

Plan Media Studies

The central themes in the module 'Globalisation and New Media' of the course of Media Studies start from visual culture. If you go more deeply into visual culture, you will discover that it is discussed in three ways.

First, there is the limited sense. Visual culture then shows the way a specific group deals with its images: how it produces and uses them, and how this relates to other characteristics of this group.

Second, there is the separation between visual culture and spoken culture. Here the analysis of the special characteristics of images is relevant, together with their possibilities and their relation with other elements of culture, more or less disconnected from place and time.

Finally, a fairly recent view on visual culture can be observed in the so-called 'Visual Studies', a school of research which can be considered part of the similarly recent 'Cultural Studies'. 'Visual Culture' is a concept here, and the concept becomes a piece of period diagnostics: we live in a period of visual culture. It is what the art theoretician Nicholas Mirzoeff says in 'An Introduction to Visual Culture' (1999): the present, fragmented and post-modern world 'is best represented and understood visually, similar to the 19th century, which was best represented classically by the newspaper and the novel.'

This is why visual culture is also a strategy, a method to investigate and understand the world: visual culture as a key concept. In Mirzoeff's view visual culture deals with 'visual events in which the consumer searches for information, meaning or pleasure, in connection with visual technology.' Visual technology for him is any form of representative technique – oil painting as well as video image.

These are three definitions, then, but, in effect, three views, each with its own basic principles. Three schools, one should perhaps say. They do share one thing, though: the pretension that comes with the new word, in which image and culture are connected: there is more to be said about images than one would expect at first sight, there is a system in the usage of images. The extent of these pretensions differs, though: from modest to expansive.

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Programme:

Week 1: postmodernism, definitions of consumption and show societies

Week 2: key concepts of visual culture: interpretation of media by means of semiotics, structuralism, connotation/ denotation, content analysis

Week 3: pragmatics, sorts of images

Week 4: audience studies: sorts of audience, effect model, influence of media, uses and gratification model, encoding/decoding

Week 5: cultural approaches

Week 6: Marketing-communication mix

Week 7: commercials and branding: debate and history, marketing and branding, commercial strategies, influence of the commercial culture.

Aims:

The student should have a thorough knowledge of the elements of static and moving images, and of the visual codes and semantic possibilities of visual culture and visual art; he should be able to analyse and discuss the syntacmatic and paradigmatic structure of images; to gain insight in the relationship between visual technology and expression within a specific cultural setting. He should also have an insight in the relation between the media and reality, in the misrepresentations and distortions in the media landscape, among others in the audio-visual and written media.