

Matters of Attention

Hum 580, Spring 2013

Attention, regulating what enters consciousness, lies at the nexus of perception and action, aesthetics and ethics. This course will move from a history of changing ideas about attention, through current research, and on into the implications for seeing and experiencing as modes of being. Since works of art can be understood as reified requests for attention, we will take them as important case studies in the investigation of what attending has meant and can mean. Consideration will be given to the training and altering of attention, to spectacle and the manipulation of attention, and to the shifting economies of attention in the modern period. Some attention will be given to attention's dialectical antitheses: distraction, secrecy, and invisibility. Ultimately, we will seek to understand (and experience) the role of attention in both the cognitive and the affective domains.

Week 1

Introduction (no readings)

Week 2

Jonathan Crary, "Chapters 1 & 2 of *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, 1999, October Books/MIT Press, Cambridge.

Week 3

Jonathan Crary, "Chapters 3 & 4 (plus epilogue) of *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, 1999, October Books/MIT Press, Cambridge.

Sigmund Freud, "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis" in Peter Gay, ed. *The Freud Reader*, New York: Norton, 1989.

Michael Fried, Chapter 1: "The Primacy of Absorption" in *Absorption and Theatricality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Week 4

William James, "Chapter 11: Attention," in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), New York: Dover, 1950.

Gerald Myers, "Chapter 7: Attention and Will," in *William James: His Life and Thought*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Gertrude Stein, "Cultivated Motor Automatism: A Study of Character in its Relation to Attention," *Psychological Review*, Volume 5, no. 3, 1898.

Week 5

Christopher Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

A. R. White, Chapters 1 & 2 ("Different Kinds of Attention-concepts" and "Attending"), *Attention*, London: Oxford, 1964.

Week 6

Michael Posner, *Attention in the Social World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Daniel Levitin, "What Does it Mean to be Musical?" *Neuron* 75, 2012.

Examine/be aware of:

Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music*, New York: Penguin, 2006.

Week 7

Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Week 8

John J. Gibson, *An Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, New York: Psychology Press, 1986.

Lorraine Daston, "The Empire of Observation, 1600 - 1800," in *Histories of Scientific Observation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Tim Ingold, Chapter 9: "Culture, Perception and Cognition," in *The Perception of the Environment, Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill*, New York: Routledge, 2000.

Week 9

Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Ian Bogost, Chapter 3: "Metaphorism," in *Alien Phenomenology: What It's Like to Be a Thing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2012.

Week 10

Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Week 11

Ignatious of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (1548), New York: Doubleday, 1964.

D. T. Suzuki, *The Training of a Zen Buddhist Monk*, (1934), New York: Cosimo, 2007.

Eihei Dogen, "Fukan-zazengi" (1228), in *Master Dogen's Shobozengo*, Volume 1, Lexington: Booksurge, 2006.

Examine/be aware of:

Wallace, Alan B. *Balancing the Mind: A Tibetan Buddhist Approach to Refining Attention*, Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2005.

Aldous Huxley, *Doors of Perception* (1952), New York: Thinking Ink, 2011.

Week 12

Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1971), New York & London: Routledge, 2001.

Christopher Mole, "Attention, Self, and the Sovereignty of Good," in Anne Rowe, ed. *Iris Murdoch: A Re-Assessment*, New York: Palgrave, 2007.

Examine/be aware of:

Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, New York: Penguin, 1973.