

Philosophy 51704 / Social Thought 43910
Professors: James Conant and Robert Pippin

The Philosophy of Visual Modernism

*** Syllabus ***

Course Description

The seminar is devoted to a careful examination of certain writings by Michael Fried and central themes and ideas elaborated in those writings. Among the central Friedian concepts to be explored are *theatricality*, *absorption*, and *embodiment*, with special attention to the implications of his account of these concepts for understanding various more familiar philosophical, aesthetic and art-historical concepts (such as *realism*, *expressionism*, *abstractionism* and, above all, *modernism*). We will look at writings by a number of those authors whose ideas Fried is concerned to inherit, develop, and/or challenge – in particular, Diderot, Greenberg, Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, and Cavell. The final part of the course will be concerned with the possibility, broached in some of Fried's most recent writing, to extend and modify his ideas about visual meaning, and the historical character of such meaning, in ways that permit their application to developments in the history of photography and other artistic media with a photographic basis (including especially but not only movies).

Faculty Instructors

This course will be co-taught by Professor James Conant of the Philosophy Department and Professor Robert Pippin of the Committee on Social Thought and the Philosophy Department. Their contact information is as follows:

James Conant email: jconant@uchicago.edu
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Robert Pippin email: r-pippin@uchicago.edu
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Course Credit

This course can be taken for either Philosophy or Social Thought course credit. This course has two different course numbers: Philosophy 51704 and Social Thought 43910. Those who want Social Thought credit should register for it under its Social Thought number. Those who want Philosophy credit should register for it under its Philosophy number.

Course Requirements

The course requirements for students will be a final paper (15-30 pages).

Readings

The following books are required for the course and can be purchased at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore:

Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*

Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*

Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*

Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*

Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*

Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism*

In addition to the readings from the books, there will also be assigned articles for the class. Each of these is marked below with an asterisk (*) and is available on electronic reserve at the Regenstein library web site under either of the course numbers or either of the professors' names.

Schedule of Course Meetings

The course will meet on Wednesday afternoons, from 3 until 5:50, in Foster 505.

Week One: January 3-7

Introduction

Week Two: January 10-14

Topic: Diderot on Absorption and Theatricality

Required Reading:

Denis Diderot, "Notes on Painting"*
Denis Diderot, "Salon of 1767"*
Denis Diderot, "Conversations on *The Natural Son*"*
Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*

Optional Reading:

G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, selection*
Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, selection*

Week Three: January 17-21

Topic: Fried on Absorption and Theatricality in the Age of Diderot

Required Reading:

Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, Chaps. 1-2

Optional Reading:

Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, Chap. 3

Week Four: January 24-28

Topic: Fried on the Dialectic of Theatricality

Required Reading:

Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, Chap. 1
Robert Pippin, "Authenticity in Painting: Remarks on Michael Fried's Art History"*

Optional Reading:

Michael Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio"*
Michael Fried, "Caillebotte's Impressionism"*
Robert Pippin, "What was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)"*

Week Five: January 31-February 4

Topic: Realism and Embodiment in Painting

Required Reading:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind"*
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt"*
Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, selections

Optional Reading:

Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, the rest of the book

Week Six: February 7-11

Topic: What is Modernism?

Required Reading:

Clement Greenberg, "Towards a New Laocoon"*
Clement Greenberg, "Avante-Garde and Kitsch"*
Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting"*
Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expression"*
T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art"*
Michael Fried, "How Modernism Works: Reply to T.J. Clark"*
T.J. Clark, "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried"*

Optional Reading:

Michael Fried, "Roger Fry's Formalism"*
Roger Fry, "Giotto"*
Roger Fry, "Some Questions in Esthetics"*
Michael Fried, "Modernist Painting and Formal Criticism"*
Stephen Mulhall, "Crimes and Deeds of Glory: Michael Fried's Modernism"

Week Seven: February 14-18

Topic: Cavell on Modernism

Required Reading:

Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed", in *Must We Mean What We Say?* [MWM?]
Stanley Cavell, "A Matter of Meaning", in *MWM?*
Stanley Cavell, "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*", pp. 175-179, in *MWM?*

Optional Reading:

Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Philosophy", in *MWM?*
Stanley Cavell, "The Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy", in *MWM?*
Stanley Cavell, "Excursus on Modernist Painting", in *The World Viewed*
Joseph Margolis, "Comment on Cavell"*
Monroe Beardsley, "Comment on Cavell"*
Denis Des Chene, "In Touch with Art: Cavell and His Critics on New Music"*

Week Eight: February 21-25

Topic: Fried on Abstract Expressionism

Required Reading:

Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, selections

Optional Reading:

Carol A. Jones, "The Modernist Paradigm"*
Michael Fried, "Response to Carol A. Jones"*

Week Nine: February 28-March 4

Topic: The *Sui Generis* Nature of the Photographic Medium

Required Reading:

Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, selections
Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, pp. 278-287

Optional Reading:

Michael Fried, *Manet's Realism*, 323-336*
André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image"*

Week Ten: March 7-11

Topic: Fried on Some Problems in the Recent Theory and Practice of Photography

Required Reading:

Michael Fried, "Being There (on two pictures by Jeff Wall)"*

Michael Fried, James Welling's *Lock*, 1976"*
Michael Fried, "Barthes's Punctum"*

Optional Reading:

Michael Fried, on the photography of Thomas Struth (if available)*
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, selections*
Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein"*