

## **Introduction: Visual Culture**

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I am pleased to present this issue of *JAST*, offering a selection of articles all of which deal in one way or another, with visual culture, particularly in connection with the USA.

It hasn't been long since visual culture has been recognized as a distinct field of study. Yet, it is quickly gaining popularity in numerous academic fields, from cultural and literary studies to political science and economy. A term loosely used by art historians, sociologists and scholars of media long before becoming an official area of study, visual culture now represents a place of convergence for disparate disciplines, and is an inherently interdisciplinary affair, both in terms of content and method.

Visual culture scholarship, in other words, does not represent nor does it aspire to represent a branch of academia, such as film studies, art history, or photography. Rather, it is a way of pointing to a host of academic methodologies all of which emphasize the visual aspects of experience itself. There are, however, a number of recurrent points of orientation within this vast and difficult-to-map territory known as visual culture:

(1) Most scholars would agree that the study of visual culture concerns itself with the position of the spectator. That is to say, any critical analysis within the field of visual culture brings with it, in Irit Rogoff's words; "an entire range of analyses and interpretations of the audio, the spacial and the psychic dynamics of spectatorship" (14). The predominance of all that is visual in the modern world—the photograph, the film, the internet, the media in general—has made the importance of the spectacle and spectatorship outstanding and nearly irreplaceable. It is for this reason that the interpretation of the act of viewing, looking, eye witnessing, and consuming the image has taken on a significant task in recent years. Any scholar of visual culture will be interested, then, in the numerous ways in which individuals react to, approach, or read the world around them in visual terms, or rather, (often contradicting) in the many ways they see the world.

(2) It is not only the spectator that is under the looking glass of visual culture studies, it is also the endless variety of images that bombard us in our daily lives. Visual culture scholars attempt, in one way or another, to read these images. That is to say, the interpretations of the visual world, understanding the meanings and/or codes that are overtly or covertly transmitted by way of images, also constitute an intellectual basis for scholars in the field of visual culture.

(3) Visual culture scholarship furthermore analyses and criticizes the visual as a reflection of culture, of ideology and the political domain, and also as a powerful component in the formation and transformation of (a) culture. The cultural shift toward the visual and away from the verbal and textual poses numerous questions about the changes cultures may be undergoing. What does a culture of the spectacle mean?

One issue of a journal cannot hope to answer all of these questions. The main focus of this particular issue of *JAST* is quite practical: an effort to suggest how visual culture has been approached in diverse scholarly fields in America in the late twentieth and the early twentyfirst centuries. The subjects touched upon here include: post-9/11 New York architecture, the poetry of Ted Jones, American abstractionist and expressionist painting in comparison with Turkish art, the photography of Walker Evans, American photography by renowned black poets, the spectacle of the body in popular American television, female artists' reading of the female body, and the representations of the city in science fiction film.

### **Works Cited**

Rogoff, Irit. "Studying Visual Culture." *The Visual Culture Reader*. Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 1998. 14-26.