# MA Options Autumn 2013-2014

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- **MA History of Film**
  - Administrator: Elaine Hudson
  - Contact: e.hudson@bbk.ac.uk
- **MA Japanese Cultural Studies**
  - Administrator: Izabel Perez
  - Contact: i.perez@bbk.ac.uk
- **MA Medieval Studies**
  - Administrator: Shabna Begum
  - Contact: shabna.begum@bbk.ac.uk
- **MA Museum Cultures**
  - Administrator: Sarah Walker
  - Contact: sc.walker@bbk.ac.uk
- **MA Renaissance Studies**
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- **MA Victorian Studies**
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Autumn term 2013-2014

Dr. Tag Gronberg

Art Nouveau, long the domain of collectors and student posters, is often thought of as a ‘decorative’ style of whiplash curves and enticing, long-tressed maidens. More recently, historians of culture have re-examined what it meant to produce a ‘new art’ in Paris on the cusp of the 19th and 20th centuries. This Option will explores the ways in which Art Nouveau challenged, as well as sustained, myths of Paris as the international centre of glamour and modernity. The approach is interdisciplinary, ranging across the visual arts and literature. Questions of national identity, changing patterns of consumption, and issues of representation and gender are examined in order to better understand the role of art during these years.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, innovations in fine art and design were often prompted by political and scientific developments, These included the rise of the ‘new woman’ and the evolving new sciences of the psyche (including Jean-Martin Charcot’s famous studies on female hysteria). In order to explore these issues in more detail, we will study the work of artists such as Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vuillard and Rodin, the dances of Loie Fuller, and the rise of the department store (in Zola’s novel Ladies’ Delight). Then as now, the ‘new’ could prove threatening, as well as exciting, provoking a retreat into fantasies of the past. The De Goncourt brothers’ exquisite collection of French 18th-century art and the photographs of Eugène Atget will be explored as instances of reaction against the rapidly modernising city.

Although each week’s seminar involves a self-contained topic, there are a number of over-arching themes: large-scale Paris exhibitions (in 1889 and 1900), the significance of the interior (psychic and domestic), the importance of French luxury commodities, artists’ and designers’ preoccupations with fashion and the body, contemporary vagues for exoticism (especially Japan), the interaction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, and artists’ interest in the urban experience of advertising and shopping.

Short bibliography:
- Molly Nesbit, Atget’s Seven Albums, 1992.
- Emile Zola, Au Bonheur de Dames, 1883 (sometimes translated as Ladies’Delight).

Photography & The Index
Dr. Patrizia di Bello

The photographic image has a direct, causal relationship to the subject matter that was necessarily present in front of the camera when the picture was taken. Unlike a painting, a photograph cannot be made from memory or from the imagination. This characteristic has been described by Charles Sander Peirce (writing at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries) as ‘indexicality’ – the way a photograph points (like an index finger) to its referent – and the term has become how most contemporary writers on photography
formulate its unique quality or special property as an image. The course considers this term not only in the context of semiotic theory, but also of its history.

Recently, digital technologies, which do permit to create a 'photograph' using a computer's memory and the imagination of the software user, have caused a renewed interest in photography and the index. Images, however, have always been manipulated, whether through darkroom techniques such as the nineteenth-century 'Combination Print' or through the use of collage and watercolour in family-albums. Do these techniques destroy the indexicality of a photograph? Is the 'indexicality' ever really the key to its meaning, or a guarantee of its truth as a document? Much discussed and criticised as explaining nothing about the way in which photographs acquire meaning, the index remains a key concept in photographic theory, which seems to be struggling to move on from it.

The course considers how different writers have theorised this special relationship, in different historical contexts. Students are asked to test theories against photographic practices – how photographs looked like, were taken, circulated and used in everyday, personal or domestic life; or in spheres seen as more public and institutionalised, such as fine art. We consider case-studies from the histories of photography in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, and students are encouraged to propose examples for discussion.

Like all MA Options, this course is seminar based, and it includes gallery visits (individually or in the group). In all cases, students are expected to have read the essential reading before the session, so as to be prepared to engage in a critical discussion of its key points, and in relation to relevant images. Students who are new to the history of photography should familiarise themselves with the topic by consulting one of the histories of photography available in Birkbeck Library. All should take the time to tackle as much of the preliminary reading as possible, even if just for a first ‘impressionistic’ reading.

Preparatory reading and key texts (you’ll have to read them sooner or later):


- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980; London: Flamingo, 1984 or subsequent editions). Key text; also a good read especially once you get to part two – don’t worry about understanding every term in it.


- Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King, 2002). This is the most recent general history of photography, a useful all round text for its social history perspective, and is available in paperback.


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**Space and Politics in Modernity**

Dr. Leslie Topp

This option will explore the theoretical, historical and embodied interconnections between space and politics from 1900 to the present. The confidence in power of spatial transformation to transform society was one of the hallmarks of modernist thinking the early twentieth century. That confidence had deep roots in the pre-First World War period, and resonated through the rest of the century, inspiring both resistance and attempts to rethink and renew how political ends could be achieved by spatial means. Politicised design was a feature of socialist and fascist states, and was bound up with the colonial and post-colonial histories of the modern world. It manifested itself in actual spaces ranging from new towns to small-scale housing experiments, from medical and educational complexes to monumental public spaces. The 1960s saw a radical critique of master planning and theorisation of space by Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and others that has been influential ever since. The scholarship on twentieth-century space and politics has expanded rapidly in the last two decades; this course will base itself on this rich body of literature (and some particularly important older texts), while also giving students the tools to make an original contribution by examining specific instances of the interaction of politics and space.

We will begin with a consideration of methods and critical theory as they relate to the analysis of politics and culture generally, as well as to politics and space more specifically. We will then move through time from 1900 to the present, exploring a range of current approaches to four periods (1900-1918, 1919-1945, 1946-1970, and 1970-2010). These general discussions, based on assigned readings, will alternate with the examination of particular examples and primary sources relating to four case studies: nation and design in Central Europe at the beginning of the 20th century; the politicisation of space in Weimar and Nazi Germany; post-war British welfare state and space; and public space in an era of globalisation and spatial flows.

Students on this option are not required to have studied the history of architecture before. It will appeal to all those interested in the connections between politics, the arts and the modern urban environment.

**Introductory Bibliography:**

Histories in Transition: Visual Culture, History and Memory in South Africa and Beyond  

Professor Annie E. Coombes

This course is an analysis of the role of visual culture during periods of political and social transition in recent history. The core of the course focuses on case studies from South Africa but explores these within a broader comparative frame using material drawn from Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Germany and Australia.

The democratic election of Nelson Mandela as president of South Africa in 1994 marked the demise of apartheid and the beginning of a new struggle to define the nation’s past. This course explores how various forms of visual and material culture dramatised the tensions involved in such a momentous shift while at the same time contributing to the process of transformation itself. Considering attempts to invent and recover historical icons and narratives, we will examine how strategies for embodying different models of historical knowledge, experience and memory were negotiated in public culture.

Course Description:
Focusing on case studies drawn from different areas of visual culture in the public sphere (exhibitions, monuments, museums, fine art and film) the course investigates the extent to which the specificity of the medium limits or expands its possibilities as an effective site for communicating and disseminating new ideals of ‘community’ and ‘nation’. Some of the questions we will be considering are, can one reinvent personal and collective histories in meaningful ways via public cultural institutions (such as museums)? Is it possible to engage new and previously marginalized constituencies using forms of public spectacle (such as monuments) associated with the commemoration of colonial, apartheid or totalitarian regimes? How does one arrive at a legitimate subject for critical practice as a visual artist once the prerogatives of revolution or
liberation struggles (such as exposing the racial violence of apartheid in South Africa) is no longer a priority? What is the future of the past in newly democratic countries which have a totalitarian or violent colonial past and how should these histories be represented?

**Preliminary Bibliography:**

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**The Art of Persuasion**

**TBC** 18:00-19:20

**Dr. Dorigen Caldwell**

In this course we will examine the debates surrounding the use of religious imagery in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, within political, historical and artistic contexts, so as to evaluate how sacred art was enlisted by the Catholic Church from the Renaissance through to the Baroque. Against the background of the Counter Reformation and the Council of Trent, we will look at a range of imagery in a variety of media, including painting, sculpture and architecture, as well as projects which employ all three, to consider how religious and political meaning were conveyed and viewer responses elicited. We will look at works by artists as diverse as Titian, Michelangelo, Rubens and Bernini, and consider altarpieces, church facades, tomb monuments and vault decorations. With an emphasis on Italy, and specifically on Rome, we will focus on a series of specific themes in order to understand the function of imagery in relation both to devotional practice and to broader issues of patronage and propaganda. Topics for discussion will include the cults of saints and relics, the centrality of the Virgin Mary in Catholic devotion and the altar as locus of salvation.
The course will be taught as a series of seminars and students will be expected to give a presentation and to participate in class discussion.

**Short Bibliography:**

- *Forms of Faith in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, eds A. Brundin and M. Treherne, Aldershot, 2009
- *From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550-1650*, eds P. Jones and T. Worcester, Boston, 2002
- *Saints & Sinners: Caravaggio & the Baroque image*, edited by Franco Mormando, Chestnut Hill, MA, 1999
MA Options Spring 2013-2014

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Art in the Age of Giotto: Evidence and Interpretation
Dr. Laura Jacobus

The course will consider Italian art of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, a period in which most of the representational conventions of western art first took shape. The course will concentrate on a limited number of major monuments of the period, focussing on issues of historical evidence and interpretation. The authorship and date of many significant projects are unknown, raising particular historiographic issues which will be the subject of close scrutiny on the course. Students will be encouraged to assess the validity of technical, documentary and stylistic evidence advanced in the literature concerning these projects. However, the dominance of attributional issues in the extant literature has meant that questions of interpretation have often been neglected or have been conducted within a very limited framework. Expanding the terms of such debates will consequently be another concern of the course.

Indicative reading:

To get a flavour of the kind of material we’ll be looking at, dip into the following. For those opting to do the course, a more detailed list of preparatory reading will be provided.

Cook, William R. (ed.) *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005) [excellent anthology of recent research. Specialised, so start with something from one of the other books before delving deeper with this one, but this is the kind of thing you’d be getting to grips with on the course]

Derbes, Anne, and Sandona, Mark *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University, 2004) [designed as a more introductory anthology; some synoptic essays, others more research-led]

Norman, Diana (ed.) *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400* 2 vols (Yale/Open University, 1995) (Two introductory anthologies, thematically organised and mostly presenting discursive but neutral digests of research. I have loan copies of these for those starting the course)

White, John *Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400* Pelican History of Art [most recent edition you can find. A regionally/chronologically-organised survey, useful for 'getting your bearings']

Art & Photography since the 1960s
Dr. Patrizia di Bello

This option focuses on the presence of photography and the uses of photographs in artistic practices from the late-sixties to the present. We trace different strands in the complex and sometimes tortuous relationships between art-photography and artists using photography; the de-materialization of the art object and its re-materialization into a photograph; documents as art and documents of art; the unconscious of the artist and the technological unconscious; and the uses of photography to facilitate politically engaged art practices. The sessions are arranged in strands rather than in chronological order. As with all MA options, students must come prepared, having read the material set for each week. They are welcome to propose artists, works or artistic practices they would like to discuss. The aim is not to come up
with definitive versions of events or evaluations of work, but to open them up for discussion to understand the past and consider its relevance into the present. The impact of digital culture not only on present practices but also on how we look at past ones is going to be one of the themes woven throughout the sessions.

**Topics include:**
Photography and performance art  
Art, photography and political activism  
History photographs / history painting  
Photography, art, and the ‘technological unconscious’  
Photography and the art museum

**Artists include:**
Gabriel Orozco, Ed Ruscha, Ana Mendieta, Tania Bruguera, Gilbert & George, Gerhard Richter, Annette Messager, Zineb Sadira, Franco Vaccari, The Atlas Group, (yes, do google them to have a look)

**Short Bibliography:**

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**Exhibiting the Body**  
**Dr. Suzannah Biernoff**

Medical images capture the human body at its most intricate, but also its most vulnerable, flawed and ultimately mortal. From the beginning, the anatomist’s art has served far more than medical ends: held up as a mirror of the divine (and later, as a mirror of society), medical representations of the body have answered to the ancient exhortation to ‘know thyself.’ During the 19th century, the realistic representation of pathology gradually displaced the idealised – and often exquisitely crafted – anatomical models, drawings and engravings that had been made since the Renaissance. Modern artists as diverse as Edgar Degas, Egon Schiele, Otto Dix and Francis Bacon explored the poetic potential of these pathological or otherwise ‘deviant’ bodies. More recently, medical themes and images have reappeared in the performance and ‘abject art’ of the 1980s and ‘90s (Orlan being the iconic example) and – closer to home – in the work of many of the YBAs including Christine Borland, John Isaacs, Marc Quinn and Damien Hirst.

**Exhibiting the Body** will provide a historical and cultural framework for these artistic developments. We will consider the changing role of images in western medicine since the 18th century, and the place of medical representations within the visual arts and popular culture. Students will be encouraged to reflect on the ethical and political implications of these cultural exchanges through an investigation of specific artworks, exhibitions and visual media (including television and digital culture). Some of this work will be collaborative, taking the form of seminar discussions and fieldtrips to museums and archives. Students will
be able to pursue individual research interests in the option essay and might address (for example): artists’ uses – or misuses – of medical subject matter; the politics of exhibiting bodies and the ethics of spectatorship; the display of human remains; the contemporary permutations of the freak show; biomedical futures and the idea of the post-human; the aesthetics of public health; or the dynamics of art-science collaborations.

The module is not intended as an encyclopaedic survey. Instead, it is structured thematically and makes use of London-based exhibitions and collections. Although we will be looking at these museums, exhibitions and archives in their 21st-century incarnations – through websites, exhibitions, catalogues and artist commissions, for example – their origins and histories will be considered as well. Case study weeks will focus on specific exhibitions: the Hayward Gallery’s blockbuster Spectacular Bodies show (2000), The Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons; and Madness and Modernity at the Wellcome Collection (2009). The final case study is Channel 4’s long-running Bodyshock strand, which we will discuss in relation to the history of the freak show. These sessions will be interspersed with seminars exploring the relationship between art and medicine since WW1: from Henry Tonks’ delicate portraits of injured WWI soldiers to the visual culture of AIDS and the use of medical archives in the computer game BioShock.

Introductory bibliography:

- Michael Sappol, Dream Anatomy. Published in conjunction with the exhibition Dream Anatomy, National Library of Medicine (Oct. 9, 2002 to Jul. 21, 2003).

Gender, Modernity and the City
Professor Lynda Nead TBC 18:00-19:20

The concept of modernity has been a central component of most recent accounts of the visual arts in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Drawing on a range of theoretical writing produced within
this period, modernity is understood to be an urban phenomenon, created in part by the space and pace of the modern city and those who live in it. Gender, modernity and the city are thus closely interconnected ideas and are integral to the visual culture of the west in this period.

The course will engage with this set of ideas, introducing students to the key texts by writers such as Baudelaire and Benjamin. It will also consider more recent revisions of the gendering of modern urban space and will work with texts by feminist scholars that challenge some of the founding assumptions of the classic literature on the city. Seminars will examine the history of debates on modernity and the city, including critiques of the figure of the flâneur and more recent revisions of the gendering of space in the nineteenth-century city. Sessions will also relate this critical writing to the visual culture of the period, focussing on painting produced in France and England in the nineteenth century. Students will be expected to engage with theoretical texts on gender and the city and to make connections between these debates and the visual arts produced in Paris and London in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Short Bibliography


**Modernism and Decoration: Paris 1900-1939**

**Dr. Tag Gronberg**

Recent large-scale exhibitions have drawn attention to the enormous impact and continuing influence of Modernist art, architecture and design. At the same time, Modernism has been revealed as consisting of more than the stripped-down, minimalist aesthetic so often disparaged by Postmodern critics. This module examines Modernism not as a unitary style, but rather as a set of different attempts to create new visual forms appropriate to modern life. It focuses on Parisian-based case studies in order to address key
debates within the Modern Movement during the 1920s and 1930s. Central to these debates was the apparent antithesis between a ‘machine aesthetic’ and more decorated or ornamented forms of modern art and design.

The course will pay particular attention to the significance of the body in representing the ‘modern’. The role of gender in defining modernity (as for example with notions of the 1920s ‘modern woman’) is a recurring theme. Seminars and related readings involve painting, design, architecture and fashion. Topics will include: the impact of the Russian Ballet in Paris, the Nice paintings of Henri Matisse, Pierre Chareau’s ‘Maison de Verre’ (‘House of Glass’), male dress as an icon of modernity in the writings of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, representations of the modern city at the 1925 Paris Expo (the exhibition nowadays identified with ‘Art Deco’), Modernism and the consumer, Surrealism and fashion.

The option aims to give a more detailed historical understanding of Modernist art and theory, but also to consider the ways in which questions raised during the 1920s and 1930s as what constitutes an appropriately ‘modern’ aesthetic remain relevant today.

**Short Bibliography**


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**Rome: Place, Continuity and Memory**

*Dr. Dorigen Caldwell*

In this course we will look at ways in which the ancient past has been referenced and enshrined in the evolution of the city of Rome from the Middle Ages to the present. We will begin with a consideration of the history of the city after the fall of the Empire and look at how successive generations of rulers and inhabitants used and re-used the remains of antiquity in their occupation and re-occupation of space. The legacy that antiquity bequeathed to later ages was so expansive and rich, both physically and symbolically, that it was mined time and again, creating a continuity between past and present which is inescapable even into the twenty-first century. We shall look at a variety of modes of appropriation and memorialisation, from the borrowings of buildings and materials in the Middle Ages, to the creation of classicizing styles and the revival of architectural types in the Renaissance, to the challenges faced by today’s planners and archaeologists to create a contemporary city out of a heritage site. As well as looking at broader themes, we shall focus on case studies, which highlight the significance of place and memory in the city and how that has been incorporated into its modern identity.

**Indicative bibliography:**

- Agnew, J., *Rome* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd), 1995