Class Meeting
Tuesday, Thursday 5:00 – 6:20pm
Room: Brown 224

Professor Patricia Alvarez Astacio
Office: Brown 204
Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00 am – 12:00pm

Teaching Fellow
Adam Gamwell
Office: Rabb 260
Office Hours: Tuesday 4 – 5 pm, and by appointment

Course Description

“Introduces students to the study of visual, aural, and artistic media through an ethnographic lens. Course combines written and creative assignments to understand how culture shapes how we make meaning out of images and develop media literacy. Topics include ethnographic film, media, digital and social media, special effects, photography, art worlds, and the technological development of scientific images.”

We live in a highly mediated society, surrounded by TV images, digital billboards, viral videos, on-demand films, and even medical images. Images constantly circulate in real time across time zones, countries, and communities around the globe. Even before this contemporary moment
of mass globalization and democratization of images and image making, cultures around the globe produced aesthetic artifacts and had their own visual traditions. Since its early days’ anthropology has sought to document, archive, interpret, and understand the diverse aesthetic traditions of non-Western “others.” Aesthetic objects used in rituals or as markers of social status became objects of art to be collected and displayed in museums after the era of mass colonialism. Since the Torres Strait Expedition of 1898, anthropologists took photographic and film cameras to the field to record primitive cultures. The visual and aesthetic have both been objects and medium of research since the discipline’s early days. As we will see in this course, aesthetic production is imbricated in multiple webs of power relations. Images are never neutral, never just appealing, beautiful or entertaining.

This course serves as an introduction to the study of visual, aural, and artistic media through an ethnographic lens. As we consider the visual as both topic and mode of research, we will question the capacity of creative mediums, such as film, as a form of research. What can producing a film convey about another culture or social issue that an ethnographic text cannot? Through a combination of written and creative assignments, called serious experimentation, students will gain critical and analytical tools to understand how culture shapes how we make meaning out of images, develop visual literacy, and consider how creative production can be a tool and product of research. Throughout the semester, we will explore the politics and processes of representation, question hegemonic ways of looking, and how relations of power are expressed and challenged through visual, audiovisual and digital means. Questions about audio/visual and material representation in relation to the portrayal of cultural difference will be central to the course. As students become familiar with media and visual analysis, we will emphasize how anthropologists approach the making and study of images in their ethnographic endeavors. Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning Goals

- Familiarize students with key areas of research and debates within the subfield of visual anthropology
- Understand how our cultural and social background influences how we engage with and make meaning from images and objects
- Examine approaches to representation processes across cultures
- Develop a critical understanding of the politics of representation and the ethical implications of recording/documenting others
- Consider the ways in which visual media can serve as a research method
- Creatively combine visual and written forms in their assignments
- Develop media literacy, critical viewing, reading, and writing skills
- Gain a critical understanding of their own production, use and consumption of diverse media

Required Readings
- Anand Pandian. *Reel World: An Anthropology of Creation*
- All other required readings are available online through LATTE

**Films**

All films will be screened during class.

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance**

Regular, punctual attendance is non-negotiable. Attendance will be taken each class through a sign-in sheet. It is your responsibility to sign in. If you forget to sign in you will be marked as absent. Signing the name of a student who is not present will be considered a violation of the academic integrity. Both students will be marked absent.

You are allowed 2 unexcused absences. Three unexcused absences will result in a 1/3 grade markdown on the final course grade. More than 6 unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. Arriving to class more than 15 minutes late counts as 1/2 absence. Excused absences should be cleared with me before class, with the exception of extenuating last-minute emergencies. Reasons like “I have to study for another class,” or simply saying “I’m not feeling well” will not be considered as excused absences.

**Participation**

Class participation is essential. Discussion is a central part of this class, the learning process, and your final grade. You are expected to attend class having done the assigned readings for that day. Be prepared to participate in class discussion with questions and comments. Bring your readings to class as well as notes you took as you read, questions you have, and material you would like to discuss.

**Assignments**

Late assignments will NOT be accepted. All due dates are stated in the course schedule. Assignments must be handed in hard-copy; emailed electronic versions will not be accepted. The only assignments that will be accepted electronically are ones done in video or audio format. Certain image-based assignments may be also handed in electronically, I will specify which ones.

In order to get full credit, students must fulfill the stated specified instructions for each prompt. Proofread all written assignments before handing them in. All written assignments must be double-spaced using font size 12, margins at 1,” include proper citations, and works cited page.
**Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism is a serious offence and will NOT be tolerated. The work you turn in for this class, both written and creative, has to be your own and come from your own critical and creative engagement with class material. If you use, incorporate or discuss ideas in your work found elsewhere, you must cite and provide the source following a citation style.

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS-Library guides.

Rights and Responsibilities:
(https://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/index.html)

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

**Class Communications**

All communications will occur through LATTE and your Brandeis email account.

**Evaluation**

- Attendance and Participation (10%)
- Serious Experimentation (10%)
  - Archival Intervention (5%)
  - Bricolage (5%)
- Essays (30%)
  - Ethnographic Scene Analysis (15%)
  - Reel World Essay (15%)
- Theory/Praxis (50%)
  - Self-ie Ethnography (20%)
  - Sensory Ethnography Final Project (35%)
  - Sensory Ethnography Presentation (5%)

* Assignment descriptions at end of syllabus
** Assignments for graduate students will be discussed with the professor at the beginning of the semester.
Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

August 31, Thursday

Introductions, discuss syllabus and assignments

Film: Notes on Blindness. Peter Middleton and Hames Spinney, 12min, 2014
https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000002648319/notes-on-blindness.html

*What does vision mean to you? How do you think our culture shapes how we understand and experience the significance of vision?

Week 2: The Act of Looking

Day 1: September 5, Tuesday

-Sturken and Cartwright, Chapter 1: Image, Power, and Politics, in Practices of Looking
-Sturken and Cartwright, Chapter 2: Viewers Make Meaning, in Practices of Looking

Day 2: September 7, Thursday

-Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation, in Against Interpretation and other Essays
-James Aggee and Walker Evans, Shelter, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

*In Class Visual Analysis Workshop

Week 3: Images and the Power of Reproduction

Day 1: September 12, Tuesday

***Hand in Archival Intervention

-Sturken and Cartwright, Chapter 3: Modernity, Spectatorship, Power, and Knowledge in Practices of Looking
-Gabriela Zamorano, Traitorous Physiognomy: Photography and the Racialization of Bolivian Indians by the Créqui-Montfort Expedition (1903), The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology 16(2)

Day 2: September 14, Thursday

- Christopher Pinney, *The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants “Get Hold” of Images*, in *Media Worlds*

**Week 4: Interrogating Creativity**

**Day 1: September 19, Tuesday**

-Brent Luvaas, *Designer Vandalism: Indonesian Indie Fashion and the Cultural Practice of Cut ‘n’ Paste* in *Visual Anthropology* 26(1) 2010
-Claude Levi Strauss, *The Science of the Concrete* in *The Savage Mind*

**Day 2: September 21 No Class**

**Week 5: Ethnographic Film: Recording the “Other”**

**Day 1: September 26, Tuesday**

***Hand-in Bricolage Assignment***

-Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor, *Documentary Styles* in Cross-Cultural Filmmaking
-Shari Huhndorf, *Nanook and His Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922*, *Critical Inquiry* 27

Film: *Nanook of the North*. Robert Flaherty, 78min, 1922

**Day 2: September 28, Thursday**

-Anna Grimshaw, *The Innocent Eye, Flaherty, Malinowski and the Romantic Quest* in Ethnographer’s Eye
-Jay Ruby, *Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With or Speaking Alongside: An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma*

**Week 6: The “Other” Films Itself**

**Day 1: October 3, Tuesday**

-Nancy Chen and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Speaking Nearby* in *Visualizing Anthropology*
-Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Scott McDonald, *Film as Translation* in *Framer Framed*

Film: *Re-assemblage*, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 40min, 1983

**Day 2: October 5 No Class**

**Week 7: Recording the Contemporary “Other”**
Day 1: October 10, Tuesday

***Hand-in Film Scene Analysis

-Harjant S. Gill, *Censorship and Ethnographic Film: Confronting State Bureaucracies, Cultural Regulation, and Institutionalized Homophobia in India*, Visual Anthropology Review 33(1)

Film: Mardistan, Harjant Gill, 30min, 2014

Day 2: October 11 Brandeis Thursday


Week 8: Moving Images in Digital Culture: Special Effects

Day 1: October 17, Tuesday


Day 2: October 19, Thursday


Week 9: News, Media, Medium

Day 1: October 24, Tuesday

***Hand-in Reel World essay

-Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, *American Stiob: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West*, Cultural Anthropology 25(2)

Clips from Daily Show, Samantha Bee and John Oliver

Day 2: October 26, Thursday


**Week 10: Digital Cultures**

**Day 1: October 31, Tuesday**

-Vincent Duclos, *Inhabiting Media: An Anthropology of Life in Digital Speed*, Cultural Anthropology 32(1)

-Geert Lovnik, *On the Social Media Ideology*, e-Flux, Journal #75


**Day 2: November 2, Thursday**

-Hito Steyerl, *Proxy Politics: Signals and Noise*, e-Flux, Journal #60


**Week 11: The Politics of Art and Design**

**Day 1: November 7, Tuesday**

***Hand-in Self-ie Ethnography***

-Bill Anthes, Contemporary Native Artists and International Biennial Culture, Visual Anthropology Review 25(2)

-Shelly Errington, *What Became Authentic Primitive Art?*, Cultural Anthropology 9(2)

-Ethnographic Terminalia: An Introduction, Visual Anthropology Review 27(1)

**Day 2: November 9, Thursday**


**Week 12: Sensory Ethnography**

**Day 1: November 14, Tuesday**

-Marshall McLuhan, *Inside the Five Sense Sensorium* in Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader

Day 2: November 16

- Tim Ingold, *Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet*, Journal of Material Culture 9(3)
- Sarah Pink, *Preparing for Sensory Research: Practical and Orientation Issues* in Doing Sensory Ethnography

**Week 13: Sensory Ethnography**

Day 1: November 21, Tuesday

- Sarah Pink, *Interpreting Multisensory Research: The Place of Analysis* in Sensory Ethnography in Doing Sensory Ethnography

In class Sensory Ethnography Exercise

**You must arrive on time to class. This workshop will take place outside of the classroom.**

Day 2: November 23 **No Class**

**Week 14: Re-imagining the Natural World**

Day 1: November 28, Tuesday

- Lorraine Datson and Peter Galison, *The Image of Objectivity*, Representations 40, Special Issue: Seeing Science

Day 2: November 30, Thursday

- Erik Frisvold Hanssen, “His Eyes are Like the Rays of Dawn”: *Color Vision and Embodiment in Leviathan*, Visual Anthropology Review 31(1)

Film: Leviathan, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, 81min, 2013

**Week 15: Final Sensory Ethnography Presentations**

Day 1: December 5, Tuesday
Day 2: December 7, Last Day of Class

Final Sensory Ethnography Assignment is due December 15

ASSIGNMENTS

-Serious Experimentation:

Archival Intervention: Make a project that transforms, repurposes, and/or subverts the original agenda of a found or archival image. Incorporate text. Consider how including text can help subvert or alter the meaning of the image. This can be image or video based. If you decide to work with still images, you must include three intervened images that you must put in dialogue with each other.

Bricolage: Make a project using images and text. Utilize this selection of images and words to create one new image with its own meaning and intention. Consider the limits of using images to represent or capture reality or the past.

-Essays

Ethnographic Scene Analysis: (2-3 pages) Select a scene from Nanook of the North or Re-assemblage. Analyze one scene and relate the meaning(s) you find within that scene to the film as a whole. You must engage with the elements of the mis-en-scene: dialogue, framing, composition, sound, lighting, color, pacing, editing. Think about how the devices and structures that you find within that small segment of the film are echoed and elaborated upon within the film more generally. Consider how these devices and structures relate to, represent, challenge and/or re-construct a cultural “reality.” You can focus on one or more of the formal elements, as they seem relevant to your discussion. Describe what’s happening in terms of the narrative only if it seems important. You must cite a minimum of 2 assigned class readings.

Reel World Essay: (2-3 pages) I will provide a prompt relating to a theme discussed in Reel World: An Anthropology of Creativity. You will engage critically with the arguments of the book.

-Theory/Praxis

Self-ie Ethnography: You will use yourself and your selfie taking practice as object of ethnographic and visual analysis. Take or select 4 selfies you have already taken. Interrogate the images and your own decisions in taking that particular selfie. Why did you like that image? Where did you take it and why? What social media platforms did you post it to and why? Who and what did you expect to comment on it? You will critically interrogate your own image-making practice, motivations for taking selfies and reflect on your social media usage. You will hand in a 3-4 page essay and 4 selfies that
you discuss. You must reference 2 of the readings assigned in class.

**Sensory Ethnography**: Select an ethnographic site. Carry out a short ethnography that focuses on the sensory elements as the main analytic focus. How can we be “attuned” (Ingold) to the landscapes we inhabit? How can we engage with an ethnographic site while taking into account sensory knowledge? How can we use ethnography to re-configure our engagement, perception and relations to our environment? Explore this site grounding your ethnographic practice through your processes of perception. Consider how you will account and convey for information that comes in through this sensory methodology. How can you document and represent information, data or knowledge that exceeds text and the privileged senses in the West? How does this approach allow us to engage, experience or understand a familiar site in a new light? You will hand in a 4 page essay alongside a non-textual representation of your ethnographic analysis. The creative non-textual component can be in the form of a photo-essay, intervened images, video or sound.

The last week of class you will each present the creative non-textual component of your sensory ethnography. This presentation will last 7 minutes with 3 minutes for Questions from your classmates. You will provide a short introduction to your site, methods, and why you selected that form as the best way to represent your sensory ethnography.