



Academic Year 2023-2024  
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 The world as a text has been replaced by the world-as-a-picture.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 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 Gender Identity

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*,  
**The Matrix** *Amazon prime* (9 hours)

**Topic 2:** Visual Studies and Colonialism: Race, Gender and Class Identity. Tv series:

**When They See Us** *Netflix*,  
**Self Made. Inspired by the life of C.J. Walker** *Netflix*  
**Maid** *Netflix* (9 hours)

**Topic 3:** Religious Identity, Gender Aging and Sexuality. Tv series:

**Unorthodox** *Netflix*  
**Grace and Frankie** *Netflix* (3 hours)

**MIDTERM:**(3 hours)

**Topic 4:** The Role of Media and Women. Tv series:

**The Newsroom** *HBO*, **The Loudest Voice** *Showitme* (3 hours)

**Topic 5:** The condition of women from after WWII until the 70'. Tv series:

**Madmen** *Amazon prime*  
**The Marvelous Mrs Maisel** *Amazon prime* (6 hours)

**Topic 6:** The body, the addictions, the gender. TV series:

**Transparent:** *Amazon prime*  
**Orange is the New Black:** *Netflix* (6 hours)

**Topic 7:** 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: **Introduction, My Point of View, Killing Rage, Betraying Your Origin, Rerun the Memory Passing.**

### TV Series:

- Alias Grace** CBC TV (Canada), *Netflix* 2017, Netflix, based on a novel by Margaret Atwood 2 episode
- Gaslit** *Starz* 2022 created by Rebecca Pickering
- 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
- (The) Matrix** 1999 A movie directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski
- Mrs. America** *Hulu*, 2020 created by Davhi Waller
- (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
- (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** *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 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%. Attending students must be present at least to 80% of classes.**
- **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.**

## Final exam

**For attending students there will be a midterm exam consisting of three written questions during the eight class and a final exam, consisting of four written questions. 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 to 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 a final in person exam, consisting of ten written questions on the two main books of the syllabus, the tv series we watched articulating ideas which show the capacity of connecting the theoretical framework of the books with the tv series we watched .**

**The midterm and the final for all students should be taken in person. Telephones and computers will not be allowed in neither occasions.**

**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**

### **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 enrol in the course, **you have read and accepted all Global Governance values and rules**. Notice that attendance is required from the very first lesson and you need to attend at least 80% 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.