

Visual and Cultural Studies

Spring 2009

MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT

Option 1—Critical Analysis

Write a critical analysis of Margaret Olin's critique of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. What conclusion does she reach about Barthes's "identification"? How do you interpret and assess the significance of Olin's account?

Be sure to briefly summarize Olin's argument in "Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes's 'Mistaken' Identification". Use the material you find relevant, appropriate, and useful from her essay, Barthes's text, and any other material included on our syllabus.

This assignment allows some flexibility in formulating your own approach. The danger here is that you could easily drift into a relatively unfocused discussion if you do not **define your thesis** and **how you intend to argue for it** at the start of your paper.

Note also that your task is to produce a **critical analysis** based on material we've already covered. **This is not a research paper.** I do not want you to do additional outside reading. Additional reading would very likely be a distraction or opportunity for avoiding the hard work of articulating your own ideas and arguing for your position. You have sufficient material on our syllabus and in the discussion blog for writing an excellent paper. I'm more interested in your analysis and reasoning than I am in the work of others. But be sure that the claims you make are backed up with evidence and compelling reasons for accepting those claims.

Be sure to review the "Guidelines for Writing Critical Textual Analyses" before beginning work on your essay. You are responsible for all of the material in this handout and will be evaluated according to the criteria discussed in it. **It is essential that you read it carefully.** The document is available under "Resources" on the course website.

Option 2—Semiotic Analysis

Produce a semiotic analysis of **one** of the two ads available on the website. The Diesel ad allows you to work with a static image that includes its own caption. The Diet Coke video gives you a chance to work with a time-based image, soundtrack, and narrative.

Be sure that your analysis includes, at a minimum,

1. the role of syntagms and paradigms;
2. the selection and role of signs (signifiers and signifieds);
3. types of signs (iconic, indexical, symbolic);
4. the message and its particular purpose within a recognizable context;
5. specification of denotation and connotation;
6. at least one "commutation test" applied to one of the key signifiers in the ad. (See my "Notes on Semiotics—Introduction" for examples and details.)

Other Details

The paper should be 5-7 pages in length.

It is due no later than **noon, Monday, 30 March 09** in the inbox of my Groupwise email. If your exam is submitted after the deadline, you'll be marked down one letter grade for each day that it's late.

You will be evaluated on the **form and content** of your paper, so pay close attention to both appearance and grammar. All papers must be **double-spaced** with **one-inch margins**, and appropriate endnotes or footnotes. If you need additional instructions or guidelines, see me.

Statement on Academic Honesty

It is expected that all work submitted for a grade in this course reflects the work of the student submitting it. If you borrow an idea from someone else, you must cite the source, even if it is based on a conversation or correspondence. **Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course.** Any student who does not fully understand the standards of academic honesty should speak to me in advance of submitting coursework.