



Ways of Seeing Ways of Listening

FIMS 9608/THEOCRIT 9326

Winter 2022

Tuesdays 1-4pm

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Office hours: by appointment

[John Berger, cat, from *Bento's Sketchbook*]

Description

The title of this course is a nod to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, a project that took shape both as a book and a television series in the early 1970s. Turning away from conventional art history, Berger joined a generation of thinkers, artists, and activists who interrogated our conventional understandings of the relationship between seeing and knowing. Collectively, this group opened important questions about the gendered, racialized, and sexualized dimensions of the human gaze, as well as the political and performative dimensions of representation, the influence of capital, and the connection between looking and listening. In short, this generation of thinkers inspired a broad investigation of human relationality through the politics of regard.

Our course tracks this intellectual and creative trajectory, treating our various ways of seeing and listening as relational ontology characterized by exposure and the vulnerability of an incarnated self for whom the other's attention is necessary. We will regard looking and listening as a historical processes—both individual and social—which, paradoxically, depend on being seen and heard. Here the classical formation of the liberal human subject is displaced by an understanding of the self as radically dependent on the other.

Timeline:

January	11 th	INTRODUCTIONS: https://westernuniversity.zoom.us/j/96440811858)
	18 th	WAYS OF SEEING: Lamming, "A Way of Seeing" + Berger, <i>Ways of Seeing</i> WATCH (at home): Berger, <i>Ways of Seeing</i> (BBC, 4 episodes)
	25 th	PHOTOGRAPHY'S MADNESS: Barthes, <i>Camera Lucida</i>
February	1 st	DRAWING: Berger, <i>Bento's Sketchbook</i> , pp. 1-80
	8 th	QUESTIONING: Berger, <i>Bento's Sketchbook</i> , pp. 81-164

	15 th	RELATING (THE MIRROR, THE MOTHER, & THE OTHER) Lacan “The mirror stage as formative of the I function as revealed in psychoanalytic experience” + Winnicott, “Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development” + hooks, “the oppositional gaze”
	22 nd	READING WEEK – NO CLASS
March	1 st	THE GAZE: Mulvey, <i>Visual and Other Pleasures</i> (excerpt)
	8 th	LOOKING, LUSTING WATCH (in class) Sciamma (dir.), <i>Portrait of a Lady on Fire</i>
	15 th	LISTENING: Attali, “Listening” + Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice” + Smith, “Some Notes on Attunement”
	22 nd	HEARING: Dubois, “Of the Sorrow Songs” + Eidsheim, <i>The Race of Sound</i> (excerpt) + Stoeber, <i>The Sonic Color Line and the Listening Ear</i> (excerpt) WATCH (at home): Topaz Jones and rubberband, <i>Don’t Go Tellin’ Your Mamma</i> , 34:32 mins
	29 th	SOUNDING: Moten, <i>In The Break</i> (excerpt) + Weheliye, <i>Phonographies</i> (excerpt) + Robinson, <i>Hungry Listening</i> (excerpt)
April	5 th	GAZING WHILE BLACK: Campt, <i>A Black Gaze</i>
	12 th	FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOP + WRAP-UP

Assignments:

1. Passage analysis (25%) *on-going*
2. Questions (25%) *on-going*
3. Final project proposal (10%) *due March 22nd*
4. Final Project (40%) *due April 12th*

1. Passage Analysis: approx. 750 words; weight 25%—*ongoing*

You will be required to present your thoughts about one of readings at least once during the term. Pick a concept or a short passage from one of the week’s assigned readings and prepare a brief discussion about its significance. Include the passage as the heading to your discussion and bring copies to distribute to the class. The idea of this assignment is to work closely with the text, unfolding and reflecting upon the significance of the passage you have chosen. You might wish to choose a passage that you believe to be the crux of the author’s argument. Or you might choose to focus on something more obscure in order to speculate on the significance of the outlying idea. I encourage you to choose something that strikes you. Treat this as an

exercise of “working through,” or what Hannah Arendt describes as “understanding.” Depending on your choice, you may wish to use the quotation as a way to try to paraphrase or summarize the author’s argument. Or you may wish to deconstruct the logic at work in the passage. Or you may wish to link the quotation to another reading from our course. You are strongly encouraged to frame your work with a few questions. Your discussion of the passage should be no more than 750 words.

2. Questions: approx. 250 words each; weight: 4 x 6.25%—ongoing

On four separate weeks, prepare a question based on the assigned reading for that week. Provide context for your question, signaling how your thinking about the question evolved. Your questions should be straightforward, jargon-free, and open-ended. **Be sure to make reference to the text.** You might wish to focus on a particular passage and parse it in a Talmudic fashion, actively wrestling with the text, seeking the meaning and truth of the words. Or you may quarrel with something an author has written. Either approach is a valid form of critique and privileges the ability to question freely and without inhibition. There is no need to rely on outside materials for this assignment, but you are welcome to relate your question to something you’ve heard or seen.

3.-4. Proposal + Final Project: 500 (10%) + 3000 (40%) words—due March 22nd and April 12th

The form of the final project is your choice. If you choose to write a standard scholarly paper, it should be an original and exciting piece of writing that grapples with and makes use of ideas from our class. I encourage essays that are theoretically athletic and conceptually fresh, that open some new terrain and show some adventure in the craft of writing. Providing a sense of the larger context and intellectual stakes of your argument is necessary. A musical quality in the prose is most welcome, as is experimentation with genre. Alternatively, you are welcome to develop a project that works directly with image or sound in some fashion. This could mean producing a series of drawings, a soundwalk, short podcast.

Regardless of the shape of your final project, you are required to write a proposal. The proposal should be approximately 500 words and it should include your research question and its context, a description of the body of work that your project will engage, the thinkers with whom you will be in dialogue, and, if applicable, the lens you plan to use in your analysis.

We will workshop the proposals in class, so bring a copy for each person in the class.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.

—. *Bento’s Sketchbook*. London: Verso

Barthes, Roland. 1980. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux.

Campt, Tina. 2021. *A Black Gaze*. Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press

REQUIRED READINGS (Available on OWL):

- Attali, Jacques. 1977. "Listening," *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Manchester University Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. "The Grain of the Voice," *Image Music Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press.
- Dubois, W.E.B. 1903. "Of the Sorrow Songs," *Souls of Black Folks*. Chicago: McClurg&Co.
- Eidsheim, Nina Sun. 2019. *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in Black Music*. Durham, NC.: Duke University Press.
- hooks, bell. 1992. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. 2006 [1949]. "The mirror stage as formative of the I function as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton.
- Lamming, George. 1960. "A Way of Seeing," *The Pleasures of Exile*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Moten, Fred. 2003. *In The Break*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1989. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. London: Palgrave.
- Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, Zadie. "Some Notes on Attunement," *The New Yorker*. December 9, 2012.
- Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. 2016. *The Sonic Color Line and the Listening Ear*. New York. NYU Press.
- Weheliye, Alexander. 2005. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham. Duke University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W.W. 1991 [1971]. "Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development," *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge.

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Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with **Accessible Education Western (AEW)**, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both **AEW** and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Health/Wellness Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Enrolment Restrictions

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Media Studies or Theory & Criticism as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.