

HUMA 16000 Media Aesthetics: Image

Course Description

Media Aesthetics introduces students to the humanities by investigating how media work and how we aesthetically perceive them. We treat "aesthetics" as the study of sensory perception, of value, and of stylistic and formal properties of artistic products. We understand "medium" along a spectrum of meanings that range (in Aristotle's terms) from the "material cause" of art (stone for sculpture, sounds for music, words for poetry) to the "instrumental cause" (the apparatus of writing or printing, film, the broadcast media, the Internet). In Fall Quarter we focus on visual media, and pose a number of questions about images drawn from a range of historical periods: what are the different forms of copying and imitation? Is it possible to ascertain how seemingly "natural" and/ or "mechanical" forms of representation are not as objective as they seem to be? Is representation a replication of reality or is reality constituted through representation? Could there be a copy without an original? Can images constitute the real?

Key Questions for the Course

What are the different forms of copying and imitation?

How do these forms relate to the medium in which they are rendered?

Are some forms of reproduction valued more than others, considered more hazardous than others? If so why?

Is it possible to ascertain how seemingly "natural" and/ or "mechanical" forms of representation are not as objective or universal as they seem to be?

Does the visible always have some relation to the invisible, and if so, what?

What is the relation of knowledge to duplication?

Is representation based on a prior reality or is reality constituted through representation—or some of both? Are there copies with no originals? And is it possible that images can seem as or more real than life itself, and under what conditions?

Why and how has Western culture focused to such a great extent on questions and issues of reproduction?

If we find that there are opposed ideologies about the legitimacy of simulation, are there important contradictions that result? How do these reverberate socially and politically?

Course Texts

Plato, *Republic*, trans/ed. Reeve

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Required Download

Jonathan Blow, *Braid*, purchase at <http://store.steampowered.com/app/26800> or on gaming platform of your choice

All other reading available on Chalk

Course Screenings (at Doc Films)

Cronenberg, *Videodrome*

Hitchcock, *Vertigo*

Course Schedule

Week 1

A

Introduction: Image and Medium

Las Meninas—Image

B

W.J.T. Mitchell, “Image”
Mitchell, “Addressing Media”

Week 2

A

The Problem of Images: Plato’s Critique of Imitation

Plato, *Republic*, Book 7

B

Plato, *Republic*, Book 3 and 10

Screening: Cronenberg, *Videodrome*, at Doc Films (1212 E 59th St)

Week 3

A

David Cronenberg, *Videodrome*

B

Cronenberg, *Videodrome*

Week 4

Photography and the Promise of Images

A

Andre Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”
Charles Baudelaire “Modern Public and Photography”

B

Pair A:
Jeff Wall, *Picture For Women*
Eduard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergèr*

Pair B:
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled (Bacchus)*
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Sick Bacchus*
Possible special collections visit (see chalk document)

Week 5

A

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological
Reproducibility”

B

Benjamin, “Work of Art”

Week 6

A

Benjamin, “Work of Art”

B Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Week 7

A Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

B Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Screening: Hitchcock, *Vertigo*, at Doc Films

Week 8

A Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*
Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

B Hitchcock, *Vertigo*

Week 9

A Jonathan Blow, *Braid*

B *Thanksgiving: no class*

Week 10

A Open class/wrap-up

B (if M/W) Open class/wrap-up