Virtual Reality from Courbet to Playstation

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Spring 2007 Graduate Seminar
Wednesdays 1-4pm / MC 716

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This seminar will investigate the persistent and at times obsessive pursuit of 'realism' in visual representation. In particular, we will examine how the themes of realism, virtuality, immersion, and corporeal engagement have been central conceptual issues for both 19th-century realisms (beginning with the Realist movement in France) and 21st-century paradigms of the virtual. Focusing on methodologies that stress the immersive or corporeally-engaged experience, the seminar will provide an introduction to conceptual issues for the study of nineteenth-century art and to their parallels in discussions of new media. In both, emphasis will be placed on the ways in which the bodies of artists and viewers are implicated in realist tactics. In short, we will ask why the accurate, detailed, and 'truthful' rendering of the world has been a recurring fascination and, ultimately, an impossibility for both of these moments.

COURSE STRUCTURE
This is a reading-intensive, discussion-based seminar. Each three-hour session will focus on presentations and discussions of assigned texts. Students will be evaluated on the basis of their preparation, attendance, critical engagement with course themes, and research projects.

There is one required textbook for the course: Michael Fried, Courbet’s Realism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). All other readings will be posted on the course homepage on the Portal (go.artic.edu) or on the Docutek electronic reserve system (docutek.artic.edu/eres). For images, students should consult online image databases available through the Flaxman library, such as MDID (mdid.artic.edu) and ARTstor (www.artstor.org/info).
EVALUATION

1. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION
   All students are expected to attend class meetings prepared to discuss the required readings. This is a discussion-based class, and all students should regularly and productively contribute to class discussions. Attendance at all class meetings is essential. More than two missed classes may be grounds for a “no credit.”

2. READING PRESENTATIONS
   Students will form groups A-D, and three times during the semester each group will be responsible for leading course discussion on a text or group of texts. This is a research assignment. In addition to reading the assigned texts, the student should also research the author, present the context, prepare an image presentation to accompany their introduction and discussion, develop questions for course discussion, and bring to class comparative examples from contemporary art. For each presentation, students will be required to prepare:
   1. An outline according to which they will lead discussion, submitted to the professor by the Monday afternoon before the seminar.
   2. Handouts for the class, including:
      a. The revised outline of the overall discussion
      b. Any supplemental or accompanying texts
      c. Lists of terms and definitions
      d. List of images (including illustrations from the articles as well as new comparative materials drawn from contemporary art)
   3. Images, videos, websites, etc., prepared as a Powerpoint/Keynote document. Your image presentation must be fully-prepared and ready to go. Do not expect to just grab things off of Google Image at the last minute or in class.
   4. From each member of the group:
      A summary and critical analysis of the text(s) (total 2-3 pages) to be submitted to the professor at the end of class that day. This is a graded assignment.

   NOTE:
   Students should plan to start research and preparation of their session at least two weeks in advance of the seminar.

3. READING QUESTIONS
   For each text assigned, all students should bring to class three typed questions for further discussion. Questions should be about the ideas or implications of the readings rather than merely factual. These are submitted at the end of class, and questions for each session must be submitted by the end of the semester in order to receive credit for the course.

4. RESEARCH PROJECT
   All students will engage in independent, original research on a topic relevant to the course themes. Projects should be distinct from research or work done for other classes. Topics can be drawn from any geographic location or historical period.

[continued]
All topics must be approved by 28 March. Papers are due two Fridays after the presentation (9 days after), except for those students who are presenting on 9 May. Their papers are due 11 May at 4pm. Papers can be turned in at MC 606.

The final research paper should be between 5000 and 6000 words (approx. 20-25 standard double-spaced typed pages), exclusive of a full bibliography, image captions, and endnotes. Bibliographies must contain at least 15 items from accepted sources. Websites and any form of encyclopedia entry are not acceptable sources. Books, journal articles, and online full-text articles from library indices and databases are acceptable sources.

Graduate students from other departments may request that their research project take a form other than a conventional essay, but all projects must demonstrate and document original research and articulate a coherent and well-considered topic.

DIFFERENTLY-ABLED STUDENTS
Any students with exceptional needs or concerns (including 'invisible' difficulties such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, or psychiatric complications) are encouraged to make an appointment with the professor to discuss these issues by the end of the second week of the term so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Any student in need of academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should first contact SAIC's Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC), formerly Services for Students with Disabilities. The Disability and Learning Resource Center can be reached by phone at 312.499.4278 or by sending an email to Sara Baum at sbaum@saic.edu. DLRC will review the student's disability documentation and will work with the student to determine reasonable accommodations. DLRC will then provide the student with a letter outlining approved accommodations. This letter must be presented to the instructor before any accommodations will be implemented. Students should contact DLRC as early in the semester as possible.

PLAGIARISM
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago prohibits “dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the School.” See Students’ Rights and Responsibilities, Student Handbook: http://www.saic.edu/pdf/life/pdf_files/rights.pdf

One plagiarizes when one presents another’s work as one’s own. It is a form of intellectual theft. Plagiarism need not always be intentional. One can plagiarize even if one does not intend to. The penalty for plagiarizing ranges from a failing grade on the plagiarized assignment to not earning credit for the course. This may also result in some loss of some types of financial aid (for example, a No Credit in a course can lead to a loss of the Presidential Scholarship), and in cases of regular offenses can lead to expulsion from the School.

COURSE CALENDAR
All assigned readings must be completed before coming to the class for which they are assigned, and all students should prepare their three reading questions for the beginning of each class. Readings listed as “further reference” are optional and not included in the on-line reserves for the course.

31 January
Introduction: Why Realism (Again)?

7 February
Virtual reality and its recurring appeal: Historical trajectories of VR

14 February
NO CLASS
Prepare for your presentations on Courbet’s Realism.

21 February
Courbet’s Realism

Presentations Group A: Chapter 1 Group B: Chapter 2 Group C: Chapter 3 Group D: Chapter 4

28 February
Courbet’s Realism II

Presentations Group A: Chapter 5 Group B: Chapter 6 Group C: Chapter 7
Further reference


7 March

Conventions of realism after Courbet: Manet and the Impressionists

Required reading


Presentation

Group D: Wagner

14 March

Realism in Three Dimensions

Required reading


21 March

Cézanne and Embodied Perception

Required reading


28 March

The Reality of the Virtual in New Media and Popular Culture

Required reading

Presentations
Group A: McKenzie+Gemeinboeck
Group B: Massumi

Further reference

4 April

Video Games and Immersion

Required reading

Presentations
Group C: McMahan+Manovich+Lanti
Group D: Hiusman/Markmann/Castronova
11 April
**Virtual Reality and Artistic Practice**
*Guest lectures by:*

**JON CATES**, Assistant Professor, Department of Film, Video, and New Media, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

**BEN CHANG**, Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Technology Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

*Required reading* TBA

18 April
**PRESENTATIONS**
*NOTE: For those students presenting today, your final research papers are due on 27 April.*

25 April
**PRESENTATIONS**
*NOTE: For those students presenting today, your final research papers are due on 4 May.*

2 May
**CRITIQUE WEEK: NO CLASS**

9 May
**PRESENTATIONS**
*NOTE: For those students presenting today, your final research papers are due on 11 May.*