

Image

Fall 2016

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Pictures are part and parcel of modern life, and due to the advance of technology, technically reproduced images become ubiquitous. The proposed course is designed on an interdisciplinary basis to give an overview of the role images play in human culture.

The image has accompanied humans from the birth of civilization and can be traced even farther back into the evolution of man. All life is based on communication, and images are part of the overall communication process that living beings maintain among themselves and with their environment. To understand images as they are today, one must go back to their origin in the animal kingdom. Why so many species acquired vision almost simultaneously, and how the emergence of vision affected the variety of life? Starting with some premises from evolutionary biology, the course will further address the physiology of human vision. We will thus establish a connection between the biological foundations of the image and the emergence of culture, e.g., pictures in Neolithic caves and the use of imagery in tribal art. From an analysis of findings in biology and anthropology, we will move to the use of images in ancient cultures, and finally into high art, the domain that emerged in Europe during the Renaissance. Special attention will be given to the evolution of specific genres in the fine arts, such as the portrait and the landscape. Still another emphasis will be made on art history and aesthetic value throughout centuries, culminating in the crises that these latter underwent in the 20th century.

We will discuss social aspects in the development of artistic media and in the increasing dissemination of images with the introduction of photography, cinema, television, and the internet. We will read and discuss seminal texts by Boas, Warburg, Panofsky, Foucault, Simmel, Benjamin, McLuhan, Kittler, Kracauer, Cavell, Eisenstein, Debord, Baudrillard, and others. Readings are selected and arranged so as to raise critical issues and encourage reflection. The purpose of this course is for the student to learn critical thinking and engage in an informed debate on the matters in visual culture that are relevant in the present-day intellectual discussion. We are going to achieve this goal by learning the practice of close and careful reading, open-ended inquiry and discovery, to improve the students' ability of independent thinking and expression in writing and discussions.

Week 1: Life, Information, Vision

Lecture 1.

Jesper Hoffmeyer. Biology Is Immature Biosemiotics. -- In: *Towards A Semiotic Biology. Life is the Action of Signs*. London, Imperial College Press, 2011, pp. 43-66.

Lecture 2.

Jakob von Uexkull. A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans. University of Minnesota Press, pp. 44-70.

Week 2: The emergence of vision in the animal world. The evolution of eyes. **Animal Appearance and Self-expression.**

Lecture 1.

Stephen Jay Gould. Wonderful Life. The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History. New York. W. W. Nonon &. Company, 1989. Chap. 1, pp. 23-52

Lecture 2.

Adolf Portmann. The Realm of Images.-- In: New Paths in Biology, pp. 66-136.

Week 3:

Specificity of Human Vision

Lecture 1.

David H. Hubel. Eye, Brain and Vision. Scientific American Library, 1988. Chap: The Eye.

Lecture 2.

Margaret Livingstone. Vision and Art. The Biology of Seeing. Harry N. Abrams, 2002, pp. 12-45

Week 4.

Anthropology of the Image

Lecture 1.

Ernst Gombrich. Art and Illusion. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1960, pp. 3-28.

Lecture 2.

Tim Ingold. Lines. A Brief History. London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 39-71.

Week 5.

The Beginning of Human Art

Lecture 1.

Alfred Gell. The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology. In: The Art of Anthropology. Oxford, Berg, pp. 159-186.

Lecture 2.

Franz Boas. Primitive Art. -- In: The Anthropology of Art. A Reader, edited by Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins, Blackwell, 2006, pp. 39-55.

Week 6.

Toward Modern Art. From craft to modernity via Platonicism

Lecture 1.

Plato. The Republic, book X.

Lecture 2.

Michel Foucault. Las Meninas. In: The Order of Things. Routledge, 2002, pp. 3-18

Week 7.

Changing Patterns of Vision in Western Art. Portrait

Lecture 1.

Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and in Art*-- in Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 105-136.

Lecture 2.

Aby Warburg. *The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie*. Domenico Ghirlandaio in Santa Trinita. *The Portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici and his Household*. -- In: *Aby Warburg. The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the Renaissance*. Edited by Kurt W. Forster. Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999, pp. 184-216.

Week 8.

Changing Patterns of Vision in Western Art. Landscape.

Lecture 1

Kenneth Clark. *Landscape into painting*. John Murray, 1952, pp. 1-35, 145-178 (plates 1-33)

Lecture 2

Georg Simmel. *The Philosophy of Landscape*. -- In: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2007, Vol. 24 (7-8), pp. 20-29

Week 9.

Image and Mechanical Reproduction. Media

Lecture 1

Walter Benjamin. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*. -- In: *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility, and other writings on media*. Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 19-55.

Lecture 2.

Sergei Eisenstein. *The Dramaturgy of Film Form (The Dialectical Approach to Film Form)*. -- In: *S. M. Eisenstein. Selected Works*, v. 1, 1922-34. BFI-Indiana University Press, 1988, pp.161-180.

André Bazin. *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*. -- In: *A. Bazin. What is Cinema?* vol. 1. University of California Press, 2005, pp. 9-16.

Week 10.

Photography. Body as Archive

Lecture 1.

Walter Benjamin. *Little History of Photography*. -- In: *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility, and other writings on media*. Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 274-298.

Lecture 2.

Allan Sekula. *The Body and the Archive*. -- *October*, Vol. 39 (Winter, 1986), pp. 3-64 (extracts)

Week 11.

The universe of images -- museums, collections.

Lecture 1.

Alois Riegl. The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin. -- *Oppositions*, n 25, Fall 1982, pp. 21-51.

Lecture 2.

Douglas Crimp. On the Museum's Ruins. The MIT press, 1993, pp. 44-64.

Week 12

The End of Arts? Iconoclasm

Lecture 1.

Dario Gamboni. The Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution. Reaction Books, 1997. Chap. 2: A Historical Outline.

Lecture 2.

Jean Baudrillard. The Conspiracy of art. Semiotext (e), 2005, pp. 25-29.

Program of the Productivist Group. -- In: The Tradition of Constructivism. Ed. by Stephen Bann, Viking Press, 1974, pp. 18-20.

Week 13.

Media

Lecture 1.

Marshall McLuhan. Medium is the Message. -- In: M. McLuhan. Understanding Media. The extensions of man. The MIT Press, 1994, pp. 7-24.

Lecture 2

Guy Debord. Society of the spectacle, Black and Red, 1970, pp. 34-53.

Week 14.

Networks and Digital image

Lecture 1

Stanley Cavell. The Fact of Television. -- *Daedalus*, Vol. 111, No. 4, Print Culture and Video Culture (Fall, 1982), pp. 75-96.

Lecture 2

Lev Manovich. The Automation of Sight. From Photography to Computer Vision, <http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/automation-of-sight-from-photography-to-computer-vision>

Writing assignments & exams

Longer Essays (20% of total grade) Two essays (4-5pp double spaced). These essays have to show students' ability to construct an interpretive argument that engages with the assigned texts. Another goal is to improve students' writing skills.

Short writing exercises (20% of total grade; no more than 1 page each) These short papers will allow for more freely developed, ponderous reflections on certain topics, following from a specific writing prompt. Your writing should fit on one page, typed (single or double spaced, front and back). You may write in whatever style, format, voice, perspective you want, so long as you fully address the questions.

Midterm & Final Exam (50% of total grade) Both the midterm and final are in-class exams. The exams will test your understanding of the assigned texts (key arguments), course knowledge (core issues, lecture discussions, etc.), and reflective/critical engagement (ability to identify issues across texts, ability to relate specific concepts to broader ideas, etc.).

Grading Summary

Longer Essays -- 20%

Short Writing Exercises -- 20%

Midterm Exam -- 25%

Final Exam -- 25%

Seminar Work & Participation -- 10%

Attendance

You are expected to attend every lecture and seminar meeting. If you cannot make a meeting, please let us know as soon as possible in advance. Attendance will be taken and participation noted. If you miss two meetings, you will need to meet to discuss where you stand in the course. If you miss three or more meetings, your final standing in the course will automatically drop one letter grade, and continue to drop per additional class missed.