
Sightseeing in art and visual culture

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I crave, I long for Abstinence from Images, for every Image is bad. (Roland Barthes, quoted in Jay 1994:435).

Visual unease

Deceptively straightforward, the contemporary visual terrain in westernised, post-industrial cultures is increasingly developing into a complex smorgasbord of visual spectacles available to potential viewers. Discourse dealing with issues arising from this field of the visual, or 'visual culture', is evidence of an intellectual acknowledgment that present-day (post-industrial) social, political and cultural life is undeniably entangled with (and complicated by) images. As a result, over the past two decades or so, institutions worldwide have adapted their teaching programmes to accommodate the field of visual culture as a site that requires serious academic attention. Recent enquiry into the ideological underpinnings of images in general, as well as the assumption that vision is a learnt activity, has led to new questions being asked in (and of) art history. In response to the disciplinary challenges that have now been lodged against the subject art history,¹ the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria has significantly modified its theoretical subjects to 'deal' with the visual with a view to affording students opportunities to develop critical thinking skills in the present image-laden world. In response to the tone of the University's centenary celebrations – based on retrospection, evaluation and looking to the future – this article considers the rising production, reproduction and consumption of images that have dominoed into academic unease over the most suitable way/s in which images should be dealt with as both *sights* and *sites* in art history and/or visual culture studies by briefly contextualising the programme offered by the Department of Visual Arts within these debates.

The *Mobile Assistant IV* (MA-IV) (Figure 1), a wearable computer produced by Xybernaut in 2001, demonstrates the extremely visual nature of contemporary life. A full-colour screen – about the size of a postage stamp – is

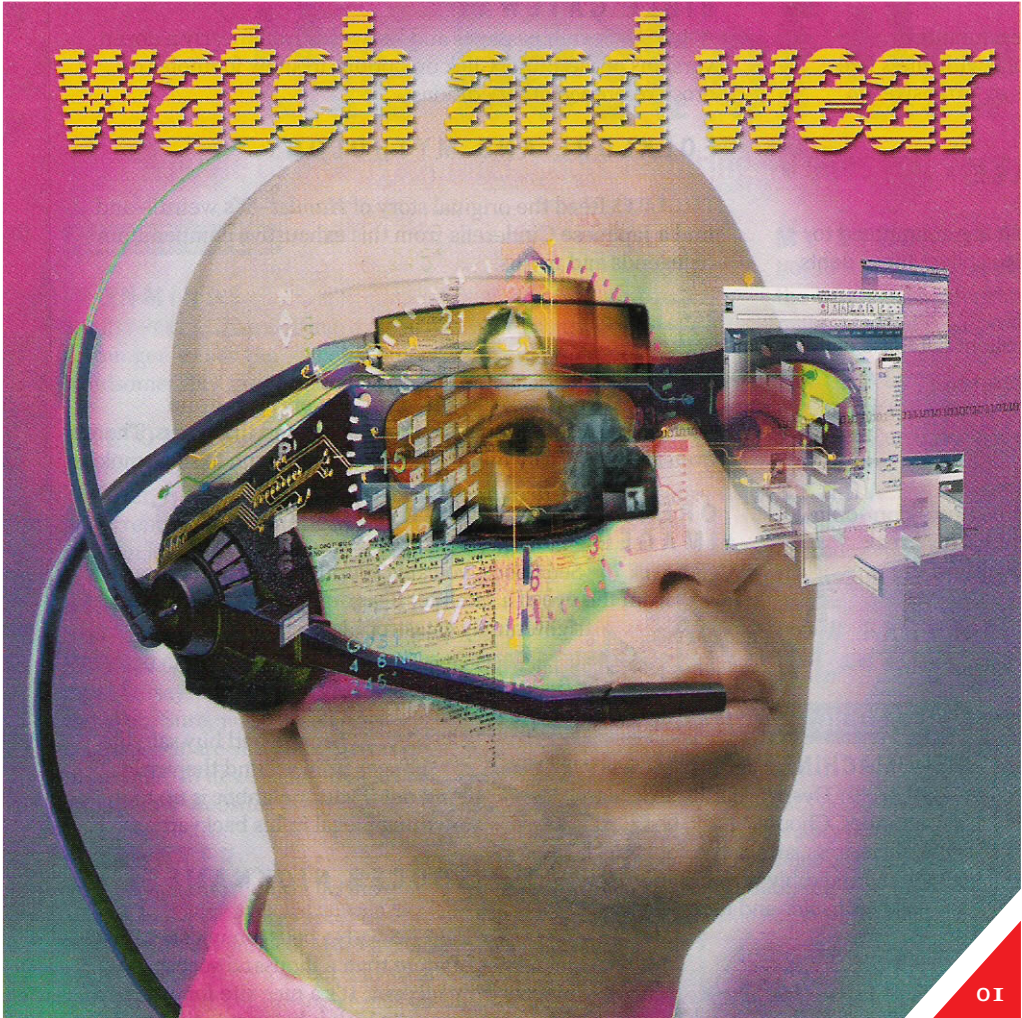


Figure 1: *Mobile Assistant IV*
Source: The Bigger Picture/Reuters.

suspended in front of the eye and a keyboard strapped to the wrist. While walking around the office, one can send e-mail, write articles or surf the Web at the same time that reality literally merges with virtual reality. Sceptics of the MA-IV within the industry scoff at the notion that 'wearables' will become a consumer product (Ghosh 2001:40). Since the MA-IV has exactly the same functionality as a laptop, one question that arises is why anyone would want to surf the Net, or play a computer game, while walking around? However, when 'wearables' are mass produced and marketed with a certain 'look' and 'feel', they *will* probably become a consumer product, irrespective of their utility, for we live in an age of 'hypervisuality', according to Nicholas Mirzoeff (2003:1), whereby the complex intersection of seeing and being seen – or 'watching' and 'wearing' – characterises modern life.

Perhaps, a more compelling argument for Mirzoeff's notion of hypervisuality can be made when one considers recent fascination with the *Nintendo Wii* – a device that involves realistic physical interaction between a player and a game (or body and screen). While acting as if a game is being played in the real world, a person is in his or her own lounge watching, and interacting with, a TV screen. Not too long ago, the notion that physical interaction with a TV screen might replace similar activities already available in the real world may have been met with some scepticism. The popularity of *Nintendo Wii* is, however, yet another example of the age of hypervisuality in which reality is constantly mediated. These are manifestations of visual culture whose influence on the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of human life can no longer be ignored.

Discourse on the topic of the contemporary visual onslaught is increasingly dominated by the cliché that 'contemporary life is more visual than ever before'. For example, Mirzoeff (1999:1, 4) postulates that 'modern life takes place onscreen' and that 'human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before'. Likewise, Paul Duncum (2002:15) contends that more than at any other time in history, everyday life is increasingly intertwined with visual imagery, while already in the 1980s Ernst Gombrich (1982:137) asserted that 'ours is a visual age' and that 'we are bombarded with pictures from morning till night'. In the light of these statements, then, to agree with David McLellan's (1995:4) rather

persuasive assertion that 'we live in the era of the Image' is undoubtedly tempting.

While it cannot be denied that living in the twenty-first century means being constantly surrounded by – or, more aptly, bombarded with – a swarm of visual spectacles, the premise on which the afore-mentioned assumptions rest is that contemporary life is somehow based progressively *more* on the visual than in the past and that ours is a 'culture of ... images' (Richard 2002:214). While Mirzoeff (1999) and Duncum (2002) argue that images have never before been more prominent in daily life than in this era, is the need, desire or compulsion to create images, and to be surrounded by images, unique (or only problematic) to the contemporary age? Mark Poster (2002:67) disputes the supposed 'new' dominance of the visual quite convincingly when he argues that people now do not use their eyes more than they did in the past by drawing on an example of how distance was measured in the Middle Ages. Poster (2002:67) explains that:

A standard of measure in certain villages was how far one could see a red bird in a forest. To the people of the day who used this expression, the distance it designated was something quite specific, as useful as saying a certain expanse is 50 yards.

Could medieval societies have had far better developed visual skills than twenty-first century people? The centrality of the visual in spiritual practices during the Middle Ages, and the resultant desecration of images by the Iconoclasts in the eighth century, is suggestive of the highly visual character of society at that time. Medieval Christendom used visual representations of Biblical stories to educate the illiterate masses, while the light streaming into Gothic churches through the stained glass window designs was a symbol of divine illumination. Although the iconoclasm of the Reformation marked a decline in Christian imagery in Protestant churches in the sixteenth century, the result was not that the *production* of images declined, but only that art functioned differently thereafter. For, while the ties between the visual arts and religion began to disintegrate, and Protestantism no longer required – or desired – the visual arts to assist in the spiritual education of its followers, images were merely put to other uses – predominately political and social (Jay 1994:36-46).

Trusting the visual

Evidence of the cultural obsession with vision (in terms of the notion that sight can give access to some inner truth) can be found throughout the modern period. The invention of the microscope (1400s), the camera obscura² (1500s), the telescope (1600s), the stereoscope³ (1838), the flat, silver-backed looking glass (1840), and the photograph (1840), all reflect a cultural obsession with sight. More recently, digital, satellite, and surveillance cameras all serve as evidence of this consuming interest in the visual world. While privileging spectatorship, visual technologies may be said to have dominated the modern era, while simultaneously fostering, what Martin Jay (1994: 435) terms the 'Cartesian perspectivalist scopic regime', in which sight was privileged above the other senses. Jay (1994:81) points out that Cartesian philosophy, based on the French philosopher René Descartes' (1596-1650) formulation of the modern epistemological habit of seeing ideas or representations in the mind, was 'particularly influential because of its valorisation of the disembodied eye'. An extension of this was the typical Cartesian trust in only what could be seen with the eye. As a result, the overwhelming development of ocular apparatus to supposedly improve access to the 'real' world characterises the modern era.

The scientific gaze that was turned on the world in the seventeenth century inspired an interest in the study of nature through 'sense experience' (Barnard 2001:21). The increasing empirical life view that echoed modern scientific experimentation was also reflected in an interest in the active potential of vision. The empiricist approach in scientific experimentation is effectively portrayed in the British artist Joseph Wright's painting, *An experiment on a bird in an air pump* (1768),⁴ which shows a scientist providing entertainment to an eighteenth century family. The scene reflects the explosion of progress and discovery made in the eighteenth century in a range of scientific and technological fields. More recently, the dramatic effects of a cultural preoccupation with visual probing are evident in what Mirzoeff (1999:7) terms the 'diagnostic medical gaze'. By means of complex technology, internal organs can be imaged as visual patterns that can describe everything from brain activity to the heartbeat. Images have no doubt gained people's trust precisely

because they are associated with complex technology. In the nineteenth century, the development of high-speed presses and photographic half-tone printing processes ignited a rapid acceleration of image production. William Ives (quoted in Mitchell 1992:82) found that 'the number of printed pictures produced between 1800 and 1901 was probably considerably greater than the total number of printed pictures that had been produced before 1801'. Before the invention of printing in the fifteenth century, images served ritual or aesthetic purposes, and were few and scarce. But, with the advent of printmaking in northern Italy in the mid fifteenth century, the process of disseminating knowledge and expanding social consciousness was markedly accelerated and by the nineteenth century the mass produced image had become accessible and freely available. The photograph heralded the start of what the seminal cultural theorist, Walter Benjamin (1936 [1970]), termed the 'age of mechanical reproduction', in which the general population was afforded visual experience and opportunities previously reserved for the elite. Profoundly applicable to industrial capitalism, the usefulness of photography's methods in a vast range of activities was immediately seized upon, for both public and private use. For example, John Berger (1980:48) notes that:

Within a mere 30 years of its invention as a gadget for an elite, photography was being used for police filing, war reporting, military reconnaissance, pornography, encyclopedia documentation, family albums ... news reporting and formal portraiture.

In this way, knowledge of the world came to be derived mostly from pictures. In the twentieth century, with the promise of offering direct access to the 'real', photography thus 'replaced the world as immediate testimony' (Berger 1980:48) and became a public (and supposedly) democratic medium.

But, in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries images are produced with the purpose of being reused; they can be copied and transmitted instantly and they cannot easily be examined for physical evidence of tampering. This has led to what WJT Mitchell (1992:17) describes as the 'new uncertainty about the status and interpretation of the visual signifier'. For, as Birgit Richard (2002:211) suggests, 'an image no longer tells more than a thousand

words – images seem to offer many views from different angles'. This means that the signifier has become unstable in the sense that the 'shifting images' (Richard 2002:211) that now dominate the postmodern age cannot be regarded as firm, stable or truthful entities. Consequently, the problem with images is not only that they are complex or multi-layered but also that they contain no hidden (or even obvious) truth. While the Afrikaans word for 'perceive' is *waarneem* – which literally means, to take or receive as true – images clearly cannot be trusted to reveal truth.

Ultimately, whether or not we agree with Horace's notion (quoted in Gombrich 1982:140) that 'the mind is more slowly stirred by the ear than by the eye', it cannot be denied that images occupy a critical space in contemporary life. A far more pressing question than whether or not life in the twenty-first century is more visual than in the past is how the 'different visual regimes' (Poster 2002:67) that are now at stake, owing to the new types of images that abound in modern society, affect and effect social consciousness. For, as James Elkins (2003:131) quite rightly proposes, 'we are ... [now] more *adept* at the visual than any preceding culture' [emphasis added].

Dealing with the visual

Worldwide changes in institutional curricula, as well as recent publications dealing with art, culture, literature, the mass media and so forth, show an ever-increasing awareness and critique of the 'ocularcentrism'⁵ of this age and the implications of sight having become the 'master sense of the modern era' (Jay 1994:543). These developments confirm Mitchell's (1994:11-34) contention that a 'pictorial turn'⁶ has occurred in the Humanities, which may have grown out of the so-called 'cultural turn' that took place in academic programmes in the 1950s. In Jay's book, *Downcast eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, he provides an account of 'an antiocularcentric discourse' that pervades much literature on the topic of vision (Jay 1994:16).⁷ This kind of 'rhetoric of the power of images' may be due to a widespread assumption that, as Mitchell (1996: 73) explains, '[i]mages have a kind of social or psychological power of their own'. For example, Guy Debord (1994: 26) identifies the commodity of images as 'ruling over all

lived experience' and, thereby, dominating, what he terms, the 'society of the spectacle'. In the same manner, the proliferation of images by technological means prompted Charles Baudelaire (quoted in Jay 1994:122) to critique the 'cult of images' as early as the nineteenth century. Furthermore, cultural criticism has shown that we live in a culture of 'surveillance' (Foucault 1977) and 'simulacra' (Baudrillard 1988:167), in which 'scopic regimes' (Jay 1994) of race, class and gender govern the production and reproduction of images.

Based on the literature already available on the topic of images and how they function in culture it would seem that the *conceptual* aspect of seeing is widely regarded as a fundamental topic in visual analysis. This means that both the image and the beholder of the image are viewed as embedded in social, political and cultural life; what we see and how we act on what we see is constructed in culture. In this way, the visual domain is regarded as socially constructed, leading to the analysis of how images operate in the terrain of cultural and political life or, put differently, how images function in terms of ideology. With journalistic photography, for example, the context of publication as well as the accompanying text and the choice of composition legitimate and produce myths, or ideologies, which function to support prevailing structures of power. In this way, a multiplicity of meanings – or what Stuart Hall (1996) describes as the 'polysemic nature of signs' – is mobilised through cultural practices in the construction of myth and counter-myth.

Precisely because photographs, in the guise of reality, are easily believable, people shape their lives on what they see in photographs, in films, in advertising, in TV news or on the TV screen in general. Therefore, as a result of the domination of the visual in cultural and social practices the visual field is recognised as a 'field of anxiety, fantasy, and power' (Mitchell 2001:8). Mieke Bal (2003:9) quite aptly points out that looking is 'profoundly impure' since it is 'inherently framed, framing, interpreting, affect-laden, cognitive and intellectual'. In the same vein, Irit Rogoff (1998:22) argues that, 'what the eye purportedly "sees" is dictated to it by an entire set of beliefs and desires and by a set of coded languages and generic apparatuses'. The cultural and ideological dimensions of vision – the conceptual aspect of seeing – are made problematic and obvious in this type of analysis. What

we know and what we believe affect the way we see images. Consequently, it is not so much that seeing is believing, but rather that believing is seeing.

While images can be understood (relatively unproblematically) as ideologically constructed, can sight itself – the biological functioning of the eye – be regarded as artificially constructed? Can images themselves influence and change actual seeing? Does seeing have a history, and if so, how do we see seeing? Discourse on the plasticity of vision indicates that certain theorists now regard actual seeing as constructed (or learnt) (Mirzoeff 1999; Mitchell 2002). This premise is quite convincingly demonstrated by the neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks, in *An anthropologist on Mars*, in which the author relates a story of a 50-year-old man, Virgil, who having been blind since childhood undergoes an operation that restores his sight. After the surgery, and notwithstanding his new visual abilities, the man struggles to once again conceive his world and what he sees has no coherence. At first he sees a meaningless blur of colours and movement and it is only when someone speaks that the chaos of light and shadow become a face. This example demonstrates that visual learning supports human existence, or phrased somewhat differently, that visual experience cannot be disentangled from perception. In the words of Sacks (1995:108), ‘we are not given the world: we make our world through incessant experience, categorisation, memory, reconnection’. As a neurologist, Sacks is not only interested in but, moreover, astounded by the plasticity of the brain; the way in which it can adapt, particularly when afflicted by some mishap – a handicap, for instance. Surely, if the brain (so crucial in the process of seeing) can be understood as being plastic, then sight itself can also, by extension, be considered plastic?

Evidence suggests that people’s innate ability to see is indeed influenced by socio-cultural circumstances through a process termed ‘visual learning’. For example, Marshall Segall’s (1976:100) research shows that perception is linked to cultural factors and previous visual experiences. This means that the ‘residues of previous sensory experiences’ (Segall 1976:100) immediately and unconsciously affect the perception of every subsequent visual stimulus. Visual experience may then be regarded as flexible, a product of past experiences and not simply a given. Such an argument could quite easily draw on examples from the history of art in order to further demonstrate the

point. For instance, the viewing public’s initial rejection of the discoveries made by the Impressionists in portraying coloured reflections and coloured shadows, attests to the premise that images affect vision. Gombrich (1982:27) maintains that ‘the public had to learn to see’ Impressionist paintings, which at first did not look convincing. Having looked at an Impressionist painting of coloured shadows, the viewers, to their surprise, could verify them in nature. Berger (1972:18) confirms that, largely influenced by the invention of the camera, people began to see differently, and the visible was given new meaning. The Impressionists pursued a scientific approach, attempting to reproduce the experience of light and colour as it is imprinted on the retina. Seemingly unfinished, with sketchy brushstrokes still visible, the paintings showed blurred forms and unblended juxtaposed colours. For the Impressionists, the *experience* of sight, through the depiction of the fleeting, temporalised glance combined with an awareness of the embodied quality of vision, was paramount.

Visual culture studies

For Mitchell (2002:232), both seeing (the conceptual) and vision (the perceptual) must now be interrogated in a task he calls ‘showing seeing’. This process constitutes not only a critical investigation into the socially constructed nature of visual life, but also an interrogation of the construction of vision through culturally endorsed modes of representation. This kind of approach acknowledges that, as Gombrich (1982:12) states, there is a ‘relation between visual perception and pictorial representation’, or, seeing and showing, in Mitchell’s terms. As Berger (1972:10) points out, ‘every image embodies a way of seeing’ and, consequently, the ‘way of seeing’ of the creator of the image is reflected in the choice of representation. If sight is not automatic, but a learned activity, then images themselves surely produce human vision.⁸ And if it is accepted that not only do pictures affect sight, on the one hand, but that they are embedded in social, cultural and political life on the other, what does this mean for the discipline of art history, which has traditionally dealt with images, but certainly not in this way?

While art historians begin to investigate ways in which art has always constructed seeing, questions are simultaneously raised regarding the methodological approach traditionally used in art history. This is because, if we assume that all images are 'bad', as Barthes (quoted in Jay 1994:435) suggests, then we also have to interrogate how images produced in the name of art have constructed vision. This then leads to a process of sight-seeing (or seeing vision) through an examination of art and an interrogation of art as a catalyst for the construction of a certain kind of perception. Consequently, an inquiry into art history's role as advocator of cultural values, through the endorsement of a particular 'way of seeing', may now be unavoidable. For, if historical changes in representation, combined with scientific and technological progress, have constructed Western perception, then the values embedded in artistic conventions must be interrogated to expose their construction of the viewing audience. This kind of campaign would analyse the parallel relationship of images to vision and led to Mitchell's (2002:232) 'showing seeing' or, *sight-seeing through the visual*.

A (not so) new academic endeavour, variously termed visual studies, visual culture or visual culture studies, emerged early in the 1990s presumably to deal with issues relating to *visuality*. Jeanne van Eeden and Amanda du Preez (2005:6) define visuality as the 'complex relationship of simultaneously seeing and being seen'. Put somewhat differently, Caroline van Eck and Edward Winters (2005:3) define visuality as 'the discursive [...] articulation of what is seen by a subject embedded in history'. What this means is that visual culture studies problematises 'the centrality of vision and the visual world in producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes and power relations within culture' (Rogoff 1998:14).

While its academic status is still quite tenuous (there is little consensus on how the study of the visual should be positioned within academic practice),⁹ much debate surrounds how visual culture studies and art history's shared field of study – images – is interwoven. How should visual culture studies be positioned within, alongside or below the discipline of art history? While art history is a firmly established discipline undeniably concerned with images, it has traditionally not shown an interest in the ways in which the artwork has con-

structed its viewers as *seeing* subjects. Even the so-called New Art History, which in the 1980s questioned previous methods in the analysis of art and applied new theoretical perspectives such as perception theory, psychoanalytical theory, socio-logy, political thought, structuralism, semiotics, postcolonial theory, feminism, cultural theory and deconstruction to artworks, may not be new enough to deal with the uncomfortable questions raised by visual culture studies, specifically regarding Art History's epistemological foundation. In particular, can art history continue to defend its mainly modernistic assumptions about its object of study – art – as an object of value with significant cultural status? It is often claimed, in fact, that visual culture studies offers a more democratic approach to dealing with the visual than that taken by art history thus far.

Alternatively, since visual culture studies democratises visual experience and addresses the issue of contemporary visuality, should all images, including works of art, be subsumed into the same category, to be read and interpreted as cultural documents? Does visual culture studies insist that art works be conflated with topics such as fashion, sub-cultural groups, shopping malls, advertisements, billboards, brain scans, computer games, and *Tannie Evita*?¹⁰ How can a curriculum deal with images (in both art and visual culture) in a way that is most suitable for students and their understanding of the diverse functions and interpretations of images? In an attempt to redress the inequalities of previous accounts of art and visual culture, but also acknowledging the impossibility of reaching an ultimate and final verdict for the study of the visual, the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria has been redesigning its theoretical component on an ongoing basis since the late 1990s. The following discussion attempts to very broadly describe what topics and methodology are employed in the two theoretical subjects at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels, namely, Visual Communication and Art History. Both subjects are compulsory for students completing the BA Fine Arts, BA Information Design and BA Visual Studies undergraduate degrees, as well as for post-graduate students registering for the honours degree in Visual Studies.

Visual Communication at first year level introduces the student to visual culture, with a particular focus on modes

of analysis (such as formalism, feminism, Marxism and semiotics) and their application to diverse examples in the mass media (such as advertising and music video). An interrogation of film, photography, digital media and advertising positions these media within the discourses of Barthes, Benjamin, Sontag, Baudrillard and Mulvey. Concurrently, in art history, the first year student explores Western art from prehistory to the present as well as design in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in terms of the interaction between art, design, culture and ideas.

Second year Visual Communication analyses type and image and their respective applications within the contexts of the marketing situation, advertising and promotion. The module also analyses the creation of corporate, product and brand identities. In addition, students are introduced to the discourse of magazine and film culture within the South African context, emphasising topics such as race, class, gender and identity. In the second year Art History modules a broad spectrum of issues arising from the ideologies of colonialism and imperialism, postcolonial thinking and African art are explored. Thereafter the ways in which identities and subjectivities are constructed in landscapes and portraits are analysed by dealing, in particular, with concepts and genres such as subjectivity, the sublime, sensation, pantheism, the nude, and various modes of portraiture.

In Visual Communication at third year level, dual views of mediated communication are discussed. This module explores how ideologies are constructed in visual culture on the one hand, and also deals with the position of the user and audience in the reception and construction of mediated communication on the other. Furthermore, a critical decoding of visual and virtual spaces exposes the culturally encoded ideas and ideologies embodied in space and place. Topics arising within the visual culture of virtual reality (such as the history and development of virtual reality, virtual communities, the cyborg and cyberpunk) are discussed. In third year Art History, Modernism and Postmodernism are investigated as the dominant ideological and theoretical paradigms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Modernist concepts such as avant-gardism, abstraction, urbanity and form are discussed within the critical theories of Kant, Baudelaire, Greenberg and Pollock. Key Postmodern theorists such as

Lyotard, Baudrillard and Taylor are discussed in an exploration of concepts such as figuration, meaning, *différance*, *simulacrum* and identity. Furthermore, aspects of representation and identity are explored in contemporary South African art.

Based on course reviews from the students as well as the report on the external evaluation conducted in the Department of Visual Arts in 2003, students perceive Visual Communication as an interesting and relevant subject and are by and large enthusiastic about the course. The growing number of students enrolled for Visual Communication (and most notably, increasing cross-faculty enrolments) indicates that the innovative content and methodology provides a dynamic offering to students. Can the distinction between art history and visual communication persist unproblematically in light of the issues discussed previously in this article?

A final word on images

Images unquestionably inhabit the site (read *sight*) at which art history and visual culture studies converge, or more aptly perhaps, collide. While the question of whether or not Art History and Visual Culture Studies can (or should) co-exist as separate fields of study is difficult to avoid, a straightforward answer will no doubt be delayed by heated debate on the matter, from both sides of the disciplinary fence.¹¹ Margaret Dikovitskaya (2005) provides an overview of the development of visual culture studies in her book *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn*. Based on the interviews she conducted with key thinkers in the field of contemporary visual inquiry, such as Michael Ann Holly, Martin Jay, Nicholas Mirzoeff, WJT Mitchell and Janet Wolff, the book provides insight into key debates in the field, but more importantly, describes the various constitutions of visual culture programmes, mainly in the USA and the UK. While there are several issues regarding the aims and protocols of visual culture studies as an academic endeavour that evade consensus among its practitioners, from this overview it is clear that the relationship between art history and visual culture studies, in particular, remains tenuous.

Whether or not art history, as a separate discipline, will prevail after the visual culture studies onslaught will

probably not depend on the virtues or vices of either field, but rather on each individual institution's agenda, funding and the availability of teaching staff. A far more pressing issue than the name we give our subject is to enquire about the methods that are employed in the analysis of images. While the conceptual and perceptual aspects of seeing images, as already argued, should be combined in the analysis of both art and visual culture, such an approach may ultimately fall prey to a concept of art works as signs whose significance is only analysed in terms of a broader cultural dimension, thus dismissing their particular and material dimension. Consequently, this approach may marginalise the experience of the artwork, thereby negating acts of 'musing, thinking, and meditating' (Nochlin 2002:9). Perhaps art history's goal, in redefining itself – as redefinition seems unavoidable – is to be the discipline that acknowledges the remainder (read reminder) when dealing with images: an aspect that remains inaccessible and which cannot be 'disciplined'. Without subscribing to the kind of 'fetishism' that discriminates between different kinds of images and without regarding an inaccessible dimension of an image as a weakness for the discipline, this would be to acknowledge the image itself with its own ontology and integrity, combined with recognition and analysis of its place in culture. As Mitchell (1996:82) argues, what 'pictures really want' from us is 'what we have failed to give them [which is] an idea of visuality adequate to their ontology'.

Notes

- 1 Art history was first taught by the Department of Afrikaans Art and Cultural History at the University of Pretoria in 1931 and although the name of the Department has changed over the years, art history has always been a major independent subject.
- 2 Camera obscura literally means 'a dark room'. Leonardo da Vinci was the first to notice that when light is passed through a small hole into a dark room, an inverted image appears on the opposite wall. The astronomer Johan Kepler (1571-1630) invented a portable camera obscura in the seventeenth century which resembled a tent.
- 3 A stereoscope is a device that allows two photographs or views of the same subject, each from slightly different angles, to be viewed simultaneously, thereby creating an effect of depth and solidity.
- 4 This image can be viewed at <http://www.national-gallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/Collection-Publisher.woa/wa/largeImage?workNumber=NG725&collectionPublisherSection=work>
- 5 Martin Jay (1994:3) indicates that there are currently several variations of this neologism. While Jay (1994:3) uses the expressions 'ocularcentric' and 'ocularcentrism', he acknowledges the use of alternate variations, including 'oculocentric' or, the less frequently used term, 'ocularocentric'. These terms all refer to the domination of the visual in culture.
- 6 It should be noted, however, that Mitchell (2002:241) has since revised this notion, more recently arguing that 'the supposed hegemony of the visible in our time [...] is a chimera that has outlived its usefulness'.
- 7 Jay (1994:264) identifies Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty as suspicious of the Cartesian perspectivalist gaze. Through their 'radical questioning of the ocularcentric bias of the dominant tradition' (Jay 1994:264), these thinkers argued in favour of a new ontology of sight.
- 8 Phrased somewhat differently, Wartofsky (quoted in Jay 1994:4) contends that, 'human vision is itself an artefact, produced by other artefacts, namely pictures'. Furthermore, Jan Deregowski (1971:27-33) demonstrated that uneducated Zambian women had difficulty in matching realistic pictures with the objects they represented. Therefore, the perception of images

is shown to be dependent on the greater experience of other pictures.

- 9 See James Elkins' informative overview of the emergence and varied constitutions of visual studies in *Visual Studies, a sceptical introduction* (2003). Margaret Dikovitskaya (2005) provides an overview of the development of visual culture studies in her book *Visual Culture: the study of the visual after the cultural turn*. In this publication, Dikovitskaya lists a substantial range of books and readers dealing with images, vision and visuality from the perspective of visual culture studies. In addition, the diverse responses to the *October* (1996) questionnaire that invited responses from a wide range of intellectuals working in disciplines related to the field of visual culture are rather illuminating in this regard.
- 10 Evita Bezuidenhout (affectionately known as *Tannie Evita*) is a persona created by South African writer, actor and satirist, Pieter Dirk Uys. Having now already acquired legendary status, Uys describes Evita Bezuidenhout as a satirical mouthpiece to draw 'attention to the presence of both cultural and social discord in South Africa' (Basel 2001:4).
- 11 See Lauwrens (2005:49-57) for a discussion of the various arguments regarding the disciplinary borders between art history and visual culture studies.

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