ART APPRECIATION · UNIT IV

Images, Mediation and Modernity

Images, Signs and Reality

Cindy Sherman · Jean Baudrillard · filmed action



Images, Signs and Reality

Images and social roles

Rosler used a familiar alphabet and kitchen demonstration to make learned roles visible. The emoji and coffee advertisement showed how a sign acquires meanings through context, desire and insecurity.

The unit’s inquiry

This unit examines how photographs, films and other images shape what we recognize, desire and accept as real. We will distinguish a representation from an image that becomes a model for experience.

Untitled Film Still #21

What role or situation do two visible details suggest?



Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #21, 1978. Gelatin silver print. MoMA; © Cindy Sherman.

Disneyland and the outside world

But this conceals something else, and that "ideological" blanket exactly serves to cover over a third-order simulation: Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral).

Jean Baudrillard, “Hyperreal and imaginary,” Selected Writings, edited Mark Poster, 1988.

The reality principle

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.

Jean Baudrillard, “Hyperreal and imaginary,” Selected Writings, edited Mark Poster, 1988.

Fantasy marks a boundary



Main Street, U.S.A., Disneyland Park, Anaheim. Official publicity photograph. © Disney.

The park openly presents a designed fantasy. Its ideal street helps us recognize one place as imaginary.

Baudrillard asks what this label does to our belief in the world outside. Naming the fantasy may reassure us that ordinary life is simply real.

Why might labeling one place imaginary make the outside world seem more real?

An image becomes a model



Richard Prince, Untitled (cowboy), 1989. Guggenheim teaching-guide reproduction. © Richard Prince.

Prince rephotographed a Marlboro advertisement and removed its text. The lone rider and open landscape offer a recognizable image of independence.

An advertisement can sell an identity with a product. That image may become a standard for how a real person wants to appear.

Which visible details make independence seem desirable or believable?

Ordinary spaces organize experience



Andreas Gursky, 99 Cent, 1999. Fisher Collection at SFMOMA. © Andreas Gursky / ARS.

Gursky photographs a Los Angeles store. Repeated packages and price signs organize a familiar commercial space.

Baudrillard asks how models shape ordinary life. Goods and money remain material.

Does this support Baudrillard's claim, or only show that shops are designed?

Andy Warhol eating a hamburger



Screening preview thumbnail; not an extracted high-resolution film frame.

Jørgen Leth
66 Scenes from America

Filmed 1981; film released 1982.
Warhol performs; Leth directs.

Open the complete 4:27 sequence

Explain a connection and its limit

Choose one case. Explain how its meaning depends on something beyond resemblance.

Use one concrete detail. Distinguish what you observe from what you infer, and state one limit of your explanation.