

Visual Anthropology  
Cassie Wells  
Proposal for Individually Planned Major

### *Section I*

As more and more new technologies are thrust into society, it is imperative to study the effects of these technologies from an anthropological standpoint. In particular, I have a special interest in research regarding virtual Internet communities and video games, specifically their effects on a generation growing up in the 'media age.' In my Effects of Mass Media class, I investigated the potential of online gaming communities in enhancing traditional methods of education, drawing my conclusions from literature in the field of media effects. After two anthropology classes with Dr. Collins, I completed a research project entitled "Video Games as a Medium for the 21st Century Revival of Religion and Myth," in which I discussed the use and presentation of various religious archetypes in a number of popular games. I then outlined methods by which we should further study the known implications of religion and myth as presented in video games, as well as implications that have yet to be considered.

#### *1. Coverage and Definition:*

The study of visual anthropology fosters a close relationship between cultural and visual perception, encouraging the study of humankind through visual means. It encompasses the anthropological study of representation, including areas such as performance, museums, art, and the production and reception of mass media. In addition, it encourages the use of media, including still photography, film, video, and computer-based imagery, in the recording of ethnographic, archaeological, and other anthropological genres. Visual anthropology is a product of the belief that culture is manifested through visible symbols. These symbols can be found in anything from ceremonies and rituals to art and artifacts, and can exist in both natural and constructed environments. According to the Society for Visual Anthropology, it "promotes the study of visual representation and media, as well as the use of images for the description, analysis, communication, and interpretation of human behavior." In other words, aspects of a culture that are expressed and interpreted visually - including images - can be seen as artifacts of that culture.

Ethnographic film and photography, sub-disciplines of Visual Anthropology, deal with the cultural constraints of the photographer or filmmaker. Films and photographs generally speak of both the culture of those filmed and the culture of those who film. Film as a medium of communication carries great potential, as it is capable of exhibiting a wide array of scientific and artistic voices. Film and photographs are often representations of an ideology, and many anthropologists use these mediums in a reflexive manner. Recent studies have identified the importance of the social contexts in which images are made, instead of viewing images as another form of "text". Visual anthropologists emphasize these findings by analyzing photographic practice as cultural behavior, and by treating vernacular practices, such as snapshots, as ethnographic studies. These studies attempt to provide insight into the production and consumption of images, so that the images can be seen as something to be interpreted without any fixed definition.

### *2. Conceptual Linkages between Concentration and Other Subjects:*

In addition to the discipline of concentration, other proposed fields of study include several courses each in art history, still photography, and media studies. As Visual Anthropology lends itself to such studies, the linkages among the discipline of concentration and the aforementioned fields are evident.

### *3. Expected and Future Plans:*

By incorporating the study of anthropology into both my previous knowledge of art history and my technical experience in photography, I will allow myself more versatility in terms of academic exploration. Graduate study is next to essential for those pursuing a career in anthropology, and I have every intention of furthering my intellectual growth at the graduate level. Many career options are available for students majoring in Visual Anthropology, including but not limited to: museum work, photoethnography, documentary filmmaking, media work, as well as consulting and assessment at the corporate and governmental levels - anthropological skills are especially valuable in these territories. Cultural differences are abundant, and as long as they exist, there will be a need for people who know how to work effectively with all cultural groups.

## ***Section II***

### **Discipline of Concentration: Anthropology**

- SOC-2975-200: Introduction to Anthropology
- Physical Anthropology (Independent Study)
- HIS-450-401: Independent Study in History - Anthropology of Religion and Myth
- Anthropology of a Specific Culture (ART-291-401S Special Topics in Art and Archaeology: Greece Study Abroad)
- Anthropology 4080: Consumption and Material Culture
- Anthropology 4470: Visual Culture

### **Other Fields of Study:**

#### Art History:

- ART 302: 18th and 19th Century European Art History
- ART 330: Far Eastern Art History
- ART 250: Special Topics in Art History: Modern and Contemporary Architecture
- ART 291: Special Topics in Art History: Iconology: World Symbols, Myths, and Cultures

#### Photography:

- ART 109: Introduction to Photography
- ART 205: Introduction to Digital Photography
- ART 290: Alternative Methods in Photography

#### Media Studies:

- CRS 420: Advanced Topics in Communications and Rhetoric Studies: Media, Culture, and Society
- UCCOM 4020: Strategies of Media Criticism
- CRS 340: Mass Media Effects