

The Seen – Le Vu

The seen is something that the moving eye can glance or gaze at. It captures our visual attention, and although senses other than sight may be engaged, we are usually aware only of the latter.

The increased presence of visual culture in the last few decades coincides with the expansion of postmodern art and the aestheticization of everyday life and the environment. In the last decade this process has spread from the First and Third World countries also to those of the Second World, therefore becoming a global phenomenon of late capitalism.

In such a situation new questions have to be posed and new theoretical answers are warranted. Here are a few possible questions:

– It has been diagnosed that the 'linguistic turn' is a consequence of the 'pictorial turn' (W. J. T. Mitchell), that the predominant part of philosophy of our century is anti-ocularcentric (M. Jay), and that at least since the sixties society is increasingly becoming that of the spectacle (G. Debord), mass media and of the aestheticized environment. What kind of theoretical discourse do such altered cultural circumstances require?

– The culture industry received its first thorough critique in the sixties. Since then not only has the relationship between elite art and mass culture changed, but visual culture is, in many respects, replacing the written one. What consequences do such changes have if they are really as profound as implied here?

– The presence of the visual has varied in different cultures. What are these differences and how can they be discerned today? What is the relationship between mass communication and the proliferation of visual culture? In which respects does the situation differ when comparing First, Second and Third World countries and cultures?

– Sight hardly ever functions alone. In recent art as well as in theory attempts have been made to stress other senses and features (audial and haptic), and hence to balance the preponderance of vision. In which ways has this process been carried out and what is its artistic and cultural significance?

– It has been claimed that the present culture and art are in the process of 'de-differentiation', of 'reenchantment', 'disturbation', etc. To what extent does the visual nature of much of this art and culture support such claims?

– In which way do new technologies affect our perception of the lived world as compared to representational painting or photography? How is what and how we 'see' determined or influenced by our contemporary circumstances?

Aleš Erjavec

