ORIGINS OF MODERN VISUAL CULTURE
Art History W4601y
Spring 2003

Professor Jonathan Crary
917 Schermerhorn Hall
Office hours: Tuesdays 11:00am-12:00pm and by appointment

REQUIREMENTS: For undergraduates there will be mid-term and final exams. Graduate students will complete a take-home final exam on a historical/critical topic. There are no requirements for graduate students taking the course for "registration" credit. Attendance of discussion sections by undergraduates is mandatory.

This graduate-level course conducts an archaeology of modern visual culture and attempts to map out some elements of the historical construction of 20th century spectacular society. One of the premises of the course is that many of these elements, or points of emergence, lie in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Thus we will examine transformations in philosophical and scientific ideas about vision and assess the ways in which those ideas were inseparable from the concrete development of visual practices and technologies in the nineteenth century. The changing status of the spectator will be discussed in terms of larger shifts in the nature of subjectivity, and in the unstable texture of both individual and collective experience. The hypothesis that "visual culture" in the West is inseparable from long-standing metaphysical and epistemological assumptions originating in antiquity, will be explored. The modernization of perception will be assessed through analyses of specific art works, optical technologies, cultural forms and media. A key aim of the course is to develop an awareness of the embeddedness of local visual artifacts and "reality effects" within a wider frame of intellectual and social transformation. At the same time, the theoretical problems involved in an attempt to historicize perception and visuality will be addressed critically. When possible the course will draw on exhibition and museum resources in New York (e.g. the Vanderlyn Panorama display at the Metropolitan Museum, pre-cinematic devices at the Museum of the Moving Image, various displays of 19th century photography, etc.)

CLASS ROOM CONDUCT: Sleeping in class, whispering or talking during lectures is considered extremely disruptive to the functioning of the course. Students engaging in such behavior will be asked to drop the course and a letter of explanation will be sent to their dean. The use of laptop computers is not permitted.

WEB SITE: The address of the course web site, still under construction, is:
www.learn.columbia.edu/mvc/

User name: ahar

Password: 826sch

READINGS: The course reader of required texts, listed in this syllabus, must be purchased. Details of price and availability will be announced on the first day of class. A bibliography of recommended related readings will be distributed during the second or third week.

The following recommended texts will be available at Labyrinth Books on 112th Street:

Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle
Charney, ed., Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life
Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century
Crary, Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture
Schwartz, Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

1. Introduction: Visual Culture as a Historical Problem

2. The Panorama and the modernization of display

Mikhail Bakhtin, "Introduction," Rabelais and His World, pp. 5-13
Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular" Wide Angle, Summer 1996, 35-64
Stephan Oettermann, The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium, Zone Books, pp. 5-47

3. J.M.W. Turner and theories of subjective vision

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Theory of Colours, MIT Press, pp. 1-28

4. Reality Effects before and after 1839

1839 texts by Daguerre and Arago, in Classic Essays on Photography, 11-25
Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," in Classic Essays on Photography

5. Images, audiences and social modernity: 1830-1855

Klaus Herding, "Courbet's The Painter's Studio: Focus of World Events, Site of Reconciliation," in Courbet: To Venture Independence, 45-61
Richard Terdiman, "Counter-Images," in Discourse/Counter-Discourse, Cornell Univ. Press, 1985, pp. 149-197

6. Baudelaire, Meryon and Paris: Remaking the City and the Spectator

Anthony Vidler, "Psychopathologies of Modern Space: Metropolitan Fear from Agoraphobia to Estrangement," in Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche, ed. Michael Roth, pp. 11-29
Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, pp. 11-24

7. The Crystal Palace and later World Exhibitions: Models of Visual Consumption


8. Later photography, Muybridge and Marey: The Hegemony of Machine Vision


9. Seurat, Wagner and the problem of mass culture

Richard Wagner, "On a Theater in Zurich," (1851) from Collected Prose Works, vol. 3
Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," (1903) in On Individuality and Social Forms, Univ. of Chicago Press, 324-339

10. Early cinema: Edison, Lumière, Méliès and Reynaud (will include viewing of films)

Noel Burch, "Charles Baudelaire vs. Dr. Frankenstein," in Life to these Shadows, Univ. Of Calif. Press, 6-22
Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-
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7. The Crystal Palace and later World Exhibitions: Models of Visual Consumption


8. Later photography, Muybridge and Marey: The Hegemony of Machine Vision


9. Seurat, Wagner and the problem of mass culture

Vanessa Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus," in Cinema and the
Invention of Modern Life, pp. 297-319
Richard Wagner, "On a Theater in Zurich," (1851) from Collected Prose Works, vol. 3
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