Laurea / B.A.
in Global Governance

Academic Year 2026-2027
Syllabus
Gender Flows

Visual Studies and Gender Identity: The TV Series

CFU 6
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Course Description:

This course will use the perspective of Visual Studies to explore the changes in gender identity and on any individual and collective identities in the American society in the past twenty-five years. The main tool used in the course will be TV series and essays.

Visual Studies originated from the fact that our culture is becoming more and more visual and that there is a gap between the wealth of visual experience and the ability to analyze it. Starting around twenty-five years ago the world as a text has been replaced by the world–as-a-picture. Such world pictures cannot be purely visual, but by the same token the visual disrupts and challenges any attempt to define culture in purely linguistic terms. At the heart of the construction of the image in Visual Studies, a displaced location of knowledge, there is an element which determined their birth, questioning the disciplinary position that the visual should occupy within the existent disciplines: the shattering strength of women movements around the world. In the academic field thanks to the studies on gender and sexuality, the disciplinary assets have been changed, challenging the traditional system of disciplines and the borders between them. Therefore, **Visual Studies** represent a new emergent body of knowledge which concentrates on the continuous formation and transformation of any individual and collective identities in the social structure. Their task is to make re-emerge ghosts which a conventional reading would leave invisible. At the origin of this action lies the process of colonization which made invisible the bodies and the identities of subaltern subjects otherwise exploited and erased. Today they speak different languages, sometimes they live in diasporic places, sometimes they are prisoners of the past, of their assigned roles and bodies; some other times they are really in prison, they are nomads, migrants, transgender; many of them come from countries which paid a high price to colonialism.

This course will focus on television and particularly on TV series which seem to illustrate better than any other visual media the profound changes which take place in the fabric of the Western society, particularly of the American society, where the popular culture really represents a social thermometer. The series analyzed in this course will concentrate, therefore, on the formation of gender identity as a starting point to show the profound changes which took place in many other sectors (ethnic, religious and race identities) of the American society and will take into consideration the period which goes from the traumatic event of September 11 2001 until our days. It will also focus its attention on some TV series and movies which will show the condition of women in the past and how we arrived at the situation of today. The choice of American TV series is motivated by the fact that they seem to represent a case study of what is happening, or will happen in many western societies.

Teaching method

The course will be structured in lectures, discussions of visual and reading of the assigned materials and the showing of excerpts of TV series. The students are expected to attend every class and come prepared for discussions through reading and watching the assigned materials. The course will be organized in three sections.

Section I: A theoretical and a historical part where the subject of **Visual Studies** will be introduced, analyzed and discussed in relation to Gender Identity

Section II: The fluidity of Identities

Section III: The introduction of TV series and their importance to understand with critical tools the contemporary American society and therefore many western countries

The showing and discussing of the most relevant TV series concerned with gender identity from the past until today will be an essential part of the course.

Subject of Main Topics:

<u>Topic 1</u>: What are Visual Studies? Why are they relevant in our world? TV series: Love, Death & Robot: (*Netflix)*, The Matrix. *(Amazon Prime)* (9 hours)
<u>Topic 2</u>: Visual Studies and Colonialism: Race, Gender and Class Identity. Documentary; TV series: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death, (Documentary); When They See Us *(Netflix);* Self Made. Inspired by the life of C.J. Walker *(Netflix),* (9 hours)
<u>Topic 3</u>: Religious Identity, Gender Aging and Class Issues. TV series: Unorthodox *(Netflix)*, Grace and Frankie *(Netflix)* (3 hours) Maid (*Netflix) (*9 hours) **MIDTERM:(3 hours)**
<u>Topic 4</u>: The Role of Media and Women. TV series: The Newsroom *(HBO)*, The Loudest Voice (*Showtime*) (3 hours)
<u>Topic 5</u>: The condition of women from after WWII until the 70'. TV series: Madmen *(Amazon prime);* The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (*Amazon Prime)* (6 hours*)*
<u>Topic 6</u>: The body, the addictions, the gender. TV series: Transparent*: (Amazon Prime);* Orange is the New Black: (*Netflix)* (6 hours)
<u>Topic 7</u>: The dystopian series during the Trump presidency. TV series: The Man in the High Castle: (*Amazon Prime)*; The Handmaid's Tale: (*Amazon Prime)*. (3 hours)

Textbook and Materials

Books:

- **Nicholas Mirzoeff** ***Introduction to Visual Culture*** Routledge New York/ London 1999 available also in Italian *Introduzione alla cultura visuale* Meltemi 2002, 2021

-**Anna Camaiti Hostert** ***Passing. A Strategy to Dissolve Identities and Remap Differences*** Farleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison -Teaneck 2007, translated from Italian *Passing. Dissolvere le identità superare le differenze* Castelvecchi, Roma, 1996, Meltemi, Roma 2004:

These two texts, written many years ago, serve to illustrate in details the roots of the epochal change which took place from the era of a world as a text to the one as a picture. These two texts are chosen respectively with the purpose, the first one (republished in Italy in 2020 after its first edition in 2002) to explain how this substitution represented an earthquake in the existent logic and the second, as one of the first ground breaking examples on the subject, to show how identities could be flexible and fluid during times when this concept was still a foreign topic.

TV Series:

Grace and Frankie *Netflix* 2015-2022 created by Martha Kauffman and Howard J. Morris

(The) Handmaid's Tale *Hulu* 2017 to present, Amazon created by Bruce Miller, based on a novel by Margaret Atwood

(The) Loudest Voice (Sesso e potere) *Showtime* 2019 based on the book *The Loudest Voice in the Room* by Gabriel Sherman

Love, Death & Robot, *Netflix* 2019- present, created by Tim Miller

Madmen *AMC, Netflix*, 2007-2013 created by Matthew Weiner

Maid *Netflix* 2021creted by Molly Smith Metzler inspired by Stephanie Land's memoir *Maid*

(The) Man in the high Castle, *Amazon prime* 2015-2019, created by Frank Spotniz

(The) Marvelous Mrs. Maisel *Amazon prime* 2017 to present created by Amy Sherman-Palladino

(The) Matrix *1999* A movie directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski

(The) Newsroom *HBO* 2002-2004 Aaron Sorkin

Orange is the New Black *Netflix* 2013-2019 created by Jenji Kohan based on Piper Kerman's *Memoir Orange is the New Black; My Year in a Women's Prison*

Transparent *Amazon prime* 2014-2019 created by Joey Soloway

Unorthodox *Netflix* 2020 created by Anna Winger

When they see us *Netflix 2019* created and directed by Ava Duvernay

Further Readings:

Barker, Brian, Wiatroski, Myc (ed.) *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access* MCFarland & Company Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017

Bourdieau, Pierre On Television New Press New York 1996

Braidotti, Rosi "Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference" in *Contemporary Feminist Theory,* Second Edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011.

Butler, Judith, *Undoing Gender*, Routledge New York/London, 2004.

Chomsky, Noam *Requiem for the American Dream* documentary directed by Peter D. Hutchinson, Nyks Kelly and Jared P. Scott, 2017

Ellis-Petersen, Hannah "Orange Is the New Black: This Show Will Change the Fabric of Our Culture" in *The Guardian* June 17, 2016

Fahari, Paul "Foxnews CEO Roger Aisles and Network in Final Talks" in *Washington Post* July 19, 2016

Haraway, Donna *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* Routledge, New York/London, 1991

Hornby, Nick "David Simon interviewed by Nick Hornby" in *The Believer* Bimonthly Magazine of Literature, Arts and Culture, Mc Sweeney's S Francisco, August 2007

Luce, Edward *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* Little Brown , London 2017

Mirzoeff Nicholas *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* Routledge, New York/London, 2005,

Sepinwall Alan *The Revolution was Televised: How the Sopranos, Madmen, Breaking Bad, Lost and Other Groundbreaking Dramas Changed TV Forever* Gallery Books, New York 2013

Shudson, Michael *Watergatein American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* Basic Books, New York, 1992

Spivak Gayaty Chakravorty "Can the subaltern speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994

Talpade Mohanty C. "Under Western Eyes" Boundary 2, Vol. 12, No. 3, *On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism*. (Spring - Autumn, 1984), pp. 333-358.

Zurawiki, David "Aaron Sorkin's 'The Newsroom' and an American Press That Has Lost Its Sense of P:urpose" in *Baltimore Sun* June 23, 2012

Assessment

By the end of the course, students should be able:

- to demonstrate an introductory understanding of the field of Visual Studies, and utilize a range of interdisciplinary tools and methods;
- to construct and enhance a critical understanding of gender and its complex intersections with other social, cultural, and biological categories, including sex, race, religion and class;
- to understand the multiple levels of Visual media, particularly TV series;
- to explain the importance of the role of gender in the field of Visual Studies;
- to show an understanding of the evolution of the role of women in the American society.

Methods of evaluation for attending students:

1) **Attendance 30%, active participation to the in-class discussions 30%, final exam 40%. Attending students must be present at least to 80% of classes.**
2) **Attendance is highly suggested for this type of course where themes of great relevance come often from the discussion in class opening new fields of research and interest.**
3) **More than three absences in class during the length of the course will make attending students become non-attending students with all the consequences that this transformation will entail.**

Final exam

For attending students there will be a midterm exam consisting of three written questions during the eighth class and a final exam at the end of the course, consisting of an oral exam. The two exams must be taken in person and will involve the two main texts of the syllabus, the themes of the TV series we watched and the topics we discussed in class. The suggestion is that the students come to class and participate in the discussion, because the

reading materials and the images repertoire are tailored to this specific course: not attending classes will make difficult to be prepared for this course.

For the non-attending students, there will be an oral exam in person on the two main books of the syllabus and on all the TV series shown in class. The students should be able to connect the theoretical framework of the books with the TV series we watched.

The non-attending students who will take the exam in September will have to take a written exam and an oral one.

The midterm for attending students and the final exams for all students must be taken in person. Telephones and computers will not be allowed in class.

A.I. produced papers and plagiarizing will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade.

A final recommendation: remember to register for the exam
Also remember that every time you come to class you must register
Office hours:
Students can set appointments by writing to the email below:
a.camaiti19@gmail.com

NOTE: If you are an Erasmus or a non-Global Governance student who would like to attend one or more courses in the Global Governance programme, please be aware that, before enrolling in the course, you should have read the code of conduct and the procedural rules characterizing our programme. We assume that, if you enroll in the course, you have read and accepted all Global Governance values and rules. Notice that attendance is expected from the very first lesson and you need to attend at least **75%** of the course to be considered an attending student.

Description of the methods and criteria for testing learning

The examination assesses the student's overall preparation, ability to integrate the knowledge of the different parts of the program, consequentiality of reasoning, analytical ability and clarity of presentation, in accordance with the Dublin descriptors (1. knowledge and understanding; 2. applying knowledge and understanding; 3. making judgements; 4. learning skills; 5. communication skills).

The examination will be graded according to the following criteria:

Unsuitable: important deficiencies and/or inaccuracies in the knowledge and understanding of the topics; the topics are exposed in an incoherent manner and with inappropriate language.
18-20: barely sufficient knowledge and understanding of most of the topics, with some missing items; sufficient capacity for analysis; the topics are sometimes exposed in an inconsistent manner and with inappropriate/technical language;
21-23: basic knowledge and understanding of most of the topics; ability to analyze and synthesize correctly with sufficiently coherent logical argumentation, with possibly some inaccuracy in the technical language.
24-26: good knowledge and understanding of most of the topics; good analytical and synthetic skills with rigorously expressed arguments, though with possibly a few inaccuracies in the technical language.
27-29: complete knowledge and understanding of the topics; good capacity for analysis and synthesis. Arguments presented in a rigorous manner and with appropriate/technical language, with only minor inaccuracies.
30-30L: very good level of knowledge and thorough understanding of topics. Excellent analytical and synthetic skills and independent judgement. Arguments expressed in an original manner and in appropriate technical language.