

## Vision, Image and Aesthetics

The University of Chicago, Winter Quarter 2002  
Wednesdays 12–2:50, Haskell Mezzanine 101  
<http://chalk.uchicago.edu/>

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This seminar examines the relationship between social practice and cultural imagination as mediated by diverse forms of visual representation. We will ground our survey of current theory in cases drawn from contemporary, historical, and archaeological contexts. Readings and class discussions will explore issues such as modernism and the avant-garde, cultural anthropology's movement beyond the modern, archaeology and European romanticism, the post-modern critique of mimesis and the return of the real.

### Texts

The following are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore and are on reserve at the Regenstein library. Course readings not listed here are available in PDF format on the course web site at <http://chalk.uchicago.edu/>. Although ordered from the Co-op, only limited selections will be read from the texts marked with an asterisk (\*).

Adorno, Theodor W., et al. 1977. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: Verso.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1997. *Aesthetic Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Barkan, Leonard. 1999. *Unearthing the past: archaeology and aesthetics in the making of Renaissance culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Barthes, Roland. 1982. *The Empire of Signs*. New York: Hill & Wang.

\*Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project*. R. Tiedemann, trans. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 1989. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency: an anthropological theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jameson, Fredric. 1981. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

\*Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Panofsky, Erwin. 1983. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## Course Requirements

Seminar participants will be expected to read all assigned texts and to prepare for general circulation a short (1-2 page) memo outlining your reactions to the key theoretical and analytic issues raised by the week's readings. Memos are to be posted to the 'discussion board' section of the course web site by 9:00 AM on the Monday before our regular Wednesday meeting. Each week, two students will be responsible for collecting and compiling these memos, for presenting the class with a critical introduction to a body of theory, and for leading subsequent class discussion. In addition to preparing memos and making at least one in-class presentation, students will also write a 15-page term paper. Topics should be discussed with the instructors by the seventh week of the quarter.

## Topics and Readings

### I. January 9: THE ANTIQUE AND THE AESTHETIC

Barkan, chapters 1-3

Eagleton, chapters 1, 2, 5

### II. January 16: POLITICS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

Adorno et al., Presentations II and III

Benjamin, W. 1968. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken. pp. 217-251.

Horkheimer, M., and T. Adorno. 1993. The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum. pp. 120-167.

### III. January 23: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF VISION: THE ARCADES PROJECT

\*Benjamin 1999, Browse.

Buck-Morss, chapters 1-4, 6.

Eagleton, chapters 8, 10, 12.

### IV. January 30: REPRESENTATION AND BEING

Heidegger, M. 1993. The Origin of the Work of Art. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. San Francisco: Harper.

Panofsky, essays 1, 4, 7

Eagleton, chapter 11.

### V. February 6: MODERNISM AND CROSS-CULTURAL AESTHETICS

Geertz, C. 1983. Art as a Cultural System. In *Local Knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 94-120.

Lévi-Strauss, chapter 1

Gell, chapters 1, 2, 7-9

VI. February 13: THE AESTHETIC TURN

Adorno 1997: pp. 1-44, 175-199, 325-331.

Eagleton ch.13

VII. February 20: POST-MODERN AESTHETICS I: ECONOMIES OF VISION

Berger, all

Frank, T. 1997. *The Conquest of Cool*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapters 1, 3.

VIII. February 27: POST-MODERN AESTHETICS II: NEO-MARX AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

Jameson, chapters 1, 3, 6.

Barthes, all.

IX. March 6: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO POST-MODERNISM?

Foster, Hal. 1996. Whatever Happened to Postmodernism? In *The Return of the Real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Mitchell, W. J. T. 1986. *Iconology: image, text, ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapters 1, 3, 6.