E59.1347
From the Cinematic to the Handheld: Cultural History of Screens

Course Description
Whether large, small, wide, high-definition, public, personal, shared, or handheld, screens are one of the most pervasive technologies in everyday life. From spaces of work to spaces of leisure, screens are sites for collaboration, performance, surveillance, and resistance. This course traces the cultural history of screens through a range of forms -- from the panorama to the cinema, from the radar system to the television, and from the terminal to the mobile device -- to provide a way of thinking about the development of the screen as simultaneously architectural, material, representational and computational.

Required Texts
(1) All required readings are available on Blackboard.


(3) Laser pointer. Don't lose an eye.

Expectations and Assessment
(1) **Readings are to be completed before class.** Class meetings center on in-depth discussion of concepts from the texts. Weekly meetings are our opportunity to work through texts as a community and the prerequisite for high-quality discussion is that everyone reads material ahead of time. Come to class prepared for discussion.

(2) **Engaged participation.** I will be looking for knowledge-building contributions that show not only that you are trying to understand the readings but also that help contribute to your peers’ understandings. A pre-requisite for active and intelligent participation in discussions is prompt and regular attendance to all classes. Notify me in advance if you are going to miss a class.

(3) **Reading Screens:** As part of this course students will be asked to conduct a series of analyses of a screenscape (broadly understood), in which they both perform a close reading of visual form, and demonstrate how practices within their chosen context are conducted. Analysis 1 will be a brief written report based on extremely close readings of the texts. Details to follow. Analysis 2 will be a written report that blends course materials with original analysis of a screenscape from the world. As part of this exercise you’ll landmark the screenscape under analysis in a shared public map. Finally, students will complete a larger project during the course of the semester on a particular historical or contemporary configuration of the screen. This project may be conducted in collaboration with another student. Final projects may be archived online, as part of our communal assemblage of a cultural history of screens. We will present these during our final class meetings.

(4) **Grading policy:**
   - Participation 25%
   - Screenscape analysis 1 15%
   - Screenscape analysis 2 20%
SAMPLE SYLLABUS – This syllabus is provided as a sample. Some course content may vary.

40%

(5) As members of the Steinhardt community you are expected to uphold the standards of Academic Integrity [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity). Failure to do so will result in an automatic failure on the assignment and harsher actions, if warranted.

(6) Students with special needs should be in contact with me at the beginning of the semester so that we can insure accommodations. Moreover where appropriate students should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, 240 Greene Street, [http://www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).

Class Schedule

PREHISTORY OF THE SCREEN: OPTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

Week 1 – NO CLASS

Week 2 – Introduction & Cartesian Perspectivalism
- Monday, September 13: Introduction
- Wednesday, September 15: Alberti, Leon Battista, Book One. *On painting*

Week 3 – Control Space: Optics, surveillance, and the digital enclosure.

WINDOWS, BIG SCREENS AND URBAN SPACE

Week 4 – Dialectics of Display: Architecture and Vision

Week 5 – Let’s All Go To the Movies: Moving Images and Urban Space
Barthes, Roland. *Upon Leaving the Movie Theater.*

TELEVISION AND COLLECTIVE PRIVATE LIFE

Week 6 – Sitcom Suburbia: The Televisual Formation of Domestic Space
- Monday, October 11: HOLIDAY no class

ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE

Week 7 – Ritual Uses of the Screen
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• Wednesday, October 20: Couldry, N. Media power: Some hidden dimensions, and Playing with boundaries. The Place of Media Power, 39 – 63; 104 – 121.

THE TERMINAL
Week 8 – Command and control: The military origins of the screen

Week 9 – The birth of the Graphical User Interface
• Wednesday, November 3: Laurel, Computers as Theater (excerpt).

Week 10 – The Subject at the Terminal

ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE
SPACES OF FLOW: VISUALIZING THE NETWORK
Week 11 – Points of departure
• Monday November 15: McCarthy, A. Ambient Television pp 117 – 135; 195 – 215

Week 12 – Terminal visions and global capital
• Wednesday, November 24 --- THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY, NO CLASS

EVERYDAY LIFE
Week 13 – Hand-held: Amateurs, Webcams, Visions Incarnate
• Monday, November 29: White, M. (2006). Too close to see, too intimate a screen: Men, women, and webcams. The body and the screen. Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Week 14 – The future of the book, The Disappearance of the Screen
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Week 15 – Final Project Presentations
• Monday, December 13: Presentations
• Wednesday December 15: Presentations & Concluding Remarks