link between cultural, artistic, scientific, and visual practices. It addresses questions on the nature and role of visual representations in culture, in understandings of the environment and in science, asking what counts as objective or accurate representations. The course also analyzes the technological and material conditions of visualization. It examines how various technologies, from practices of cultural image making to scientific instruments, shape our perceptions and conceptions of the natural world. In science, visual representations are used to depict and communicate understandings of nature. Visualization techniques also assist scientists in making sense of natural phenomena, by making non-visible processes manifest and by offering material forms in which to imagine and conceive natural processes. But imaging practices also operate widely in culture as means for depicting and shaping understandings of the natural world. The course explores how phenomena are constructed in the process of representing them, and how the products thus made manifest are artifacts as well as natural entities. It considers how through particular visual images, informed by historically and culturally specific contexts, nature is reconceived.

Texts for the course include theoretical works as well as case studies. They are drawn from a diversity of fields – cultural studies, anthropology, art history, science and technology studies, and environmental studies.

Each class will begin with a discussion of the texts assigned for that week. There will be a break in the middle of the class. Presentations will take place after the break.

**COURSE TEXTS / READINGS**

**Visual Representation and Culture**

Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. “Practices of Looking: Images, Power and Politics.” *Practices of Looking: An introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford UP, 2001, pp. 10-44.

**Making Animals Visible**

Mitman, Gregg. “Pachyderm Personalities: The Media of Science, Politics and Conservation.” *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, edited by Gregg Mitman and Lorraine Daston. Columbia UP, 2005, pp. 175–195.

**Manufactured Landscapes**

Edward Burtynsky, *Manufactured Landscapes*. Directed by Jennifer Baichwal. Mongrel Media and National Film Board of Canada, 2006.

**Weeds, Gardens and Wild Nature**

Mabey, Richard. “Thoroughwort.” *Weeds: How Vagabond Plants Gatecrashed Civilisation and Changed the Way We Think about Nature*, by Mabey. Profile Books, 2010, pp. 1-21.

Myers, Natasha. “From Edenic Apocalypse to Gardens against Eden: Plants and People in and after the Anthropocene.” *Infrastructure, Environment and Life in the Anthropocene, edited by Kregg Hetherington.*Duke UP, 2019, pp. 115-48.

**Vision, Perspective and Objectivity**

Haraway, Donna. “The Persistence of Vision.” *The Visual Culture Reader,*edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff. 1988. Routledge, 2013, pp. 356-62.

**Images of Race**

Berger, Martin A. “The Iconic Photographs of Civil Rights,” and “The Formulas of Documentary Photography.” *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography*. University of California Press, 2011, pp. 1-57.

**Images of the Foetus/Images of the Woman**

Firth, Georgina. “Re-negotiating Reproductive Technologies: The 'Public Foetus' Revisited.” *Feminist Review*, no. 92, 2009, pp. 54-71.

Nilsson, Lennart, and Albert Rosenfeld. “Drama of Life Before Birth.” *Life,* vol. 58, no. 17, 1965, pp. 54-65.

**Images of the Brain/Imaging the Person**

Dumit, Joseph. “Is It Me or My Brain? Depression and Neuroscientific Facts.” *Journal of Medical Humanities,*vol 24, no. 1/2, 2003, pp. 35-47.

**Indigenous Images of the Land**

The Royal Canadian Geographic Society, in conjunction with Assembly of First Nations and National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. *First Nations. Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*, 2018: <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/section/first-nations/>.

**Mapping the Earth**

Helmreich, Stefan. “From Spaceship Earth to Google Ocean: Planetary Icons, Indexes, and Infrastructures.” *Social Research*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2011, pp. 1211-1242.

**Mapping Knowledge**

Manuel Lima. “A Visual History of Human Knowledge.” TED2015. March 2015.

**WEIGHTING OF COURSE**

Participation (15%); Class Presentation (15%); Commentaries on Readings (25%); Research Paper Proposal (10%); Research Paper (35%).