



Academic Year 2022-2023

Syllabus

Gender Flows

Visual Studies and Gender Identity: The TV Series

CFU 6

Prof. ssa Anna Camaiti Hostert

Course Description:

This course will use the perspective of Visual Studies to explore the changes in gender identity and, as a consequence of that, on any individual and collective identities in the American society in the past twenty 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. The world as a text has been replaced by the world-as-a-picture.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. The women movements in many countries around the world challenged and continue to challenge the traditional asset of many societies influencing all the western world and the American society. 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, transgenders; 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 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 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 a few TV series 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 it 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 small 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 American democracy and the role of the Media

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:

Topic 1: What are Visual Studies? Why are they relevant in our world? Tv series **Love, Death & Robot:** *Netflix*. (3 hours)

Topic 2: Visual Studies and Gender Identity. Tv series: **Unorthodox:** *Netflix*; **Maid:** *Netflix*; **Grace and Frankie** *Netflix*. (6 hours)

Topic 3: The Role of Media and Women. Tv series: **The Newsroom** *HBO*; **The Loudest Voice:** *Showtime*. (3 hours)

Topic 4: Traumatic events in the American society: surveillance and control. Tv series: **Quarry:** *Cinemax*. (3 hours)

Topic 5: The relevance of TV series after September 11. Tv series: **The Looming Tower:** *Amazon prime* (3 hours)

Topic 7: The condition of women from after WWII until the 70'. Tv series: **Mrs. America:** *Hulu*; **Gaslit:** *Starz*; **The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel** *Amazon prime*. (6 hours)

Topic 8: The body, the addictions, the gender. TV series: **Transparent:** *Amazon prime*; **Nurse Jackie:** *Showtime*; **Orange is the New Black:** *Netflix* (6 hours)

Topic 9: The dystopian series during the Trump presidency. Tv series: **The Man in the High Castle:** *Amazon Prime*; **The Handmaid's Tale:** *Amazon Prime*. (6 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: Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 3 Chapter 4

-**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* Castelvechi, Roma, 1996, Meltemi, Roma 2004: Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 7, Chapter 9

TV Series:

Alias Grace CBC TV (Canada), *Netflix* 2017, *Netflix*, based on a novel by Margaret Atwood 2 episode

Gaslit *Starz* 2022

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) Looming Tower, *Hulu* 2018 based on the novel by the same title by Lawrence Wright

(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* 2021 created 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 Shvrman-Palladino

Mrs. America *Hulu*, 2020 created by Davhi Waller

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

Nurse Jackie *Showtime* 2009-2015 created by Liz Brixius, Evan Dunskey, Linda Wallem

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

(The) Wire *HBO*, 2001-2008 created by David Simon

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

Bourdieu, 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 *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* Basic Books, New York, 1992

Spivak Gayatri 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 Purpose" in *Baltimore Sun* June 23, 2012

Assessment

By the end of the course, students will:

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

Methods of evaluation for attending students: attendance 30%, active participation to the in-class discussions 30%, final exam 40%.

Methods of final exams for attending students There will be a final written exam
Attending students must be present at least to 80% of classes.

Non-attending students will be evaluated only on the final examination.

Final exam

The final exam will consist in a written essay (8-10 pages) regarding a topic we discussed during the course in class and must previously be agreed with the teacher. **The essay should consist of a short (around 1-2 pages) general introduction where the students must explain the general topics and objectives they intend to achieve, then of a**

demonstration of their goals (6-7 pages) and finally of a short conclusion (1-2 pages) where it is showed the relevance of their choice in terms of critical capacity of deconstructing an image. The suggestion is that the students come to class and participate to the discussion, because the reading materials and the images repertoire (some series shown in class are difficult to find) are tailored to this specific course: not attending the course will make difficult to be prepared for the final exam.

The non attending students should write a paper of at least 20 pages articulating their ideas using the same criteria of the attending students following the same proportions.

Once we established the deadline of the final exam every day late in the delivery of essay will be penalized with a lower grade in the percentage of 2/30.

Office hours

Students can set appointments by writing to the email below

E-mail

a.camaiti19@gmail.com