Senior Seminar: The Cultural Politics of Displacement

“Visuality can be concerned with how we see everyday objects and people, not just those things we think of as visual texts.” (Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*)

Course Description

One of the most pressing issues in the global world today remains that of the involuntary movement of people, or ‘displaced persons’. Whether wrought by natural disasters, such as the tsunamis or earthquakes, by war or ethnic conflicts, or by policies towards urbanization, displacement is often linked to human suffering, and always connected to national and transnational politics. Not surprisingly, scholars in a wide range of fields (anthropology, geography, cultural studies, economics, etc.) have noted the importance of ‘seeing’ to cultural perceptions of and public responses to displacement. Not only do visual images and narratives elicit emotional responses, *visuality* itself structures political knowledge within the global arena.

MC 493 is a capstone seminar for CCP majors. It builds upon students’ previous course work and theoretical investigations to examine the ways in which ‘displaced’ persons—and bodies—are constructed, circulated and regulated in the visual field in and across particular cultural contexts. Some of the key questions that we will be asking are: What is ‘displacement’? How is displacement constituted? What is visuality? How do technologies of the visual, such as photography, film or digital media, render displacement (in)visible in the global field? Can displaced groups engage in the production of visual knowledge? What are the relationships between global capitalism and visual economies? What are the relationships between governmental, non-governmental or humanitarian organizations, policies towards ‘displacement’, and visuality?

In this seminar, we will take an interdisciplinary approach to answering these questions, drawing on theories, methods, and texts from both the humanities and the social sciences. We will begin by situating displacement within the global world and within visual field. To this end we will read theoretical and conceptual pieces from various disciplines, such as political geography, history, feminism and visual studies. We next take up question of how instantiations of ‘displacement’ are constructed both within and without the field and across cultural contexts. Here we first consider the experience of the refugee of from a broad perspective in anthropologist Michel Agier’s *On the Margins of the World: The Refugee Experience Today* (2005 French; 2008 English) and human rights journalist Caroline Moorehead’s *Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees* (2005). We will set these general accounts against specific visual articulations of the refugee. We second consider the experience of economic displacement in one specific case: Ecuador, Peru. Here we turn to anthropologist Suzana Sawyer’s ethnography, *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*, and to director Joe Berlinger’s documentary film, *Crude* (2009). We conclude by considering a narrativized account of the migrant/immigrant experience in a post-colonial African/European context in J.M.G. LeClezio’s novel, *Desert* (1980 French, 2009 English). In each instantiation, we will be particularly attentive to the ways in which visual narratives of displacement intersect political discourses. We will thus be attentive to the constitutive power relationships between multiple articulations of displacement in structuring knowledge in forms of policies and actions.

As this is the capstone experience in your CCP course of study, you will have the opportunity to shape our explorations by researching on a topic and issues of interest, and presenting your findings to the class.
Course Objectives
This seminar has four objectives: (1) to expose you to a portion of the scholarship in visual culture, visuality, and economies of the visual; (2) to introduce you to the issues of displacement of various kinds and in various national and trans-national contexts; (3) to encourage you to apply the insights you have gained in your career as a Madison undergraduate and as a CCP major; and, (4) to afford you an opportunity to shape an in-depth critical study [i.e. a 25-30 paper and formal presentation] investigating the cultural politics of displacement in relation to your personal interest or concern.

Required Texts
The following books are available at SBS on Grand River, and other local bookstores. In addition, you will find both required and recommended readings posted on our course’s ANGEL website.


*Course Notebook*: Collection of hard copies of all required course readings posted to ANGEL.

Course Requirements and Assignments
A separate addendum is posted on the ANGEL site. Final course grades will be determined as follows:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Informed participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical reflection journal</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project proposal</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project paper/text</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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In addition, to receive a passing grade in this seminar, you must, at minimum, attend class regularly (missing no more than three sessions), complete the assigned readings prior to class, participate in class discussions, and complete all assignments at an adequate level. Extensions on written assignments will be granted only with prior permission and only for substantial reasons (e.g., major illness, family loss). All other late assignments will be penalized.

Instructional model: You should realize that because this course receives 5 credits for 4 in-class contact hours, you are expected to do considerably more out-of-class work than for a regular 4 credit course. This out-of-class work may include consulting with me on a regular basis to ensure comprehension of course materials and successful framing of a research project on a topic of your interests, as well as engaging with other students outside of class to explore course materials further.

Academic honesty: James Madison College and Michigan State University policies on academic integrity and plagiarism will be strictly enforced in this course. See the James Madison College Handbook section, Standards and Expectations, and the MSU Academic Programs catalogue, for further information. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 10</td>
<td>Introduction to seminar.</td>
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<td>January 12</td>
<td>Opening Moves: Visual culture, visibility, displacement</td>
<td>Readings: David Campbell, “Geopolitics and visibility: Sighting the Darfur Conflict.” Political Geography 26 (2007): 357-382. Due: Locate video footage of one type of ‘displacement’ on YouTube or another venue and post site to ANGEL drop box by 5:00pm, on Tuesday, January 11. Be prepared to discuss the construction of this ‘displacement’ as well as the ‘politics’ [i.e. the international, cultural, and social politics].</td>
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<td>January 17</td>
<td>Martin Luther King Day observed—No class.</td>
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February 7

February 9

February 11
Research topic and annotated bibliography due by 5:00pm to ANGEL drop box.

February 14

February 16

Economic displacement and global visualities
February 21

February 23
Readings: Suzana Sawyer, chapter 2, “Crude Excesses,” and, chapter 3, Neoliberal Ironies,” from Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador. Pages 57-117. Research proposals due by 5:00pm to ANGEL drop box.

February 28

March 2
Film: Discussion of Joe Berglinger’s documentary Crude (2009); view before class.

March 7-11
SPRING BREAK—NO CLASSES

March 14
In-class research paper/project workshop.

Voluntary displacement: colonial and post-colonial migrations
March 16

March 21
Readings: J.M.G. Le Clezio, Desert (entire novel must be completed)

March 23  
Readings: J.M.G. Le Clezio, *Desert*.

March 28  
In-class viewing of director Michael Winterbottom’s *In This World* (Spain, 2002) or Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (French, 1995).

March 30  
Discussion of Bauman and of *In This World* or *La Haine*.

April 1  
Completed **rough draft** of research paper/project due by 5:00pm to ANGEL drop box and hard copy to faculty mailbox.

Re-configuring ‘displacement’: research project presentations

April 4  
Presenter:

April 6  
Presenter:

April 11  
Presenter:

April 13  
Presenter:

April 18  
Presenter:

April 20  
Presenter:

April 22  
Critical reflection journal meta-analysis due by 5:00pm to ANGEL drop box.

April 25  
Presenter:

April 27  
Presenter:  
**Senior seminar dinner/party!!!!**

April 29  
Completed **final draft** of research paper/project due by 5:00pm to ANGEL drop box and hard copy to faculty mailbox.

May 3 (Tuesday—3-5pm)  
Presenter:

Presenter: