

Sergio Muñoz-Sarmiento

Visual Culture and Literacy

University of Southern California

Visual Culture and Literacy 150, **Fall 2002**

Instructor: Sergio Muñoz-Sarmiento

T/Th: 12:30-1:50, Office Hours: 11-12, 2-3, or by appointment

Email: s.munoz-sarmiento@att.net

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What is “visual culture and literacy”? Over the next fifteen weeks, we will study the sophisticated language of visual signs. We will discover, or perhaps we already have, that there is no such thing as an innocent sign, gesture, or word. To be literate is to know how to read and write, and to be globally and critically literate is to have the adequate and critical tools to decipher the multiple languages and sign systems of our social fabric. Thus, we will learn numerous ways in which to “read”, “interpret”, “decode” and “translate” the many complex visual, verbal and written “dialects, patois, slang’s, and specialized languages” (Deleuze). In order to entertain this huge task, we must partake of reading material that will facilitate the dismantling and thus comprehension of these signs. Much of the reading material will be theoretical, but I have also chosen some immediate, raw and “marginal” reading material as well.

We will attempt the huge task above through a *deconstructive* critique, using a variety of theories in the humanities, including art, literature, film and philosophy. Towards the second half of the course, we will look at visual culture through the inflection of war and globalization, which will allow an understanding of both the interpretation and construction of “other” cultural groups and social formations.

CLASS STRUCTURE:

This class will take the form of lectures, class discussion, readings, film/video, slides, and potentially a guest speaker or two. As always, the logic of the syllabus falls prey to chance and improvisation, thus, *we might sidetrack where deemed necessary*. Note also that although I may not lecture directly on any given reading material, it is still your responsibility to read it.

As explained above, due to unforeseen circumstances, additional essays and/or articles might be handed out during the semester. Although the readings will be followed by a lecture, it is my hope that even with a large lecture class we can still maintain a class discussion.

There will be three (3) books and one class reader you will need to purchase. You will be expected to have read and reviewed ALL material by the assigned date, to attend ALL class meetings, and to contribute regularly, constructively, and actively to class discussions and critiques. You will also need to write one 500-word essay.

****NOTE: As always, if any class material, be it written, visual, verbal, or any material hereby not listed, is found by any student to be offensive, you have the option to not partake in the class discussion and/or leave the classroom. The student will then need to see the instructor for make-up material.

PLAGIARISM: Includes the failure to cite sources through footnotes in research papers or any written material handed-in in this class. If you write ANYTHING that essentially copies another previously written paper, article, essay, or brief written by someone else, and you FAIL to give this other person(s) credit, it will result in you receiving an automatic “F” (failing) grade for the course!

CLASS ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY! YOU ARE PERMITTED TWO (2) ABSENCES, ANY ABSENCE OVER THIS WILL AUTOMATICALLY REDUCE YOUR GRADE BY A FULL GRADE POIN (Three absences will lower an A to a A-, or A- to B+).

*** No make up quizzes will be given, and no extra-credit work will be given or accepted.**

MANDATORY books and periodicals:

1. The Cultures of Globalization, Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi
2. Pure War, Paul Virilio and Sylvere Lotringer
3. Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology, Jack M. Balkin
4. Class Reader. (Available at University Graphics/Magic Machine. Located in the University Village at: 3309 South Hoover. 213.744.1511)

Your final grade will depend on:

1. Weekly quizzes 50% (you will be given between 8-10 quizzes, your lowest score will be dropped. NO MAKE-UP QUIZZES WILL BE GIVEN)
2. One 500 word essay. 25% total (see below for explanation)
3. Final exam (cumulative) 25%

Instructions for 500 word essay: You will need to write a 500 word essay, 11 point, 1½ line spacing, 1 ½ "border) on an image of your choice. In other words, you must either appropriate a pre-existing image from any media or cultural source, or you may shoot the image yourself via digital or celluloid camera. You will then write a criticism of this image using information from class lectures, readings, and discussions. Your total "essay" should be 4-5 pages long, which will include a bibliography page and a **COLOR** reproduction of the image you have chosen and are criticizing. You should NOT hand in an essay prior to the 6th week of class! (NOTE: Do NOT use an encyclopedia or web site for information, and don't forget to city the source, if any, of your appropriated image).

1. WEEK OF AUGUST 26TH:

What is Visual Culture and Visual Literacy?

Read: "What is Visual Culture?" and "Studying Visual Culture" from Reader, and "Chapter 1: Tools of Understanding" from Balkin book.

2. WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 2ND:

What is critical theory? Why use theories of thought.

Read: "The Subject" pp. 126-149, from Reader and "Suture: Discourse and Subjectivity" pp.194-201, also from Reader. Ch. 2 from Balkin book.

3. WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 9TH:

View, Amores Perros

Read: "Derrida and Deconstruction" from Reader.

4. WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 16TH:

Lecture: What is Modernism/"post-modern-ism"?

Read: "Suture: The Cinematic Model", "Lyotard and postmodernism", both from reader.

5. WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 23RD:

Continue lecture on "Modernism/post-modernism"

Read, "We other Victorians", by Michel Foucault, and "Todo Sobre Mi Madre/All About My Mother", both from Reader.

6. WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 30TH:

View [All About My Mother](#), by Pedro Almodovar

Read: Ch. 3 from Balkin book, and “Suture and Ideology” and “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” from Reader.

7. WEEK OF OCTOBER 7TH:

Lecture and discussion on [All About My Mother](#).

What is ideology?

Read: Ch.4: “The Spread of Cultural Software” and Ch. 5 “Conceptions of Ideology” both from Balkin book, and “Ideal Masculinities” by Anthea Cullen

8. WEEK OF OCTOBER 14TH:

Lecture: What are Ideological State Apparatuses? The construction of masculinity via media and ideology.

Read: “Representation”, “Reading the Slender Body”, and “Popular Culture” from Reader.

9. WEEK OF OCTOBER 21ST:

What is representation? Visual Representation and representation of the visual—class, race, gender, sexuality.

Read: “Who Invented the Concept of Race” and “Class”, all from Reader.

10. WEEK OF OCTOBER 28TH:

Continue lecture on representation. Lecture on Globalization.

Read: “Of Other Spaces” by Michel Foucault from reader, and “Notes on Globalization as a philosophical issue” by Fredric Jameson from Globalization book.

11. WEEK OF NOVEMBER 4TH:

View: [Once Were Warriors](#)

Read: “Globalization, Civilization Processes...”, by Walter D. Mignolo and “Toward a Regional Imaginary in Africa”, by Manthia Diawara. Both from Globalization book.

12 WEEK OF NOVEMBER 11TH:

Discussion and lecture on: [Once Were Warriors](#)

Read: “Lapsus Imaginis: The Image in Ruins”, by Eduardo Cadava from Reader.

13. WEEK OF NOVEMBER 18TH:

View: “Images of the World, Inscriptions of War”, by Harun Farocki

Read: “Pure War” by Virilio and Lotringer

**Charles Gaines Lecture (12:30pm)

14. WEEK OF NOVEMBER 25TH:

Lecture and Discuss “Images of the World...” through Cadava’s “Lapsus Imaginis”

Lecture: preface to Virilio, speed, war.

No class on Thursday, November 28th! (Thanksgiving)

15. WEEK OF DECEMBER 2ND:

Lecture on Pure War, Virilio, Speed and War!

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18. *Lapsus Imaginis*: The Image in Ruins, - Eduardo Cadava