

Syllabus for FSCOM201: *Visual Culture*
Media & Cultural Theory
fall 2009
Instructor: Ishita Sinha Roy, Ph.D.

Course Hours: M/W/F 1.30-2.20 pm Classroom Location: Doane Hall 104
Office Hours: Mon: 5-7.30pm, Wed: 12.00-3.30 pm. Other times by appointment.
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Phone: (814) 332-4384

Please note that the sign up sheet for office hour appointments is posted on my office door. If you are unable to make a meeting, please take your name off the list or e-mail me 24 hours in advance so I can accommodate someone else during that time. If you cannot make it during my office hours, please let me know and I will arrange an alternate meeting time with you.

Please note that I do not check e-mail over the weekend. Therefore, please plan your consultations in a timely manner so you can contact me during office hours, or e-mail me during the week. Please also keep in mind that I may not be able to answer your e-mail immediately.



This class is a critical approach to visual and cultural studies. We will be studying various theories that inform ways of 'looking' at and understanding popular and media culture. Students will be applying various theoretical lenses to analyze the form, content, and function of artifacts from both popular culture and commodity culture. The course will also introduce several approaches central to cultural and visual studies, such as semiotics, psychoanalytic criticism, audience ethnographies, political economy, film theory, and critical theory.

Required Readings:

1. Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
2. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*.
3. Additional readings may be supplied as handouts or made available on the electronic course reserves.

It is also recommended that you keep a copy of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Sixth Edition) at hand since your assignments should follow the format and citation style outlined in this manual. You may purchase a copy from the college bookstore, or refer to the handbook at the Pelletier library reference desk or the Learning Commons.

Class Etiquette

- Please plan to be in class within the first seven minutes of the lecture period. You will be marked absent on my attendance roster once this grace period is done. You would not be late at a business meeting, and developing that consciousness in college is a good start. If you find the door locked, please do not knock or try to get in.
 - Cell phones must be turned off before we begin class. Please do not think that you can silently text while in class. If I detect cell phone use in my class, I will take that breach very seriously.
 - I do not encourage the use of laptops in class. Please be prepared to take notes the old-fashioned way so you develop the habit of listening and putting down content in your own words, rather than blindly typing in information as data.
 - Your participation grade counts for an entire letter grade. Please therefore make an attempt to contribute meaningfully to classroom discussions. Since this is an academic environment, please be respectful of others' feelings in expressing your point-of-view. Freedom of expression comes with responsibility in exercising it.
 - If you require any accommodation for taking notes or during exams, please provide documentation through the Learning Commons (332-2898) ASAP.
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Class E-mail Etiquette:

- I will e-mail the class the class plan for the following week, the previous Friday. Please make sure to check your Allegheny College account regularly, since important class announcements may also be communicated to you electronically.
 - Please note that I do not check e-mail over the weekend. Therefore, kindly plan your consultations in a timely manner so you can contact me during office hours, or e-mail me during the week. Please also keep in mind that I may not be able to answer your e-mail immediately.
 - When you email me, please do not use ornate backgrounds or icons in the body of your email. This is a formal document, and therefore the tone and content should be appropriate. Please also put the course name and number in the subject header of the email (e.g. FSCOM201, followed by a topic line).
 - Email is a legal document so please keep this in mind when communicating with your peers or the rest of the campus community.
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Course Requirements:

There will be a midterm paper, short written assignments, and one group project with a presentation.

Midterm Paper	20% of final grade (in class on 10/30)
Final Project (with Presentation)	30% of final grade (presentations on: 12/4; 12/7)
Response Papers/Creative Assignments	30% of final grade (dates TBA)
Class Participation	20% of final grade

Assignments that are not submitted on the due date WILL NOT be accepted without formal documentation such as a medical note from a doctor. Arrangements for any make-up assignment have to be made by the student concerned within a week of the original assignment due date. Please do not approach the instructor at the end of the semester with requests for make-ups for exams and/or assignments.

Please DO NOT leave assignments/exams in my mailbox or under my office door. Please hand all assignments to me in person on the due date, or upload them to your sakai sropbox if so instructed. The only exceptions are if I give you WRITTEN (e-mail) permission to do so, or to hand in an assignment on a different date than the assigned due date.

Plagiarism Policy:

Please review the section on Plagiarism and the Honor Code outlined in the Allegheny Student handbook (The Compass). The Department of Communication Arts has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism cases. Any student suspected of plagiarism will automatically be referred to the Honor Committee for further review and sanctions. If you have any doubts or questions regarding citation, please consult me well IN ADVANCE of when your assignments are due.

Having your friends or family members help you with your assignments constitutes plagiarism. Failing to cite sources from which you have quoted material, or borrowed ideas, also constitutes plagiarism. This includes ideas from lectures as well.

Criteria for Class Participation Grade:

A for class participation is awarded when students regularly initiate discussion. This means coming to class thoroughly familiar with the assigned reading and, therefore, prepared to raise questions, to open discussion, to identify topics of interest in the reading, and actively engage other students in the discussion. (This does not mean monopolizing a discussion, or shutting others out, or talking for its own sake rather than to make a point about the topic). [20-18 points]

B for class participation is awarded to students who participate regularly and productively in class discussion, who are prepared, and who are willing to engage. **B** discussants differ from **A** students in that the latter are self-starters who do not rely on the instructor's questions to set the agenda for discussion. [17-15 points]

C for class participation is awarded to those who participate on a regular, but less frequent basis than the **B** student. **C** discussants will be prepared for class, but their contributions will indicate that less thought has been given to assigned materials. [14-12 points]

D for class participation is given to those who contribute infrequently to the discussion and whose contributions do not appear to arise from thoughtful consideration of the assignments. [11-09 points]

F for non-participation in class discussion. Of course, participation is impossible if you don't attend class. Frequent absences mandate **F** grades. [08-00 points]

IF YOU MISS CLASS IN ORDER TO COMPLETE PROJECTS FOR OTHER CLASSES, IT WILL SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.

Grade Appeals:

A grade appeal must be submitted within 48 hrs. of receiving the grade for the specific assignment. It must be in writing (e-mail) and should include clear reasons that are fact-based (not emotional) as to why the student feels that s/he deserves a higher grade. No late appeals will be considered. In the case of the final exam, you may appeal the grade by the end of the first week of the following semester.

Understanding Your Grade:

Your total on all assignments will be converted to a percentage score, which will be translated to a letter grade as per the scale shown below:

A = 100 - 96	C+ = 79 - 76
A- = 95 - 90	C = 75 - 73
B+ = 89 - 86	C- = 72 - 70
B = 85 - 83	D = 69 - 66
B- = 82 - 80	F = 65 and less

Attendance Policy:

You are allowed up to three unexcused absences. Each undocumented absence after that will result in a reduction of your final course grade by half a grade point. This means that your fourth unexcused absence will reduce your grade from a potential A to an A-, the fifth absence will further reduce this to a B+ and so on. Please make sure that you keep track of your attendance since no appeals are permitted after the last day of classes. Habitual tardiness (coming late to class) results in a significant reduction of the participation grade.

TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

(This schedule will change according to class pace and other exigencies)

UNIT 1: Visual Culture & Visual Technologies

Wed 9/16

Introduction; partial review of Ch 1 and 2 from textbook. Homework: review Ch 1, 2, 4 from Sturken & Cartwright for in-class exercise on Friday

Fri 9/18	Ch 1, 2, and 4 from Sturken & Cartwright (in-class exercise).
Mon 9/21	Ch 1, 2, and 4 from Sturken & Cartwright (in-class exercise) contd.
Wed: 9/23	Ch 5 "Visual Technologies, Image Reproduction, & the Copy"(complete chapter). Viewing of National Geographic's "The Search for the Afghan Girl" (2002)

Required: attend Kathy Eldon (Creative Activism Workshop. 9/25 from 12-2 pm in Tillotson room, Tippie Center. Must register online by 9/20 at <https://alleghenycollege.wufoo.com/forms/creative-activism-workshop/>)

Fri 9/25	NO CLASS (CREATIVE ACTIVISM WORKSHOP INSTEAD)
Mon 9/28	Complete screening. Start discussion on Baudrillard (posted on sakai).

UNIT 2: Media & Advertising

Wed 9/30	Complete discussion on Baudrillard and Ch 5 in context of the documentary; Creative Commons; digital images; film. Sturken and Cartwright, Ch 6, "Media in Everyday Life" (223-236)
Fri 10/02	Sturken and Cartwright, Ch 6, "Media in Everyday Life" (223-236) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masses & Mass Media • Media Forms • Broadcasting, narrowcasting, webcasting
Mon 10/05	Discuss Asst 1 and midterm. Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 6, "Media in Everyday Life" (236-264). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of mass media critiques • Media and Democratic Potential • Public Sphere • National and Global Media Events • Image Flows
Wed 10/07	NO CLASS (ATTEND GREG MORTENSON EVENT INSTEAD). FALL BREAK: OCTOBER 10-13, 2009
Wed 10/14	In class assignment on Mortenson. Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 7, "Advertising, Consumer Culture & Desire" (265-293). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer Societies • Envy, Desire & Belonging • Commodity Culture, Brands/Branding
Fri 10/16	Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 7, "Advertising, Consumer Culture & Desire" (294-306). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing Cool

- Anti-ads and Culture Jamming

UNIT 3: Audiences & Spectatorship

Mon 10/19	<p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 2, "Viewers Make Meaning" (49-75).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended meaning; Encoding/Decoding • Aesthetics and Taste • Ideological Subjects
Wed 10/21	<p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 2, "Viewers Make Meaning" (75-92).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reception • Appropriation and re-appropriation <p>Midterm due in drop box by 4pm as Word document.</p>
Fri 10/23	<p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 3, "Modernity, Spectatorship, Power & Knowledge" (93-104).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Subject in Modernity • Spectatorship
Mon 10/26	NO CLASS (ATTEND DR. VANDANA SHIVA TALK INSTEAD)
Wed 10/28	Creative Activism presentation and materials due in class
Fri 10/30	Creative Activism presentation and materials due in class
Mon 11/02	<p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 3, "Modernity, Spectatorship, Power & Knowledge" (105-123).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourse and Power • The Gaze and the Other • The Gaze in Psychoanalysis Wed
11/04	<p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 3, "Modernity, Spectatorship, Power & Knowledge" (123-140).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and the Gaze' • Changing Concepts of the Gaze
Fri 11/06	<p>In class assignment on Dr. Shiva's presentation. Assign Final Group Project.</p> <p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 8. "Postmodernism" (307-328)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postmodern Visual Cultures • Postmodern Subject • Reflexivity
Mon 11/09	<p>Sturken & Cartwright, Ch 8. "Postmodernism" (328-346)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastiche, Parody and the Remake • Space & Geography
Fri 11/13	<p>Sturken & Cartwright Ch 9. "Scientific Looking" (347-364)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theater of Science • Images as Evidence

Mon 11/16 Sturken & Cartwright Ch 9. "Scientific Looking" (364-377)

- Biomedical Personhood
- Vision & truth
- Imaging Genetics
- *Watchmen*

Wed 11/18 Sturken & Cartwright Ch 9. "Scientific Looking" (77-388)

- Digital Body/Cyborgs
- Imagining the Body (Body Discourses)
- *Watchmen*

UNIT 5: THE GLOBAL FLOW OF VISUAL CULTURE

Fri 11/20 **GUEST LECTURE (TBA)**

Mon 11/23 Meetings with Groups about projects. **Please note that it is mandatory for all group members to be present at the meetings scheduled during class. Absence will result in deduction of group grade.**

THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOVEMBER 25-29

Mon 11/30 Sturken & Cartwright. Ch 10. "Global Flow" (389-401)

- Global subject; global gaze
- Cultural imperialism and beyond
- Global brands

Wed 12/02 Sturken & Cartwright. Ch 10. "Global Flow" (401-417)

- Concepts of globalization
- Visuality and global flows
- Indigenous and Diasporic media
- Borders & Franchises

Fri 12/04 TBA

Mon 12/07 **Final Project Presentation**

Wed 12/09 **Final project presentation**

Please note that there is no final exam for this class. You will be evaluated instead on classroom discussions of assigned readings/screenings and in class assignments on the same.