

**HUM2031- Period 5, 2017-2018**  
**Cultural Studies II: Visual Cultures**



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## **1. Contact**

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## **2. Course description**

*What is Cultural Studies?*

Cultural Studies concerns the interdisciplinary study of contemporary culture and the ways in which people use cultural artifacts to construct their own identity, their sense of the world, and other people's identities. A Cultural Studies scholar is interested in the meanings that are produced with the help of cultural artifacts, and in particular in *how* this meaning-creating process works. The cultural artifacts scrutinized by Cultural Studies can be almost anything: paintings, photographs, movies, television series, clothing, make-up, novels, poems, but also technologies, prisons, diseases, or sexuality. When it comes to research objects, Cultural Studies knows no boundaries: anything can be analyzed. In this regard, Cultural Studies differs from "traditional" disciplines, which usually have a well- and narrow-defined object of study.

Within this wide framework this course will explore the theoretical insights garnered by the study of visual cultures. Straddling art history, museum studies, media studies, performance studies, literary studies, and science studies, the field of visual culture at its most expansive combines theories and methods from across the academy. We will investigate visual cultures from these exciting and challenging (inter)disciplinary perspectives.

The course presents visual culture as a ubiquitous facet of modern life that perhaps more than any other component shapes and informs our understanding of self, society, and the world. Hence, it demands our careful attention and critical parsing of its workings at all levels of daily life. Our foray into the field will include examining the benefits of this inclusive mode of analysis, for instance in the range of

objects available for study, as well as the drawbacks, particularly in terms of methodological rigor and the overinvestment in ocularcentric forms of knowledge. The student will be invited to scrutinize their disciplinary assumptions, to develop their toolbox of concepts, and to analyse objects that are rarely considered inside the university.

Following up on the methodological concerns of *Cultural Studies I: Doing Cultural Studies* put forward in the unit on “Politics of Looking”, in *Cultural Studies II: Visual Cultures* we will further delve into how to analyze the visual field and ourselves placed into visual regimes. This course seeks to achieve the following learning objectives:

- To understand the way in which visual culture is conceptualized in relation to its disciplinary, historical, and theoretical context.
- To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different theories of visual culture.
- To select the appropriate theory(ies) and methodological tool(s) for analysis that best suits the material and argument.
- To communicate the way in which different approaches to visual culture mobilize disciplinary points of view using specialized terms.
- To demonstrate awareness of the larger social, political, and sexual issues involved in the academic study of visual culture as it relates to the body/subjectivity.
- To recognize the interdisciplinary nature of visual culture in its historical and contemporary overlap with scientific, artistic, and economic imaginaries.

### 3. Literature

Students are advised to own a copy of the course book:

- Nicholas Mirzoeff (2009). *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (second edition). London, Routledge.  
ISBN: 978-0-415-32759

In addition to several chapters from this book we will be reading several articles from journals in the field of Visual and Cultural Studies as well as excerpts from other books. Each task is accompanied by a list of required readings, most of which can be found in an E-reader on EleUM. Each required reading is followed by a specification of where this reading can be found.

### 4. Attendance

- The minimum attendance requirement is 85% of all tutorial groups and lectures. Your tutor registers your attendance in tutorial groups and the coordinator for the lectures. Exams have a 100% attendance requirement.
- If you do not show up for an exam (including the graded presentations: **please note carefully the dates below**) without notifying the course coordinator beforehand, you will automatically fail the course.
- You are not allowed to enter after the starting time of the tutorials/lectures. Your tutor may allow you to join but has to register you as absent. Since UCM makes use

of the PBL educational model in which the group process takes a central place, as is also the case in this course, it is essential that you do not disturb the meeting by coming in late.

- If you have missed more than 30% of the group meetings you have failed the course. For students who have missed no more than 30% it is possible to do an additional assignment in order to make up for the missed meetings. To qualify for an additional assignment you may not have missed more than 30% of the group meetings and submit a completed request form ‘additional assignment because of insufficient attendance’, within 10 working days after completion of the course to the Office of Student Affairs. After collecting and checking the form the Office of Student Affairs will send the request form to the coordinator. The coordinator of the course shall decide on the validity of the reasons given. If a coordinator decides that you have had a valid reason for not complying with the attendance requirement you will be given an additional assignment. The nature and volume of the additional assignment will be proportional to the number of tutorial group meetings missed, and the assignment must be completed and submitted to the coordinator concerned within 20 working days. Students who receive a pass for an additional assignment will be regarded as having met the attendance requirement and their provisional final grade will be declared valid. The coordinator will inform the Office of Student Affairs about the student’s successful completion of the assignment via e-mail. If the coordinator decides that the reasons for absence were not valid and/or if additional meetings have been missed, no additional assignment will be given and the provisional grade point will be annulled.
- Please note that the schedule may be subject to change. EleUM announcements and email will be the principal means of official communication and making announcements for this course. Make sure to check both EleUM and your university email regularly.

## 5. Assessment and examination

*The assessment in this course consist of two assignments*

- **30%: Group grade, analysis presentation.** On **Tuesday, May 1**, you will give a group presentation and hand in a pdf of your presentation slides to the tutor during the tutorial (See Problem 3 in this course book for further details)
- **70%: Individual grade, analytical essay.** On **Friday, June 1**, you will hand in to the tutor at the tutorial a 3,500-word essay in hardcopy and upload to SafeAssign before 23:59 pm. (See Problem 5 in this course book for further details)

All grades will be rounded off to one decimal. If you earn an average of 5.5 or higher for the entire assessment and meet the attendance requirements, you pass the course. When you pass the course (grade  $\geq 5.5$ ), you are NOT allowed to take a resit to improve the grade. In order to receive a grade for the assignments you will have to do a serious attempt at passing your assignments. If the assignments are not deemed a serious attempt by your tutor you will not receive a grade and you will not qualify for a resit.

*Resit*

In case the final grade of the course is below 5.5, and you have fulfilled all the requirements defined for the course, you are eligible for a resit. In order to be allowed to participate in a resit, you should have met the attendance requirement for a course or be allowed to make up for it by means of an additional assignment. You should also have participated seriously in all three assignments described above. Students who fail a course, i.e. receive an overall grade lower than 5.5, are allowed to do the resit exam. The resit will be a written exam - which concerns all required readings and lectures - that will be scheduled during the resit period. The resit grade will replace your final grade.

## 6. Provisional Course schedule

The tutor meetings will generally follow the PBL format. The tasks of note-taker and discussion leader will be *per problem* and assigned as agreed by the group and the tutor.

### Week 1

- Tuesday - Lecture: *Visual Analysis* –introduction + pre-discussion Problem 1
- Friday - Tutor group: Discussion Problem 1 + pre-discussion Problem 2

### Week 2

- Tuesday -Tutor group: Discussion Problem 2 + pre-discussion Problem 3
- Friday – Tutor group: Discussion Problem 3 + pre-discussion Problem 4

### Week 3

- Tuesday – Lecture: Guest lecture by Rosa Wevers
- Tuesday -Tutor group: Discussion Problem 4 + pre-discussion Problem 5
- Friday – prepare presentations

### Week 4

- Tuesday – Lecture: *Group presentations* (30%)
- Tuesday - Tutor group: Discussion Problem 5 + pre-discussion Problem 6
- Friday – Tutor group: Discussion Problem 6 + pre-discussion Problem 7

### Week 5

- Make sure you watch the movie The Pianist before this meeting (DVD will be distributed)*
- Tuesday - Tutor group: Discussion Problem 7 + pre-discussion Problem 8

### Week 6

- Tuesday – Lecture: Guest lecture by Miriam Meissner
- Tuesday - Tutor group: Discussion Problem 8 + pre-discussion Problem
- Friday - Tutor group: Discussion Problem 9 + evaluation

### Week 7

- prepare final essay

### Week 8 Exam Week

- Friday June 1, 23:59h Deadline analytical essay

## **PROBLEM 1: REPRESENTATION: CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACHES TO VISUALITY**

It seems rather obvious that in order to “represent” the world around us, we need a system of signs, be they written letters, spoken words, or visual symbols. However, the interrelation between language, representation, and reality is not so clear-cut. Here are three very different views on that interrelation.

1.

I never have to think about what things mean. I just know, because the things themselves and the words we use for them tell me. When you *see* a bell tower of a church it is obvious that it has to do with religion: it points up to the heavens – where God is. You know that a bell can ring – so that people are called to church by the sound of the bell that is hanging there. Simple! The meaning of what you encounter is given in the shape of the thing itself. Meaning is printed on the surface of everything, and words simply reflect that surface meaning. You have a word for everything that exists. “Church” is a church. That is a one-to-one relationship. You can compare it to shooting a picture: the word is the film, on which things are imprinted.

2.

I have a unique outlook on reality and on myself. I am an artist, you know. So when I see a church I see something very different than other people: I see colors, shapes, I do not care about the function of the church as a religious relict – that is nonsense to me. I choose my words in such a way that I am the only one who really knows what they mean. I create my own world in language; I decide what my texts are all about. I want to go beyond cultural conventions as they are: fixed, bourgeois, dull, unimaginative. Everybody should live more according to their own unique perspective and the language that expresses and creates it. But nowadays you find the truly original people only in the madhouse.

3.

Language is a social thing. You share it with the community that you are a part of. If everybody would connect their own meanings to the words we share we could not even communicate with each other. We look at the world through a set of conventions that we slowly pick up during the process of socialization. So if we see a church, a whole set of meanings is mobilized, about religion, our upbringing, our beliefs and the beliefs of others, we know what people do in churches, we have our own experiences in them – but none of these associations is totally unique, we share them with other people. It is not us but the common culture that constructs meaning through language.

Some of you may already have come across the concept of “representation” in the course *HUM1003 Cultural Studies I*. Do you already have some ideas about what it could be? Maybe you can recall some theories about representation from prior courses? How does representation relate to other important aspects of our culture, such as the production of culture, the consumption of culture, the regulation of culture, and matters of identity formation?

## **Required readings**

- Bal, M. (2003). Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture. *Journal of Visual Culture* 2(1): 5-32.
- Hall, S. (2013). The work of representation. In S. Hall et al. *Representation. Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 1-30). London: Sage Publications.
- Mirzoeff, N. (2009). Introduction: Global Visual Cultures: Paradox and Comparison & The Division of the Sensible (Keyword). In *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1-20). (Course Book)

## PROBLEM 2: METHODS: HOW DO WE LOOK?

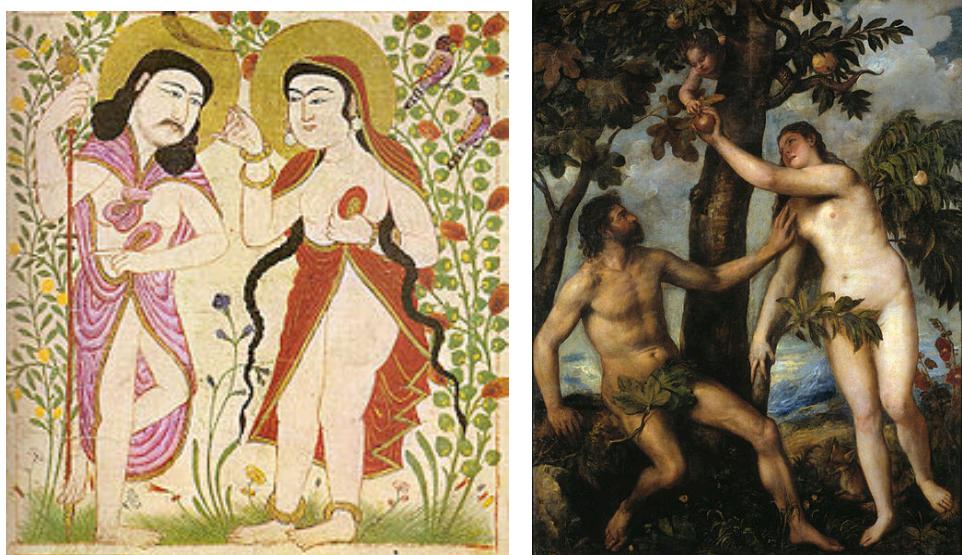


Figure 1. *Manafi al-Hayawan* (The Useful Animals), Figure 2. *Adam and Eve* by Titian in Italy. c. 1550  
Adam and Eve from Maragheh in Iran, c.1294–99

Every object of visual culture comes with a set of directions telling you how to look at it, whether that is through the visual codes of its genre, the assumed cultural context, or in the object itself. Where does your eye travel in each of these paintings? How does it glance, graze, or focus and in which directions? The paintings are each telling the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Through hand gesture, line of sight, color, tone, and perspective we have presented different versions of this story. What is the effect for you of the flatness of the image on the left, versus the depth of the image on the right? As well, this story is about knowledge, gender, and awareness of sexuality. How are these issues formally discussed in the paintings?

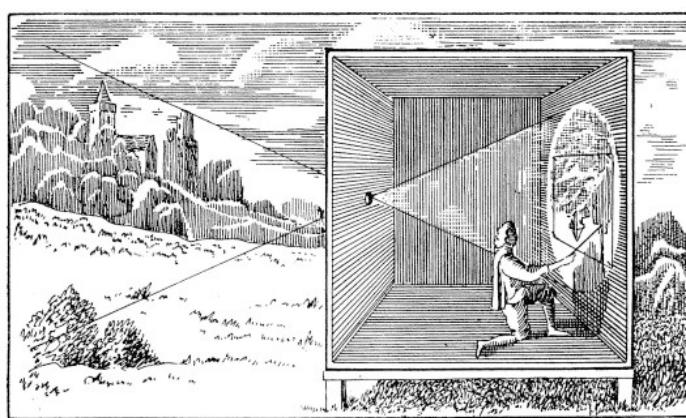


Figure 3. *Camera Obscura* (darkened chamber) optical device used by an artist

Artists and scientists have used all kinds of technologies to help them see better. Gadgets like the camera obscura (above) projects an image of the surrounding onto a screen so that the artist can trace it exactly, though it is upside down. This ancient device lent the prize of accuracy in a perfect imitation and was a forerunner of the photographic camera and film camera.

While such visual devices enable the detailed recording and mapping of the world, the choice of what becomes documented, and in what style is of great interest to Cultural Studies scholars. Particularly when it comes to the human body, who is looked at, who is visually marked as different, and who does the looking are all important topics of investigation. Hence, we can locate a difference within the power relation of the observer and observed, the clothed and nude/naked, and through the marking of racialized and disabled bodies versus the unmarked normal bodies. Concepts such as “the gaze” point to a human anxiety that comes with the awareness that one is an object subject to another’s vision. Do you experience the gaze coming from others? Where? When? Do you feel that you can look back, and challenge that gaze? Or, do you feel that you are able to exert the gaze in some contexts? Which?

### Required readings

- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. BBC First and second episode of series. 30 min films broken up into 8min uploads on youtube:
  - First Episode: Part 1/4: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnfB-pUm3eI> - keep clicking through to find 2/4, 3/4, 4/4.
  - Second Episode: Part 1/4:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u72AIab-Gdc> - keep clicking through to find 2/4, 3/4, 4/4.
- Mirzoeff, N. (2009). Chapter 1: Sight Becomes Vision: From al-Haythem to Perspective & The Fetish and the Gaze (Keyword). In *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (pp. 21-44 & 169-175). (Course Book)
- hooks, b. (1992) The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators. In Amelia Jones ed. *The Feminist and Visual Culture Reader* (pp. 107-117).
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2002 ). The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography. In S. L. Snyder, B.J. Brueggemann, and R. Garland-Thomson eds. *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, (pp. 189-205) New York: Modern Language Association.

### **PROBLEM 3: FASHION: THE SEMIOTICS OF ‘SEXUALIZATION’ IN ADVERTISEMENTS (ASSIGNMENT I)**

In the past years, there has been a growing debate about the so called ‘sexualization’ of Western societies. Politicians, conservatives as well as liberal ones, and feminist have put the item on the agenda, pointing at possible negative effects of overt sexualized pictures of women, and to a lesser extent men, in the public space. Especially advertisements that display women in sexualized positions are suspect. They are assumed to reduce women to sexual objects.

In her semiotic analysis of several advertisements in which women and men are on a sexualized display, Rosalind Gill (2009) shows us that matters are far more complex. The meanings that these type of advertisements produce can vary considerably: According to her, different people are sexualized in different ways, which becomes clear if we pay attention to the way, in which for instance gender, ethnicity/race, and class intersect.

For this assignment you are to divide in three groups. Each group is going to perform a semiotic analysis of two advertisements (**see Appendix A**) from campaigns of the brands Armani, Prabal Gurung, Harvey Nichols, Suitsupply, Sloggi, and Tom Ford in which women and/or men seem to be sexualized. In this assignment, you are asked to perform an in depth, detailed semiotic analysis of the ways in which women and men are represented in the fashion advertisement assigned to you. What kind of meanings are being produced? Are the women and men being sexualized? If so, in what ways?

What is a semiotic analysis? It is the study of signs. French language theorist Roland Barthes was one of the founding fathers of a method of analysis called semiotics. For many of his ideas he drew on the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure. At the heart of both de Saussure’s and Barthes’ thinking lies the idea that a signifier and a signified come together to form a meaningful sign.

Together let’s look at picture below and break down what all the visible signs are to better understand how they come to mean within this image. First: List the different elements that you perceive in the picture: the clothes, colors, settings, attributes, etcetera. We call these concrete aspects of the image (what is THERE) the signifiers. Second: Now discuss for each element what larger concept it might represent: formality or informality, official-ness or casual-ness, anti-bourgeois criticism, romance, sensuality, business, and so on. These larger concepts that are referred to (what is in CULTURAL MEANING) we call signifieds.



**Figure 1. Lady Gaga for Versace Spring 2014**

### **Required Readings**

- Gill, Rosalind (2009). Beyond the ‘Sexualization of Culture’ Thesis: An Intersectional Analysis of ‘Sixpacks’, ‘Midriffs’ and ‘Hot Lesbians’ in Advertising. *Sexualities*, 12(2), 137-160. Available online via  
<http://sex.sagepub.com/content/12/2/137>
- Owyong, Y S M. (2009) Clothing semiotics and the social construction of power relations. *Social Semiotics* 19(2): 191-211. Available online via  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10350330902816434>
- Attwood F. (2011). Sex and the Media. In *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media* K. Ross ed., (pp. 457-469). Download (26 pages) from  
<http://www.feonaattwood.com/blog/wpcontent/uploads/2011/09/sexandthemedia.pdf>

## PROBLEM 4: MEDICINE: THE CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF BODY IMAGES

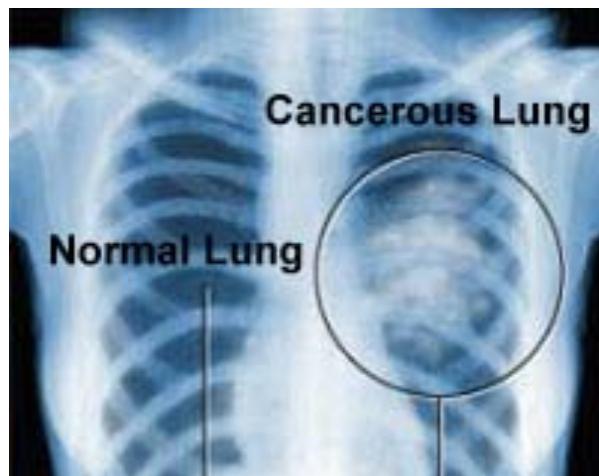


Figure 1. X-ray of a cancerous lung.  
From [http://www.terrordaily.com/reports/Gene\\_found\\_to\\_protect\\_against\\_lung\\_cancer\\_999.html](http://www.terrordaily.com/reports/Gene_found_to_protect_against_lung_cancer_999.html), 2011.

In medical science the body, health and disease are often thought of as natural phenomenon, there to be discovered. When we consult a specialist because of pain in our chest and we are put behind an x-ray machine, we do not think that this machine will construct or represent our body. On the contrary, we believe that the x-ray pictures are going to show us what is “really” going on in our body.

But is this truly the case? Historian Charles Rosenberg claims that “[I]n some ways, disease does not exist until we have agreed that it does, by perceiving, naming, and responding to it” (*Framing Disease* xiii). According to social constructivist scholars, our definitions of illness, health, and bodies are framed by discourses, i.e., by the conglomerate of texts, images, behavior, and material objects that surrounds sickness and health in a given time and place. The reality of the body is then never directly knowable or accessible. It can only be grasped through discursive mediation - the mediation of an x-ray machine, for example.

[W]e cannot but think of our bodies through the strange colours, shadows, pixels and resonances that have come to inhabit our bodies and constitute our identities. For has not each and everyone of us been there, in a hospital, attended by a technician, some nurses, a medical specialist, a radiologist or echographist, often behind a glass wall to protect them against radiation or other kinds of invisible phenomena? Here you are, partly naked but not yet to the bone, positioned in a specific manner and ready to be exposed to a ray, a strong magnet, a sound wave. And some time later the image appears: of a heart, an elbow, a breast, a fetus, part of the brain, moving still, in black and white or full primary colours. But this is your own brain; your elbow; your child-to-be. There is a good chance too that we’ve all come to think of and envisage our bodies at least partly in terms of such images.

Bernike Pasveer, “Affected Bodies: On Medical Imaging Technologies and the Bodies Imagined.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 31.4 (2000): 660

In reading through this passage do you recognize the experience Pasveer describes as identifying with images as your self? How has interacting with medical images informed your understanding of the body, or health and disease?

The abstract images that medical imaging devices create require training to decipher, such as a MRI or ultrasound. Yet, they also make use of cultural codes like color and perspective that allow a popular audience to feel as though they can peer into the inner recesses of the ever more transparent body. In this sense cultural analysis is an appropriate method for investigating the uses and meanings of medical images both within and outside of medicine. Consider the debates around abortion or lung cancer. Far from the domain of a clinic, how are popular images of a fetus or cancer cell presented, and used discursively?

### **Required readings**

- Meynell, L. (2012 ). The Politics of Pictured Reality: Locating the Object from Nowhere in fMRI. In R. Blum et al. eds., *Neurofeminism. Issues at the Intersection of Feminist Theory and Cognitive Science*. (pp. 11-29).
- Sturken, M. & Cartwright L. (2001) Scientific Looking, Looking at Science. In M. Sturken and L. Cartwright, eds., *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (279-300). [E-Reader]
- Van Dijck, Jose (2005). Mediated Bodies and the Ideal of Transparency. In *The Transparent Body: A Cultural Analysis of Medical Imaging*. (pp. 3-19) [E-Reader]

## **PROBLEM 5: MUSEUMS: REPRESENTING OTHERNESS (ASSIGNMENT II)**

At the International Colonial and Trades Exhibition in Amsterdam, 1883, the Dutch colonies were represented by a group of Javanese people who lived in an Indian “kampong” consisting of houses from different parts of the Dutch East-Indies (contemporary Indonesia). This makes the Amsterdam exhibition the first to put colonial subjects on display as objects. Fifteen years later, at the National Exhibition of Women’s Labor in The Hague, the Dutch West Indies were represented by a Surinam woman named Louise Yda.

Nowadays, as a result of de-colonization and a related post-colonial ethics, such “lively” exhibitions are unacceptable. The display of colonial subjects is considered, at the very least, to be an act of bad taste, but more likely as shameless imperial racism. It is understood as a function of an asymmetric power difference – a power difference that subsequently gets concealed by the display’s aesthetic and romantic representation of colonial people. Hence, in our times, anthropological and historical museums that exhibit cultures far away and/or long ago, do not display “real people” anymore.

Art, anthropological, and archeological museums alike face the question of how then to exhibit representations of “other” cultures, with visual means. Through what strategies of visual signification can museums “properly” exhibit “foreign” cultures, and what power dynamics underlie these strategies?

For this assignment (**see Appendix B**): each person will visit a museum of his or her choice, anywhere in the region. You can go together to the same museum if you like, but each essay must be individually developed and written.

### **Required readings**

- Butler, S. R. (2000). The politics of exhibiting culture: legacies and possibilities. *Museum Anthropology*, 23, 74–92. Available online via <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/mua.2000.23.3.74/pdf>
- Mirzoeff, N. (2009). Chapter 5: Imperial Transcultures: From Kongo to Congo & Race (Keyword) (pp. 127-152) Coursebook
- Coombes, A.E. (2003). Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities. In *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (pp. 231-246)
- Porter, G. (2003). Seeing Through Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums. In *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (pp. 104-116).

## PROBLEM 6: GRAPHIC NOVELS: READING NARRATIVE THROUGH FRAMES

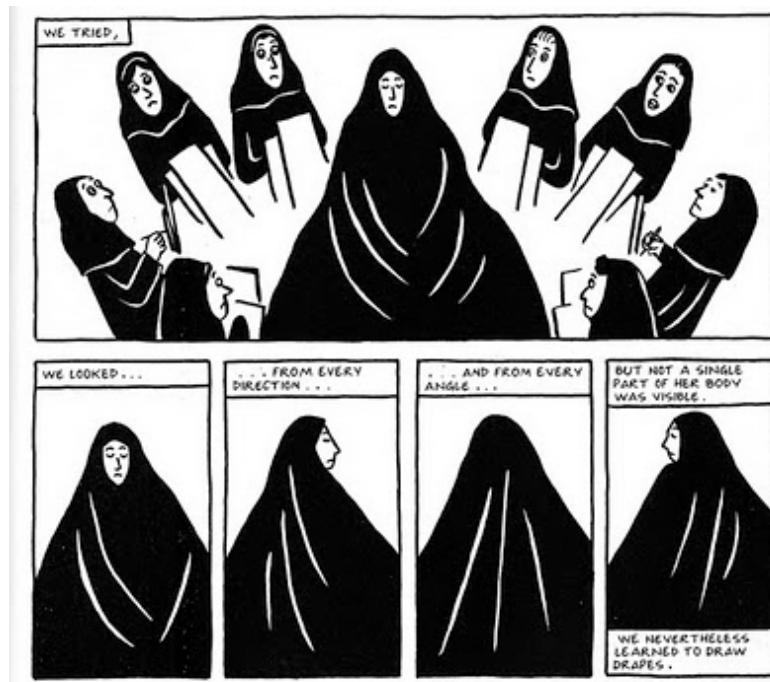


Figure 1. Frame from Marjane Satrapi (2004).  
*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon.

Comics and graphic novels are cultural forms that combine images and words to tell a story. They are a narrative form that challenges the division of literature and visual cultures. Scholars point out how this popular art form defies genre, taste cultures, and disciplinary divisions. While graphic novels can be fictional, non-fictional, comic books tend to be serialized, but a comic can also be a stand-alone story. Do you read comics? What is your association with them? Above is a “frame” from the graphic novel by Iranian artist Marjane Satrapi, which depicts an episode from her youth using a stark black and white stylization of the story. How does this visual choice tie-in with the anecdote being told about a drawing class?

### Required readings

- Chute, H. (2008). Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative. *PMLA* 123(2): 452-465.
- Davis, R.G. (2005). A Graphic Self. *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 27(3): 264-279.
- Royal, D.P. (2007). Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative. *MELUS* 32(3), Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative: 7-22
- Satrapi, M. (2004). *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon. (excerpts)

## PROBLEM 7: CINEMA AND SPECTATORSHIP THROUGH FEMINIST THEORY



Stills from *The Piano* (1993) by Jane Campion

Here are some stills of *The Piano*. Now that we have all watched the film, let us discuss how the film positions the spectator.

Feminist film scholars have sought to draw attention to the ways in which a film depicts gendered and racialized subjects on screen. Do you recall Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" and bell hooks's text on the "oppositional gaze" (cf. Problem 2)? What would a "colonial gaze" imply? How are women represented in *The Piano*? How are the Maori represented in *The Piano*? What role can the film *The Piano* play in the way "white" New Zealanders of European descent come to terms with their colonial past? Vice versa, what can the film signify for the Maori people?

Inspired by the continental philosophy of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), feminist film scholars increasingly become interested in the question how the off-screen spectator gains entrance to a film. As such, they have tried to shift the focus back from the formal analysis of film to the embodied experience of the spectator him- or herself. Where does the pleasure of viewing a film come from? How do you relate to the images of *The Piano*? Would you say that your engagement with the film is purely visual, or does the film invite your other senses to respond as well? How does the body make sense of the images on screen?

### Required readings

Dyson, L. (1995). "The Return of the Repressed? Whiteness, Femininity, and Colonialism in *The Piano*." In: *Screen* 36, 3, pp. 267-76.

Pihama, L. (1994). "Are Films Dangerous? A Maori Woman's Perspective on *The Piano*." In: *Hectate* 20, 2, pp. 239-242.

Sobchack, V. (2004). What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh. In: *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (pp. 53-84). Berkeley: University of California Press.

(This is a difficult text – just focus on the main points and the parts referring to *The Piano*.)

## PROBLEM 8: PHOTOGRAPHY: THE AESTHETICS OF REALISM



Figure 1. From The Guardian Online, 2014.



Figure 2. From The Economist, late 2003-2004

These sketched drawings on the left are based on reports given by Kim Kwang-il (published February 18, 2014), who spent two years in a North Korean prison where he was tortured, starved and witness to the deaths of his inmates. The photograph on the right is one of the most famous of a prisoner held by American military police and CIA personnel at the Iraq Abu Ghraib prison. The image even made it to the cover of *The Economist* in 2004 when the torture and abuse allegations went public. When comparing a drawing based on testimony versus snapshots which for you are more reliable? More shocking or touching? More realistic? Realism is an attempt to show a perspective on something that makes the viewer experience either a visual, social, or emotional sense of accuracy. Hence, realism is a style to convey truthfulness.

Photography is regularly touted to be a highly accurate medium, and therefore closely related to realist aesthetics, because it registers the world directly. In photography and film studies, or lens-based art, the term “indexicality” is generally identified as coming from Charles Pierce’s semiotic system. Most scholars agree that an indexical image requires a physical relationship between the object and the photographic image. Furthermore, this relationship becomes registered on the photographic negative when it is transformed chemically. In “What’s the Point of An Index?, Or Faking Photographs ” Tom Gunning reminds us that a photograph’s indexicality relies on supporting evidence for its truth claim, that is, the rules of discourse must corroborate with recognizability of the object represented (*Still/Moving* 2008: 24). Thus while an indexical image appears to be a direct imprint of reality, its ability to resemble an object the viewer recognizes, or iconicity, solidifies its truth claim. Gunning’s point is that all photographs are indexical signs: they are visually accurate in terms of an imprinting of reality by capturing light information, but they can still of course be aesthetically abstract, lacking a recognizable object.



Figure 3. Hippolyte Bayard “Autoportrait en noyé” (*Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*), 1840

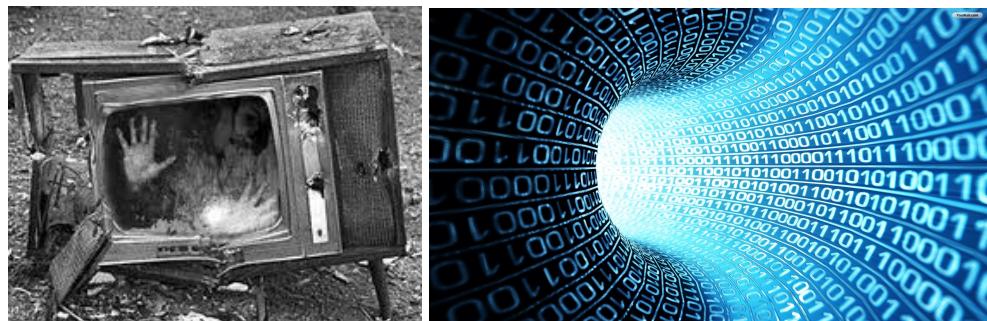
From the very beginning of photographic technologies tricking the viewer into misrecognizing objects, faking scenes, and altering the image was a part of the aesthetic practice. Amelia Jones’s essay “Body” uses the example *par excellence* of Hippolyte Bayard’s staged self-portrait “Autoportrait en noyé” (*Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*) from 1840, which facetiously claims to show the artist as dead (*Critical Terms in Art History* 2003). With the instigated confusion over whether the subject/artist is dead/alive here, Jones notes that from the very beginning of photography the desire for the body to be indexed in its fullness and truth, and thereby the self, is belied. The white deathly sheen on Bayard’s body, along with the darkness of his hands that he describes as rot setting in, are the markers of its chemical processing, but also appear to index a relation to his (faked) death.

Jones follows Roland Barthes in arguing that the artistic medium of photography “was developed at least partly out of the desire to forestall disappearance (death),” yet, cruelly “ends up indicating nothing other than our mortality” (2003: 259). Beyond the content of depicting death in a style of realism, would you agree that photography’s aesthetic charge turns on the axis of bringing its subject to life and also to its death by capturing the subject in the past?

### Required readings

- Barthes, R. (1980). *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage Books. [excerpts]
- Sliwinski, S. (2009). On Photographic Violence. *Photography & Culture* 2(3): 303-316.
- Mirzoeff, N. (2009). Chapter 10: The Death of the Death of Photography & The Abu Ghraib Photographs (Breakout Image) & Chapter 12: Watching War (pp. 250-263 & 287-309) Coursebook

## PROBLEM 9: CHALLENGES TO OCULARCENTRICISM



Visual culture as a category of analysis has been contested both from a historical standpoint as well as from within televisual and digital approaches. Why do you think networks might be considered non-visual?

Too much emphasis on the eye (*ocular*) over other senses means that sight and vision are privileged when studying past and contemporary culture. We miss out on the ways in which power structures social relations through the other senses, like touch, taste, smell, and hearing, or how power/knowledge works synaesthetically, drawing on more than one sense. Think back through the other problem units and consider how vision interrelates to other senses, and to language. Do you think vision rightfully dominates our study of culture, that it is the primary sense to perceive the world and its representations?

### Required readings

- Mirzoeff, N. (2009). Visuality (Keyword) & Networks (Keyword) & Chapter 9: Discrete States: Digital World from the Difference Engine to Web 2.0 (pp. 89-93 & 218-244) Coursebook
- Jay, M. (1988). The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism. *Poetics Today* 9(2): 307-326.
- Romanyshyn, R. (1993/ 2009). The Despotic Eye and its Shadow: Media Image in the Age of Literacy. In *Images: A Reader*. S. Manghani et al eds. (pp. 183-188).
- Wilson, M.L. (2004). Visual Culture: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis? In *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*. V.R. Schwartz and J. M. Przyblyski eds. (pp. 26-33).

## APPENDIX A

### Assignment I – group analytical presentation Fashion: The Semiotics of ‘Sexualization’ in Advertisements

- In analyzing the advertisements you should make use of Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, sign, signifier and signified.
- Especially pay attention to the way in which identity categories such as gender, ethnicity/race, class, sexuality in the advertisements possibly intersect.
- Make explicit use of the required readings for this problem.

You are to present your analysis in class during the discussion (a PowerPoint presentation, max 15 min). The presentation will be graded by your tutor.

#### Group 1:



Figure 1. Rafael Nadal for Emperio Armani Jeans Spring 2011

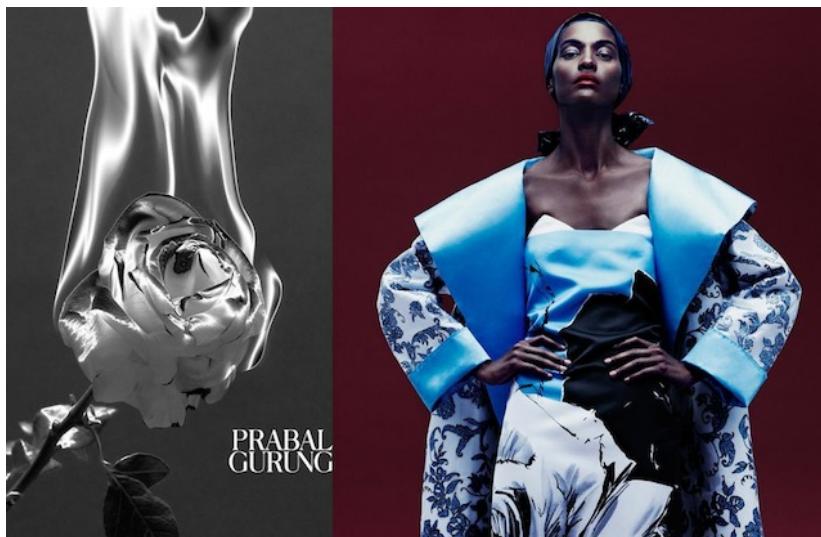


Figure 2. Liya Kebede by Dan Jackson for Prabal Gurung's Spring 2014 Ad Campaign.

**Group 2:**



Figure 3. Tom Ford Menswear Spring/Summer 2008



Figure 4. Suitsupply 'Find your perfect fit', Spring/Summer 2018

**Group 3:**



Figure 5. Harvey Nichols Department Store Opening, Fall 2012



Figure 6. Johnny Heitinga for Sloggi Summer 2010

## APPENDIX B

### Assignment II - analytical essay Museums: Representing Otherness

Each student is going to write an analytical essay in which you provide a critical evaluation of the way in which cultural otherness is exhibited in a specific anthropological, archeological, or fine art museum. There are many to choose from in the region, in the Netherlands, and Belgium. In order to do so, you are to research, visit, and reflect on a museum of your choice. Use the questionnaire as a starting point to help guide your attention during your visit (below). The aim is to evaluate the ways otherness is exhibited in the museums. Make explicit use of the required readings for this problem in your essays and make sure to integrate the learning goals as well.

UCM is willing to reimburse your entrance fee ONLY if you are able to provide proof of purchase (a receipt and the ticket itself). Hand it in to the coordinator on the day of the presentation, no later. Travel costs cannot be reimbursed.

This assignment is a 3,500 word essay (excluding references), which counts for 70% of your overall grade.

#### DEADLINE

**Friday, June 1:** upload to SafeAssign before 23:59.

#### Questionnaire about the Visual Language and Politics of Otherness in Museums

This Questionnaire is divided in two parts: the first part addresses the semiotics or visual language of the display, the second part addresses the discourse or the politics of the display with a focus on the production of otherness.

##### *I The Visual Language of the Museum, or 'how is it done'?*

In this part you analyze the visual forms that are used to produce meaning within the museum.

**1.a** What are the main characteristics of the exhibition in the sense of how things are shown or demonstrated? Which of the forms are used and how do they interact?

**1.b** Which media are used in the museum:

- sound / music
- film
- text
- interactive devices

**2.** How is 'the story' told? By making use of

- scenes from the 'real life'?
- artifacts?
- pictures?

- texts?
- sound

**3.** How is the spectator drawn into the exhibition / museum; how is he/she addressed and ‘co-opted’?

**4.** Does the Museum / exhibition reflect on its own exhibition techniques? The story told? The history of the museum and the origin of its collection?

## *II The Politics of Otherness of the Museum*

In this part you analyze the politics of the Museum: the production of meaning through discourse. You will focus here on the production of notions of otherness in the stories that are told, and in the knowledge that is behind the exhibition or the display. What is at stake here is the social construction of differences between different cultures and the effects of these constructions.

In which ways are the “Western” culture and the “other” culture presented as different from each other in exhibitions in museums? Are differences in these exhibitions represented in a way that contribute to the traditional hierarchical order between “us” and the “other”, or is this hierarchy put into question?

**1.a** Which roles/positions are assigned to “other” cultures and to the “western” culture in the museum?

- As conservators
- As a person (the subject of the presentation)
- As the craftsmen or makers of objects and art
- As figures which are being depicted on objects and art
- As the people who use objects

**1.b** What are the consequences of the sort and number of presentations you came across for the social construction of “otherness”? Do you think that certain groups of people are excluded or included in the exhibitions in certain ways? What does this tell you about power relations?

**2.** What about the title and subtitles of the exhibition? Do they leave room for thinking about diversity? Which titles do and which don’t? Can you think of titles that bring about the opposite?

**3.** How ‘general’ are the accompanying so called general texts / film / spoken comment? Whose point of view do they represent? Find some examples of mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion at work in these texts.

**4.a** Can you detect any differences or similarities in the ways “ethnic others” and “western” people are depicted on pictures and paintings?

**4.b** What do these differences/similarities tell you about the social relationships? Are they elucidated in the accompanying texts?

**4.c** Score the number of times “ethnic others” and “western” people are presented in several different ways.