

## Octopus Journal Vol. 4: Surface

H-NET Intellectual History List

[x-post from H-Ideas]

Octopus: A Visual Studies Journal

Call for Papers: Volume 4: Surface

Deadline for Submissions: April 15, 2008

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Octopus solicits submissions for our fourth volume, "Surface." Surfaces mediate a first encounter, and are often posited in opposition to the "authenticity" or "depth" of what lies below them. The question of surface encompasses a wide variety of practices and perspectives, including art practice and theory, film and media studies, historiography, the question of virtual interfaces, topography, urban studies, architecture, race and ethnicity, and the sciences of knowledge, optics, and biology. Octopus invites essays that question, examine, and engage with the encounter between subject and surface or surface and depth, as well as those that challenge or contribute to the epistemology of "surface."

In some ways, surface has come to have pejorative connotations. Often thought of as superficial or even artificial, the surface is dismissed as one-dimensional, something we are encouraged to see beyond. The reproduction of images has led to theories of simulacra, in which copies—infinitely-reproduced duplicates of a lost original—have removed us from what is "real." Likewise, constructions of the self, put forth in the popular medium of self-help books, tell us that the truest condensation of the self resides below the surface. In all these configurations, the surface is constructed negatively against notions of supposed "authenticity" or "realness."

Surface has not always been viewed skeptically; in some fields it has been used as a tool for the creation of knowledge. Until the late nineteenth century, pseudosciences of the surface, such as phrenology, biotypology, and physiognomy, claimed to decipher inherent pathologies through analysis of the surface of subjects' skin or the shape of their skulls. Early uses of the photographic medium included the

documentation and cataloging of “archives,” which used photographic likenesses to posit subjects in relation to notions of deviance or normality. Colonialist theories also fixed colonizer and colonized in a matrix based upon the characteristic of skin tone. Despite later refutations of these practices, they nevertheless demonstrate the powerfully ubiquitous belief in the “authenticity” of “reading” the surface, with a careless disregard for what perhaps lies beyond it.

In the art world, too, surface had a clear moment of ascendancy with the configuration of surface and depth offered by Clement Greenberg’s influential notion of formalism, which posited the “essence” of a painting in its inherent flatness—the surface as a unique expression of the artist’s psyche. Later artists continued to embrace flatness by valorizing the shallow or attempting to do away with depth; pop artists used the surface in different ways: politically, polemically, and aesthetically. Postmodern artists have also challenged the modernist dichotomy of surface and depth through an embrace of hyper-visibility and superficiality.

In science studies and film and media studies, constructions of the surface, as a template for study of what is beyond it, are integral to its ontology. Films project images onto reflective surfaces; a famous anecdote tells of the audience’s inability to reconcile or comprehend the screen’s flatness when faced by an early film of a locomotive. In the contemporary world, the screens of televisions, computers, and cell phones offer increasingly heightened immersive “realism” and accuracy, while thinness or flatness is coveted in the devices themselves. At the same time, we embrace low-resolution images that are the result of glossy compression technology, heralding perhaps a new era less concerned with depth and accuracy of color than with speed and ease of transmission. With the rapid development of medical imaging and biometric technology, we are also increasingly able to see both the surface and interior of the body at once. In light of these developments, how might we reconfigure critical ideas of permeability, opacity, or transparency based on the development of new media and technologies?

Paper topics may include but are not limited to:

- Mechanical reproduction, simulacra
- Fakes and counterfeits
- Science imaging: optics, microscopy, virology, membranes, spectroscopic studies
- Optics: reflection and refraction, mirrors, the cornea
- Ontology of the photographic medium, the indexical, the photographic archive
- The screen: film projection, virtual reality, media interface

- Microsoft Surface, iPhone, Nintendo Wii: technologies that allow users to manipulate digital content using “natural” motions, such as hand gestures
- Topography and cartography: mapmaking, surface transportation, mining, military technology such as surface-to-air missiles
- Architectural surfaces: surface and volume, architectural “skins”
- Artistic mediums: bas relief, canvas, fresco
- The body: skin, scabs, acne, plastic surgery
- Pseudosciences treating race and ethnicity: phrenology, physiognomy
- Palimpsests
- Theories of surface: Deleuze & Guattari’s “faciality,” Charcot, Freud & Breuer on hysteria, Derrida & Freud on the Wunderblock, David Joselit’s “genealogy of flatness,” Lacan’s “surface stain,” Saussure’s “parole”

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Submission Guidelines:

Submissions should be sent as Microsoft Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) attachments to octopusjournal@gmail.com. Please put the word “submission” somewhere in the subject line.

All submissions must include a detachable cover page including the following information: the title of the work, the name(s) of the author(s), a brief biographic entry about the author(s), and contact information including a mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number. Manuscripts should also be accompanied by an abstract of no more than 150 words. Because Octopus follows a policy of blind peer-review, no material identifying the author(s) should appear anywhere other than the detachable title page.

Manuscripts submitted to Octopus should not be under consideration at any other journal. It is the responsibility of the author to obtain written permission to reproduce film and video stills, artworks, photographs, song lyrics, or any other copyrighted material from the copyright holder before publication.

Octopus is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal published by the graduate students of the Ph.D. Program in Visual Studies at the University of California, Irvine. We are committed to publishing work by emerging scholars engaged with visuality, culture, history, and theory from a range of contexts, disciplines and methodologies.

Reference:

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