

PRACTICUM PROJECT No. 2: Visual Theory/The Alien Anthropologists :::::
Mediaworks Fall 05:::::DUE THURSDAY NOVEMBER 10 @ 1pm (note time change)

One must die as a sighted person to be born again as a blind person and the opposite is equally true: one must die as a blind person to be born again as a seeing person.

Your task is to imagine that you come from a planet that has no visual culture—a society of the blind, perhaps, or a society that has never developed visual representation or has never found visual information of any special interest. This society has sent you to Earth, USA, as an anthropologist to study the ways in which visual culture operates. Upon returning to your planet you discover that, due to an unfortunate accident, you have lost all the material samples (images, objects, apparatuses) of this culture that you had gathered along the way, EXCEPT ONE. From that one sample you must try to reconstruct for your audience (who are also from your home planet) both a general idea of what your object is and how it comes to be understood by people who approach the world visually. For example, your object is a desktop picture frame. You will need to explain to your audience what a frame is [a polygon or circle made of wood, metal, or plaster], what it does [holds, usually, a two dimensional object for display], and how it functions in the lives of the people who use them. Where did you encounter this object [on people's walls, by their bedsides, in museums] and how did location affect its contents [personal snapshots, paintings]? You will find that you will need to tell your audience what a snapshot is, what a museum is or what the word "display" means.

It is up to your group to decide, through your subject choice and method of presenting it, what exactly it means to have "no visual culture." This could mean that we have no eyes, or under- or differently-developed eyes, or eyes but don't organize our entire culture around sight. And please tell us where you visited in the US. Was it Olympia? NYC? Mobile, Alabama? Albuquerque, New Mexico?

Your task is to give a five-minute "show and tell" presentation using your sample to illustrate what a visual culture is like. This sample can be just about anything: it need not be a picture or a piece of art. In fact, your object might be more interesting if it isn't. It could, for instance, be a machine, instrument, found object, a piece of clothing, etc.

The objective here is to de-familiarize visual experience and representation, to re-stage it as a problem to be explained rather than a capacity to be taken for granted. The idea is to set up an empty frame in which any object or experience may be staged for inspection and analysis insofar as it helps to explain what a visually oriented culture is.

You will have 5 minutes to present and then take 5 minutes to field questions and comments from your audience. Audience members are also from your home planet, and should think and act accordingly. This means you certainly will have a lot of

questions to ask. Each person in your group should have equal speaking time in the presentation.