

Graduate Seminar: **The Iconic Turn**

Fall 2008

Tuesdays: 2.10-4pm

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 4.15-5.30 or by appointment.

Course Description: Affirmations that images have a life of their own have become commonplace in the literature of art history and visual studies. Older approaches to the “life” of images based on philosophical traditions such as phenomenology have been supplemented by fresh initiatives drawn from philosophy, anthropology, philosophy of history, sociology, science studies, visual studies, and art history. We will address texts drawn from each of these fields in an effort to understand their implications for today’s history of art. What claims are currently being made for the “presence” of objects--their power to shape their reception--by authors in both art history and visual studies? Can this sensitivity to the agency of images be reconciled with those approaches that stress their ideological and political function? What is lost and what is gained when an image is treated as if it were an icon?

Requirements: 1. Each week two members of the class will be asked to introduce the assigned readings. These presentations should take no longer than five to ten minutes. The reports should lay out the main ideas of the texts in question and suggest a couple of questions that might usefully begin class discussion. Speakers can get together to work out how best to deal with the assignment. Your comments (4-5 pages long) should be turned in after the presentation.

2. Students will be asked to write two short papers on a theorist or a theoretical issue that is relevant to their own scholarly work. Please submit a one-page outline of your project before getting started. One of these papers (5-7 pages) will be due at mid-term, and the other (8-10 pages) on the last day of classes.

3. I have tried to minimize reading in languages other than English. Nevertheless, the sessions dedicated to Visual Studies contain several texts in German. In order to get the full benefit from this course you should be able to read academic writing in this language.

Sept 2 Introduction: *Who’s who and why are we here? Aims of the course and how it works. Requirements.*

Sept 9 Philosophy I: *What are the philosophical traditions most closely associated with our response to the work of art? How does phenomenology conceive of the status of the image? What is its attitude to “representation”? What is the iconic power of the work of art? How does it conceive of the subject/object relationship?*

Readings: Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-20.

Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 17-81.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121-149.

Sept 16 **Philosophy II**: *What currents in contemporary philosophy offer us an alternative means of understanding our response to objects? How does the notion of "event" alter our understanding of "representation"?*

Readings: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Percept, Affect, and Concept," in *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 163-199.

Alain Badiou, "Art and Philosophy," in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1-15.

Sept 23 **Anthropology**: *Anthropologists have recently claimed that cultural artifacts have a life of their own. What, on this view, is the "agency" of objects?*

Readings: Alfred Gell, "The Distributed Person," in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 96-106.

Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, "Introduction: Thinking Through Things," in *Thinking Through Things: Theorizing Artefacts Ethnographically* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1-31.

Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991),

Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63.

Sept 30 **NO CLASS**

Oct 7 **Historiography**: *Our conception of history has been decisively altered by a new insistence that the past is available to us in some sense that escapes the mediating function of language. Where Hayden White and others once insisted that the role of writing, its implication in the present, forever distanced us from the events of the past, contemporary historiographers affirm that historical narratives create the past itself.*

Readings: Eelco Runia, "Presence," *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 1-29.

Runia, "Spots of Time," *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 305-316.

Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), "Introduction: Experience in History and Philosophy," and "Subjective Historical Experience: The Past as Elegy," in *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1-11; 263-315.

Oct 14 **Science Studies I**: *"Are words forces? Are they capable of fighting, revolting, betraying, playing, or killing? Yes, indeed, like all materials they may resist or give way. It is materials that divide us, not what we do with them."* (Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 155.

Readings: Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," in *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-16.

Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," in *Things*, 151-173.

Lorraine Daston, "Introduction: The Coming Into Being of Scientific Objects," in *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, ed. Lorraine Daston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1-14.

Oct 21 **Science Studies II:**

Readings: Timothy Lenoir, "Inscription Practices and Materialities of Communication," in *Inscribing Science: Scientific Texts and the Materiality of Communication*, ed.

Timothy Lenoir (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1-19.

Lorraine Daston, "Introduction: Speechless," in *Things that Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 9-24.

Oct 28 **Visual Studies I:** *The study of visual culture is often conceived in terms of the ideological function of images in popular culture. Recent initiatives, however, suggest that such images may also contain an iconic dimension. Such proposals call for new attention to the specific quality and texture of media.*

Readings: Keith Moxey, "Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7 (2008), 131-146.

Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005), 302-319; or "Medium-Bild-Körper: Einführung in das Thema," in *Bildanthropologie: Einwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2001), 1-55.

Gottfried Boehm, "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder," in *Was Ist Ein Bild?* (Munich: Fink, 1994), 11-38.

Horst Bredekamp, "A Neglected Tradition? Art History as *Bildwissenschaft*," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003), 418-428.

Nov 4 **NO CLASS**

Nov 11 **Visual Studies II:**

Readings: Horst Bredekamp, "Drehmomente—Merkmale und Ansprüche des Iconic Turn," in *Iconic Turn: Die Neue Macht der Bilder*, ed. Christa Maar and Hubert Burda (Cologne: Dumont, 2004), 15-26.

Horst Bredekamp, "Vom Baum zur Koralle," in *Darwins Korallen: Die fruhen Evolutionsdiagramme und die Tradition der Naturgeschichte* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2005), 12-28.

Steffen Bogen, "Kunstgeschichte/Kunstwissenschaft," in Klaus Sachs-Hombach ed., *Bildwissenschaft: Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2005), 52-67.

Nov 18 **Art History I:** *In what ways has the history of art responded to the renewed preoccupation with the "presence" of the object in other disciplines? What are the consequences for of the iconic turn for some of art histories most well established methodologies?*

Readings: Georges Didi-Huberman, "Has the 'Epistemological Transformation' Taken Place?" in Michael Zimmermann ed., *The Art Historian: National Traditions and Institutional Practices* (Williamstown: Clark Art Institute, 2003), 128-143.
Didi-Huberman, "The History of Art Within the Limits of its Simple Practice," in *Confronting Images: Questioning the Limits of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2005 [1st ed. Paris, 1990]), 11-52.
Michael Ann Holly, "The Melancholy Art," *Art Bulletin* 89 (2007), 7-20.

Nov 25 **Art History II:**

Readings: W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures Want?" and "The Surplus Value of Images," in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 28-56, and 76-106.
Mitchell, "Metapictures," in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35-82.
James Elkins, "What is a Picture?" in *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 52-67.

Dec 2 **Afterwords:** *What have we learned? Perspectives on the readings by all members of the class.*