

The University of British Columbia
Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory
John O'Brian

ARTH 543
Spring Term 2011-12
Thursday, 2.00-5.00pm

Peep: Surveillance, Voyeurism, Criminality, and Photography

Course Description

To say that we have become a society of voyeurs has become commonplace, and to observe that we are fixated on technologies of surveillance is also a cliché. Since 9/11, a large literature has developed on the surveillant eye of the state and related issues that range from the growing reach of the Internet to the brave new world of biometrics. “Voyeurism and surveillance are eminently photographic ideas,” Sandra S. Phillips argues in a recent essay. Since the invention of photography, the first mass technology for looking, we have all become practiced voyeurs. We have also become objects of surveillance. This course aims to complicate the usual assumptions about surveillance, voyeurism and criminality by asking about the desires, fantasies and demands that photographs have produced since the advent of the camera. In particular, the course hopes to historicize the frenzy of the visible since 1839 as well as to work through the ethical dimensions of spectatorship. There will be at least one field trip during the term. Because ARTH 543 is a graduate seminar in Canadian art and photography, attention will be paid to Canadian images and texts where relevant.