ANTH 130B 1  
Visuality and Culture

Class Meeting  
Tuesday-Thursday 3:30 - 4:50  
Room: Brown 316

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

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, 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 various forms of medical imaging. Images constantly circulate in real time across time zones, countries, and communities around the globe. 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 colonization. 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 been both objects and mediums of research since the discipline’s early days. As we will see throughout this course, aesthetic production is imbricated in multiple webs of power relations. Images are never neutral, never just appealing, beautiful or entertaining.

As we consider the visual(aesthetic) 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. This 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 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. Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study per time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion, assignments, 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**
- All required readings are available online through LATTE

**Films and Workshops**
- Will be screened in class unless stated so

**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 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, 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 only be accepted and/or required for specific assignments.

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 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:
(http://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 (15%)
  - Archival Intervention
  - Bricolage
- Essays (30%)
  - Essay #1 (15%)
  - Sensory Write Up (5%)
  - Sensory Ethnography Final Project Proposal (10%)
- Theory/Praxis (45%)
  - Self-ie Ethnography (20%)
  - Sensory Ethnography (25%)

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: Introduction**

August 30, Thursday

Introductions, syllabus and assignments
Cards Against Anthropology

**Week 2: The Act of Looking**

Sept 4, 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*

Sept 6, Thursday - BRANDEIS MONDAY - NO CLASS

**Week 3: Meaning and Power**

Sept 11, Tuesday – Rosh Hashanah - NO CLASS

Sept 13, Thursday
- Sturken and Cartwright, Chapter 3: Modernity, Spectatorship, Power, and Knowledge in *Practices of Looking*

*Workshop: Visual Analysis*

**Week 4: Producing Images, Producing Knowledge**

Sept 18, Tuesday

**Hand in Archival Intervention**


Sept 20, Thursday

- Lisa Messeri, *Visualizing Alien Worlds* in *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds*
- Hito Steyerl – “In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective,” *e-Flux*

***Sept 21, Friday - BARS on anthropology of outer space and Master Class on Virtual Reality and 360 filming with Lisa Messeri - Extra Credit.***

**Week 5: Re-Imagining the Natural World**

Sept 25, Tuesday – BRANDEIS MONDAY – NO CLASS

Sept 27, Thursday

- Lorraine Datson and Peter Galison, *The Image of Objectivity*, *Representations* 40, Special Issue: Seeing Science
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Visualizing the Anthropocene*, *Public Culture* 26:2

**Week 6: Sensory Ethnography**

Oct 2, Tuesday

- Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*
- Michael Taussig, Redeeming Indigo, *Theory, Culture & Society*

Oct 4, Thursday

*Hand-in Essay #1

- 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 Orientation Issues in *Doing Sensory Ethnography*

*In-Class Sensory Workshop

**Week 7: Method, Documentation, Analysis, Representation**

Oct 9, Tuesday

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

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

Oct 11, Thursday


- Sound Safari: Bath, Maine: [https://soundcloud.com/sensoryethnographylab/sound-safari-bath-maine](https://soundcloud.com/sensoryethnographylab/sound-safari-bath-maine)

**Week 8: On Reproduction**

Oct 16, Tuesday

* Hand in Sensory Tour Write-Up
- 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*

Oct 18, Thursday

- Brent Luvaas, Designer Vandalism: Indonesian Indie Fashion and the Cultural Practice of Cut ‘n’ Paste in *Visual Anthropology Review* 26(1) 2010

**Week 9: Objects Around Us: The Politics of Art and Design**

Oct 23, Tuesday

*Hand in Bricolage Assignment*

- Shelly Errington, What Became Authentic Primitive Art?, *Cultural Anthropology* 9(2)
- Bill Anthes, Contemporary Native Artists and International Biennial Culture, *Visual Anthropology Review* 25(2)

Oct 25, Thursday

- Krisztina Fehervary, From Socialist Modern to Super-Natural Organicism: Cosmological Transformations Through Home Décor, *Cultural Anthropology* 27(4)

**Week 10: Self and Social Media**

Oct 30, Tuesday

Workshop on the Politics of Self and Social Representation

Nov 1, Thursday

- Geert Lovnik, “On the Social Media Ideology”
Week 11: Ethnographic Film: Recording the “Other”

Nov 6, Tuesday

-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

Nov 8, 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 12: The Other Records Itself: Indigenous Cinema

Nov 13, Tuesday

*Hand-in Selfie Ethnography

-Tess Lea and Elizabeth Povinelli, Karrabing: An Essay in Keywords, Visual Anthropology Review 34(1)
-Faye Ginsburg, Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?, Cultural Anthropology 6(1)

Nov 15 - AAA - No Class

-Watch Karrabing Films

Week 13: Popular Media and Discussion of Final Projects

Nov 20, Tuesday

*Hand in Research Proposal Sensory Ethnography
- Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, American Stoob: 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

Nov 22, Thursday - Thanksgiving - NO CLASS

Week 14 - Independent Work Sensory Ethnography

Nov 27, Tuesday

- Advance Sensory Ethnography Projects, Individual Meetings with Professor and Lab/Course Assistant
- Lab Worktime

Nov 29 Thursday

- Advance Sensory Ethnography Projects, Individual Meetings with Professor and Lab/Course Assistant
- Lab Worktime

Week 15: In Class Sensory Ethnography Praxis Critiques

Dec 4, Tuesday

Dec 6, Thursday

Presentations

Week 16

Dec 11, Tuesday - LAST DAY OF CLASS - Group Exhibit

Dec 13-20 - Hand in Final Sensory Ethnography Written Part