Chapter 4 Notes
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- **Intro: Page 139-142**

    - Realism is not Representationalism

    - "In this chapter we consider realism in a range of visual cultures, focusing on the origins and legacies of perspective. In some cases the same conventions have been linked to different political agendas. We have already noted Saussure's dictum that the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary, shifting and contextual. We will demonstrate that it is important to look at the signifier's production, the processes through which codes and conventions emerge in context." pp140

    - As we will see in this chapter, definitions of realism have changed over time. Many different styles have been associated with it, and there have been a myriad of motives and meanings behind its use.

    - An imaging convention that is central to most forms of realism is perspective. It is a cornerstone of pictorial work across painting, photography, film, etc.

    - "By tracing the ways different types of perspective have developed, we show how practices of looking and image-making have been tied to conventions... used to know and experience "the real."" pp141

    - Ideology plays a large part in realism. What you believe is real defines your view of it.

    - "In photography realism is sometimes tied to ethical ideas about whether and how accurately photographs represent events as they occurred. We expect photojournalists to observe "realist" conventions rather than using the camera in [a more]... interpretive manner." pp 139 "Realism"in the late 19th century became associated with a photographic style of social realism. We can see this style in the humanitarian work of Jacob Riis. Riis used flash photography to reveal the appalling living conditions of the unlit tenement housing of New York factory workers. Here realism stood for authenticity, and was a journalistic tool used to garner the sympathy of Riis's audience.

- Representational realism: images stand in for the "real thing." As an observer would see it in life. These objects can have symbolic meanings to communicate a meaning beyond what is depicted. This is still realism, because the connoted meaning is real for those who are interpellated by the images.

  - In the Renaissance, an effort was made to make art more "scientific." This meant using devices of measurement and mechanical tools to see and render work. This was to take away as much human error as possible. As most work made during this period was done under the patronage of the Catholic church, to strive for perfection, images that looked three-dimensional and real, was a religious and philosophical aim.

  - Realism is often considered the opposite of abstraction. The division between realism and abstraction is blurry and undefined. Art critic Jean Cassou writes, "The word realism is one of the most vague and ambitious of the vocabulary of aesthetics… there are thousands of ways for [an artist] to be a realist." (pp142) In the chapter, the movement of Pop art is used as an example of art that incorporates both realist and abstract elements.

- **Types of Realism:**

  - 20th Century Russian Realism
    - The Realistic Manifesto:
    - Captured key principles of the Soviet Constructivist art movement that arose after the 1917 October revolution that ended the tsarist rule and launched the Soviet Union
    - Written in 1919-20 by brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner
    - Criticized past art forms like Cubism and Futurism as mere illusions (representation = illusion)
    - Championed for realism because of material reality of space and time
    - Called for technology and industry revolution
  - Gabo and the constructivists used kinetics (study of force and reaction), movement and industrial materials to champion social change and progress, using geometric abstraction and objective form to represent the Soviet state.

  - Man with a Movie Camera
    - Film made by Dziga Vertov to immerse the viewer in the pace of Soviet urban life, and present industrial progress as awe-inspiring. The "realism" here is the attention to everyday life, the simulation of

speed of that life.

- Soviet Socialist Realism pp 144

    - After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin rejected Constructivism as too elitist. He mandated the return of pictorial style to promote the government and its ideologies.

    - It became dangerous for artists to make work that wasn't in the "official" Stalinist style. These artists were persecuted, censored and surveilled.

    - A 1974 exhibition of "unofficial" art was destroyed by thugs hired by local officials. Many artists emigrated, and organizer Evgeny Ruhkin died under suspicious circumstances.

- French Poetic Realism
    - 1930's
    - Coincided with Soviet Socialist Realism
    - Dark and lyrical cinematic style intended to oppose the popular film style that catered to the bourgeoisie
    - It's creators were sympathetic to the French Popular Front (an alliance of left-wing political groups)
    - The "realism" referred to the dramatization of the conditions of the French working class, creating tragic anti-heroes from people of a lower class

- Italian Neorealism
    - 1940-50's
    - Inspired by French Poetic Realism
    - Through allegory and allusion the directors of these films commented on the demoralizing economics and politics of Italy after the fall of Mussolini's Fascist regime.

    - Like the French, the Italians called this style "realism" for its depictions of poverty and political despair.

    - They used allegory and allusion in these films to create political satire

    - They used grainy black and white film to evoke newsreel footage.

    - They used film critic André Bazin's style of long takes and deep space and focus to present jarring everyday realities.

- Each iteration of realism so far has expressed a particular set of views specific to its

time and politics. Engaging in these styles of art meant taking an active political stance that could hurt your life and career.

- "In all cases, realism has been levied powerfully in the expression of political movements through visual form." pp 147
- In Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things*, he uses the term episteme to define how each era has accepted a certain way of acquiring knowledge seeking truth.
- "An episteme is an accepted, dominant mode of acquiring and organizing knowledge in a given historical period." pp 147
- The episteme of Constructivism for example was organized according to Soviet revolutionary theory, valuing industrial forms and their power and a rigid structure as the basis for society.
- The episteme of Socialist Realism was organized by a return to the codes and conventions of pictorial realism to promote nationalism and state conformity.
- Social and political definitions of truth and what is "real" are attached to different ways of presenting space in an image.
- In the next section we look at the subject of perspective to prove the point that form and method not only *convey* meaning and epistemic values; they *produce* them.

- **Perspective pp148**

  - Perspective is a set of techniques for depicting spatial depth within two-dimensional pictorial space (Held by Plato as a deception). A method of representation and metaphor for dominant episteme.

  - These techniques were derived from the optical studies of Euclid and mathematical and astronomical studies of Alhazen

- The Scientific revolution during the 15ht and 17th centuries led to the eroded role of the church, which in turn had Galileo tried for heresy for his scientific discoveries.

- In the 18th century, science became the dominant force in the Enlightenment era.

  - Movement, rationalism, progress, power of human reason, science will overcome hardship = prosperity

Descartes-Modernity (link to chapter 3)

- Linear Perspective System pp149

    Brunelleschi, invention, move away from empirical

    Alberti, mathematics and optical rules

    Spectator position, trope of window frame, computer screen Fig. 4.10 pp149

    The two annunciations, perspective science vs. religion, conventions in both works contribute to range of later styles pp150-151

- Paradox of viewer locus and mechanical approximation

    Descartes rational worldview

    Cartesian Grid

    John Berger quote, pp152, orientation of viewer (connection to ways of seeing) *"...every drawing or painting that used perspective, proposed to the spectator that he was the unique centre of the world."*

- Perspective and the Body
    - Bodies in space posed a challenge

        Ancient Egypt hierarchy, body size = importance

        Mantegna - Dead Christ, anatomical realism Fig. 4.13 pp 153

        Durer's Draughtsmen, critique of science? Pp154 Fig. 4.14

        Grid drains mobility/fluidity

        Durer's "realism" of idealized body parts

        Realism or Idealism?

        Composites, collages, remixes

Distortive or deceptive aspects of viewing practices seen over time i.e.

Plato's cave.

Renaissance art's social function reproduce human vision pp 155

DaVinci and anamorphosis + Salvador Dali

Surrealist plays on meaning, mental play, the unreal to say something

real

- **The Camera Obscura pp156**

  - Development 10-19th cent.

  - Single point perspective holds its own

  - Empiricism vs. rationalism

  - Shen Kou, Alhazen - eye-light empirical experimentation

  - Walk-ins

  - Reorganization of the subject 16th-18th cent. Pp157

  - interior/exterior embodied experience

  - Marx's take

  - Drawing instrument

  - Hockney/Falco "Secret Knowledge" controversy thesis pp157

  - Vermeer used it? Pp158 Fig 4.18

  - Value of work affected by instruments/technology used

    Value in non-mechanical nature vs work made now with computers

    has value?

- **Challenges to Perspective (pp158)**

- ○ Throughout history the idea of perspective has remained linked to an objective depiction of reality. However, human vision is not in one-point perspective. Our eyes are in constant motion, and the images of the world around us are composed in our brains from many different views of what we are looking at.
- ○ Many modern artists decided to defy the perspective made constricting by the camera.

- ● Cubism

  - ○ Painters like Picasso and Georges Braque became interested in painting objects from multiple points of view.
  - ○ Challenged the dominant perspective by representing the planes of bodies and objects broken up, changing the depth of the image and creating a sense of movement and time passing.
  - ○ "Influenced" by African art. The way African artists had abstracted the body was "borrowed" and re-coded. The African art that influenced their work was shown, alongside Les Demoiselles d'Avignon at the MOMA in 1984 in an exhibition titled *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern.* The show presented modernist art works alongside the "cultural objects" that may have inspired them. The African works were shown without artist names or dates. Critics argued that this exhibition was an extension of colonialism, Eurocentrically co-opting the African work.

- ● Abstract expressionism

  - ○ Challenging the cartesian subject as the center of the word. What does that mean?

  - ○ Form is the content, the subject matter is painting or sculpture and the material and mediums.

  - ○ Painting as a document of the artist's empirical sensory experience

  - ○ Action painting; inspired by automatism, marking spontaneously without care for Aesthetics. The idea was to get the release of emotion across directly, uncensored, without passing through codes and conventions.

  - ○ Concept, process and performance were essential concerns of many modernist artists. Conceptual art involved the production of works in which

the idea or concept was more important than the visual product." pp164

- ○ Yves Klein had nude female models become part of his works, subverting the concept of "painting from life." These works talk about the materiality of the paint and canvas, the "having been there" of the imprints left behind.

- ○ Klein's process was later taken up by Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta. She created imprints of her body in the earth, her shape left behind in the landscape, and documented this in photographs. Here she is reworking the representation of the female body, its overuse by male artists, and its absence in history books. Klein used women's bodies as his brush, using both their physical being and their labor. Mendieta uses her own body to evoke the violence of exploitation and erasure.

- Linear perspective has had a long life. There is a cultural desire for vision to be stable and fixed. But we have seen this challenged over time.
- Rational objectivity can be said to define the modern episteme but the abstract "ism" movements have asked us to be aware of alternative pictorial arrangements, and the versatility of a vocabulary that includes them.
- "Artists working in Impressionism, Cubism and Surrealism emphasized the status of perspective and its worldview as always culturally situated, determined by the social and political landscapes that shape representation." pp163

- **Perspective in Digital Media**

    - ○ Realism, codes and conventions changing

        Interaction - invitation into screen

        Visual episteme, emphasizes viewer engagement, with technical ways

        of seeing, and experiencing image worlds, Environment and buildings

        Male dominated, hegemonic derision, racist, sexist

        POV shots - link to Bazin (Italian Neorealism, deep space) FPS games

        pp169

        Isometric, axonometric, projection,

Perspective shifts in relation to viewer orientation and role

Multiple points of view for showing change in direction so player can

move around in virtual world

Tank man in isometric perspective

Virtual images - composites

CG and "real-life" augmentation

V.R. - fantasy football

Virtual space vs cartesian space

- Multiple uses of perspective in our time

Minecraft

- Perspective is a method and metaphor for an episteme

- Perspective is a hybrid system… pp 174 it has agency