Reconsidering History (and the History in Art History)
In the Era of Post-Postmodernism, Post-Globalization,
Virtuality and the Internet

Pablo Picasso Guernica 1937 (Wikipedia)

This seminar will consider theories and practices of history and how they have been severely questioned in the wake of Postmodernism. Foundations as well as radical critiques of traditional forms of positivist history and concepts of truth will be examined along with developments in art history.

Can we speak confidently about history and art today? Why do we even choose to look at art of the past? With Post-Structuralism and particularly in the late 1970s and the 1980s there was a radical critique of traditional forms of history writing in the empirical positivist mode. Grand narratives that attempted to explain all and concepts of “truth” and the ability to be “objective” were sharply attacked by the likes of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and deconstruction, feminists and Post-colonial theory. On the other hand, these critiques proved to be very productive. Traditional canons for what should be included as subjects for history and art history were radically changed: the deep long history of the Annales school, the “cultural turn” where historians began to look more broadly at culture and cultural constructs and mentalities rather than “events” per sé; micro histories and narratives were produced even after Hayden White’s demonstration of the “artiness” and “tropes” that traditionally shaped history writing. Foucault’s focus on conditions that allow history to happen through a study of discourses and tracing of genealogies of concepts proved to be very influential. While there had been a certain lull in political thinking in the 1980s and 1990s, there seems to be a new kind of post-Marxist politics developing recently. All of this has influenced art history, of course.

Curiously, however, the furor and anxiety that seemed to reign in debates about history writing in the 1980s and 90s has appeared to subside without really being resolved. As the feminist Judith Bennett noted in History Matters (2006), of late, there even seems to be an avoidance of history, a trend one can see in art history as well.

Where do we stand? Is there still a place for history in art history? If so, how do we do it without being naïve? How do we make it matter today?

Student Evaluation:

Class Participation (General and as Class Discussant): 40%
Oral Presentation of Term Paper: 10%
Final Term Paper: 50%
**Weekly Topics and Readings:** Reconsidering History

### Week 1
**Sept 5**

**Introduction: The Challenge—Has Postmodernism made history impossible or more interesting?**


**Robert Baldwin.** “A Sea Change in Art History: The Decline in the Past and the Rise of Contemporary art.” (Short-Online: http://www.socialhistoryofart.com/miscinfo.htm)

**Further Reading:**


Class will brainstorm our current ideas about “What does history entail” and also “What is the history side of Art History?” How have these both changed in the wake of postmodernism?

Questions to consider:

- What does history entail? How have new trends affected the practice of history?
- Why do we study history?
- What do we do when we want to study/research/write history?

Consider the problematics on a practical and theoretical level.

- How do we organize history/historical thoughts? How do we choose a focus, given this is so partial.
- How can we do history knowing that ours is just one view and only a partial one? Is there still a point?
- How does our interaction with a historical era affect us, or be useful or meaningful to us?

**Why art history?**

- What is art history? Visual Culture? In what ways are these different from history? Where does the discipline begin?
- What is the history part of art history or visual culture?

### Week 2
**Sept 12**

**The Legacy of Hegel: Aesthetics and the Teleology of History**

**G. W. F. Hegel,** “The abstract characteristics of the nature of Spirit” in *Philosophy of History* (1837) Part III, Section II.1 (short) http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/Hegel%20Philosophy%20of%20History.htm

**G.W. F. Hegel.** *Philosophy of Fine Art* as excerpted in *The Art of Art*
To consider: Hegel has argued that within art there is a relationship of spirit to the material, universal to the particular. How are those terms defined and how does the relationship work? Where and how does history enter in? In Hegel do we see a kernel of the influential German concepts of "Geistesgeschichte" and "Weltanshauung"?

Contrast Hegel’s way of thinking about history and aesthetics to some contemporary intellectuals dealing with similar issues in today’s climate.


[Note: This interview refers to other writings of Badiou. Just consider what he sees as the crisis.]


Recommendations:
Stanford’s Encyclopedia of Philosophy discussion of “the Philosophy of History” (as distinguished from more pragmatic histories): http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/history/#HegHis

Useful Hegel Glossary:
http://www.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/students/philosophy/ba_course_materials/ba_19thc_hegel_glossary_01.pdf

Familiarize yourself with aspects of Kant’s aesthetics. One source: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest/

Or read section in Preziosi

**Week 3 Sept 19**

**Early Forms of Art History and Some Rethinking**


**Erwin Panofsky.** “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline” and “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art” in Meaning in the Visual Arts (Garden City, N.Y.:
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<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Marx and Social Art History</th>
<th>Visit and discussion with Serge Guilbaut</th>
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To consider: *Note how Marx & Engels turn the tables on Hegelian concepts about what motivates history. The short T.J Clark text is a kind of manifesto against the moribund state of traditional art history in the early 1970s by one of the early influential proponents of social art history. Serge Guilbaut, a student of T. J. Clark, wrote this text as the introduction to an exhibition he organized that had a big impact on debates about how to integrate “history” into exhibitions. Read this text less for the specific information, but rather with an analytical eye as to how he incorporates history/politics/culture into the discussion of “high art” and does this in an exhibition space. Since he will be here to respond to questions, the discussants should prepare questions for Guilbaut along with comments.*
Further Reading:
For a taste of Karl Marx’s history writing read:
Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* written between December 1851 and March 1852, Ch. I and VII
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/

And for a critique of Clark’s book for its lack of consideration of gender see:

Week 5
Oct. 3

**Practices and Symbolic Goods**


To consider: How is Bourdieu both working in the spirit of Marx but extending this theory for the field of the cultural sphere? Can you see a relationship between the theories of Bourdieu and the art historical writing of Baxandall on the "period eye?"

Further Reading:


Week 6
Oct. 10

**Potluck**

**Nietzsche, Foucault and Geneology**

Online: http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/nietzsche/history.htm


*One major thing to think about in these texts is the critique of history writers’ constant quest for origins. Foucault’s genealogy is a different*
**Week 7 Oct 17**

**Carlo Ginsberg – Microhistory and Accessing Oral History and Popular Belief / Transculturation and Pictorial Histories of the Ancient Aztecs - Visit and discussion with Marv Cohodas**

*Carlo Ginsberg.* “Witchcraft and Popular Piety: Notes on a Modenese Trial of 1519” and “The Inquisitor as anthropologist” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1989; Ital version 1986) 1-16; 156-164 plus notes. [First hour]

For Marv Cohodas’ visit please prepare questions and expect to be asked questions. He will also bring more colour images.


*Richard A. Rogers.* 2006 From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation. *Communication Theory* 16: 474-503. (online) [This is a more theoretical reading]

To consider: *In both sets of readings we are dealing with special problems in accessing history: 1) understanding oral culture and popular beliefs through traces in the written historical record 2) understanding histories recorded in a pictorial language (without words) developed in a situation of culture clash and appropriation.*

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**Week 8 Oct 24**

**Feminism, Performance and (Art) History**


For a debate within Art History compare two reviews: 


https://secure.palgrave-journals.com/fr/journal/v87/n1/full/9400373a.html
Consider the importance of phenomenology and embodiment in the texts of Butler and Bennet and how these are important for identity and memory which are significant aspects of history sometimes overlooked. In a slightly different vein, note how the two reviews of Reclaiming Female Agency reveal lingering debates within feminist art history today.

Further Reading:


______. “Feminism’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History*. Vol 16, No. 2 (Summer 2004) 10-29. (Online)

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**Week 9**

**Oct. 31**

**Reflections on History: Walter Benjamin and Implications for the Time and the Virtual**

Walter Benjamin. "On the Concept of History (Theses on the Philosophy of History) 1940 Online: [http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html](http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html)


Allen Meek. “Benjamin, Trauma and the Virtual” in the same issue. [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_15/article_02.shtml](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_15/article_02.shtml)

Perhaps because of the poetry and sometimes aphoristic nature of a lot of his texts together with his interest in the arts, Walter Benjamin’s writings have inspired many subsequent reflections on philosophy and culture. Consider how Agamben and the articles in Transformations develop the themes of history in relation to time and virtuality.

Further Reading:

Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *The American Historical Review* (December 2001) pp. 1721-1743 (Online) [Comments on several works]

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**Week 10**

**Nov 7**

**Reflections on History and its Writing**


Further Reading:
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<td><strong>Deleuze and History: Anti-history, history’s silences or another kind of history?/ A brief consideration of Visuality and Historicity</strong></td>
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**Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guatarri.** *A Thousand Plateaus:Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota, 1987) v-xx (pay attention to T of C); 3-25 (Introduction: Rhizome); p. 167-178 (faciality); p. 233-239 (on becoming (small part)); p. 260-265 (Memories of a Haecceity); Terms to consider
- Assemblage
- Becoming
- Body without Organs
- Haecceity (hæk-see-ê-tee)
- Multiplicity
- Rhizome (rye-zohm)
For definitions check: Kick-ass Deleuze & Guattari introduction!!!


Further Reading:
**Claire Colebrook and Jeffrey A. Bell, eds.** *Deleuze and History* (Edinburgh UP, 2009) [A number of good essays]


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