

VISUAL & MATERIAL RHETORICS



contact

Professor: Dr. Dustin Edwards
Office: 307D Colbourn Hall
Email: Dustin.Edwards@UCF.edu
Office Hours: Tues 3-4; Wed 12-1; and by appt

course description

A cliché and truism: we live in a visual world. In our daily lives, we are bombarded by visual advertisements, messages, and arguments. Those with sight, read the world—whether conscious or not—rhetorically, and come to understand visuals based on the cultural, technological, and economic conditions in which they find themselves. In this class, we will strive to understand that visuals are anything but simple. Visuals “act” on us—sometimes in visceral and affective ways, activating in us emotions, feelings, moods, and knowledges. Visuals hold cultural power and significance.

We will also study how visuals are depicted through and with materials of all kinds. Visuals are carved in stone, printed on paper with ink, and projected through glass and plastic. As such, rhetoric (including visual rhetoric) is experienced through materiality. Rhetoric “happens” when we view memorial sites, when we walk through cities, when we browse websites in online spaces. Rhetoric is experienced through our material encounters with the world.

This class examines and links together two relatively recent threads of rhetoric theory: visual rhetoric and material rhetoric. In addition to studying visual cultures and rhetorics, we will specifically engage what’s been called the “material turn” in the humanities—undertaking an inventive mode of inquiry that asks you to contemplate the agentive force of matter. It’s one thing to say we produce and interact with materials—that humans derive meaning and interact with other humans using material symbols. It’s another to say materials themselves act on the world—that the entangled agencies of matter have effects on the world. We’ll consider both of these claims throughout this semester.

“The capacity of images to affect us as viewers and consumers is dependent on the larger cultural meanings they invoke and the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are viewed.”

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright,
Practices of Looking 25

“Rhetoric is a responsive way of revealing the world for others, responding to and put forth through affective, symbolic, and material means, so as to (at least potentially) reattune or otherwise transform how other inhabit the world to an extent that calls for some action...”

Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric* 162

course goals and outcomes

In this class, you will:

- Study visual and material cultures
- Engage in research methods to track visual and viral images
- Experiment with writing so as to attune yourself to material environments
- Examine the materiality of digital data practices
- Gain experience with design tools and software
- Practice composing ethical and appealing visual designs

required text and accessing readings

This course has one required text:

Berinato, Scott. *Good Charts: The HBR Guide to Making Smarter, More Persuasive Data Visualizations*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2016.

But there will be many more readings available through webcourses. In addition to readings in rhetoric and writing studies, we will read multidisciplinary work in new materialisms, affect theory, environmental humanities, art, and design.

course format

This is a mixed-mode course where we will meet in-person on Tuesdays from 9 am-10:15 am. You will also be responsible for completing online readings and discussions—all of which will be due on Sundays at midnight (though, of course, you can work earlier if you wish). Generally, the readings and activities done online will set you up to participate in face-to-face class discussions, in-class writings, workshops, or activities.

policies

access/accommodation

I am committed to maximizing your learning potential and making this course as accessible as possible. If there is any way that I can adapt this course to better meet your needs as a learner, please let me know. If you have a documented disability, I will provide any accommodations that have been best determined by you and Student Accessibility Services.

Contact for Student Accessibility services:

website: <http://sas.sdes.ucf.edu/>

email: sas@ucf.edu

office: Ferrell Commons 185

phone: 407-823-2371

classroom conduct

Students must follow UCF standards for personal and academic conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule. As a matter of common courtesy, please come to class on time and prepared. More importantly, proper classroom conduct also entails creating a positive



“An estimated 1.8 trillion gigabytes of digital information are created and stored globally each year by ordinary consumers with no sense that data is physical and storing it has a direct impact on the environment.”

J.R. Carpenter, *The Gathering Cloud*



learning experience for all students, regardless of race, sex, religion, sexual orientation, social class, or any other feature of personal identification; therefore, sexist, racist, prejudicial, homophobic, or other derogatory remarks will not be tolerated.

late work

All assignments must be turned in on time. In extreme cases, you may be allowed an extension if you contact me before the regularly scheduled due date.

academic integrity and plagiarism

Plagiarism consists of knowingly copying and/or reproducing the work of someone else without supplying appropriate credit. In cases involving deception (e.g. buying an online paper or copying others' work without giving them credit), consequences can result in failing the assignment or, if serious enough, failing the course. If at anytime you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please schedule a time to meet with me.

For further details about Academic Integrity at the University of Central Florida — including a detailed list of examples of academic dishonesty and procedures and penalties for dealing with instances of academic dishonesty — visit <http://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>.

assignments and course expectations

The course will be organized around four assignments. Hopefully, each will extend, compliment, or complicate the one that came before. The names of the assignments—along with brief descriptions and point allocations—are listed below. Please note: you will get much more detailed assignment sheets for each project.

1. Image Tracking Project — 20 percent

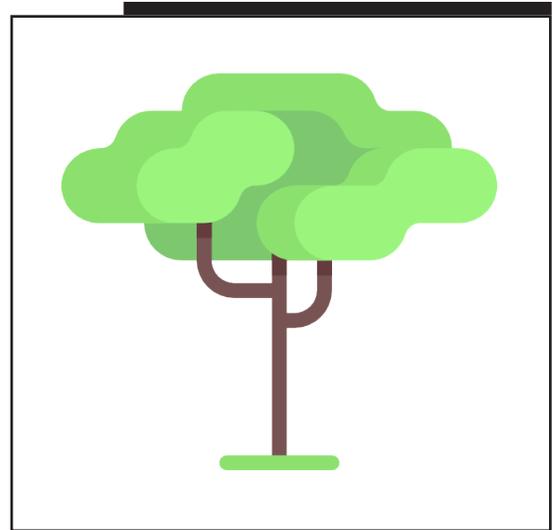
This assignment asks you to use digital search tools to trace a single visual artifact of your choosing. Using research strategies we will develop in class, you will engage in concentrated research on your visual artifact. The project will culminate with a report that describes your image, your research processes, and the various contexts, uses, genres, and arguments that correspond with the image's circulation. The assignment aims to demonstrate the rhetorical power of an image—and how one image can come to matter in multiple, sometimes competing, ways.



The Image Tracking Project will engage rhetorician Laurie Gries' research process and method, called "iconographic tracking," for tracing visual-material images. As pictured above, Gries' work, which we'll read in class, traces how the "Obama Hope" image has undergone rhetorical transformation throughout the years it has circulated in online and offline spaces.

2. Attunement Experiment — 20 percent

This assignment asks you to broaden your perspective as to what might be counted as “rhetorical.” You will write a descriptive essay about a particular place. You will attempt to **attune** yourself to the lively materialities of the place. The assignment will be an experiment in writing where you will be expected to use vivid, lively, and capturing prose. You will take field notes of your place, write multiple drafts of your descriptive essay, and write a short reflection.



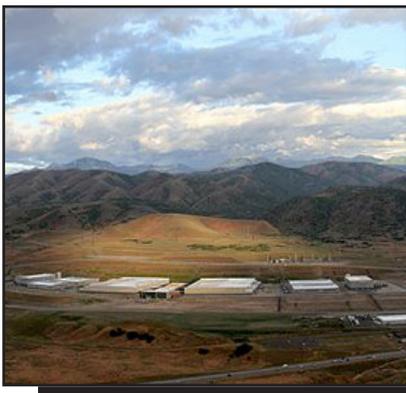
The Attunement Experiment will draw on theories of new materialism, rhetorical attunement, and affect. After reading and reflecting on these theories, you will attempt to write with affect—that is, you should strive to open up a lively scene (or series of scenes) to your readers.



3. Deep Mapping Project— 20 percent

This assignment asks you to map one aspect of your digital “cloud”—to seek out the material places your data travel and are ultimately stored. It’s a project aimed at disrupting the logics of immateriality that often correspond with digital tools and platforms.

You will choose a particular digital platform, study its Terms of Service and Privacy policies, and attempt to locate its data centers. You will use Google maps, which will allow you to add descriptions to the points on your map.



The Deep Mapping project will engage digital materiality through readings (including both scholarly and popular sources) that pay attention to technical infrastructures, including data centers, fiber optic cables, cell phone towers, etc. The assignment asks you to consider the physical and environmental implications of storing digital information.

Your mapping research will lead to the next project, which asks you to visualize key findings from your research.

4. Data Visualization + Presentation — 25 percent

This assignment connects to the mapping project. Based on the research and mapping that you do in the Deep Mapping Project, you will create a data visualization that represents key findings, insights, and/or surprises from your map. In addition to presenting information in an aesthetically appealing way, you should strive to represent data fairly and ethically. You will also present your data visualization to the class, making sure to utilize presentation design and delivery best practices. This assignment will allow you to gain experience using industry-standard design software.



As part of an ongoing partnership between UCF and Adobe Systems, this class section has access to the full suite of Adobe Creative Cloud products. Through your KnightsMail account, you will have semester-long access to both desktop and mobile Adobe software for personal and class use. To provide technical support for these products over the semester, Adobe is funding student experts for each participating class. These individuals are also available to meet one-on-one if you want help with specific software or performing a certain task. These students are not enrolled as graders or instructors. Even though “TA” might appear by their name in Webcourses, they will not have access to the grading functions of the course, nor are they able to assist with the content of the course itself. Please direct questions about those issues to me instead.

A Note on Adobe Creative Cloud Software

5. Discussion Participation — 15 percent

Each week, you will be responsible for completing (1) initial discussion post and (1) follow-up reflective discussion post on Webcourses. The initial discussion prompt will be individualized for each week—asking you to respond to readings, do research, or contemplate the writing/designing you’re doing for major projects. Initial discussion posts will be due every Sunday at midnight and will be based on online activities or readings. You can expect to write between 300-400 words for these discussion posts.

Then, you will write a reflective follow-up discussion post after each in-class session. In this follow-up, you should reflect on the conversations, group work, insights, etc. that you gathered in class. You will post this reflection on your own discussion thread, but you should mention your class colleagues in your write-up. You can expect to write about 200 words for these posts, which should be posted by midnight each Tuesday.

schedule

You can access an up-to-date schedule for the semester via Webcourses.