

Point of View

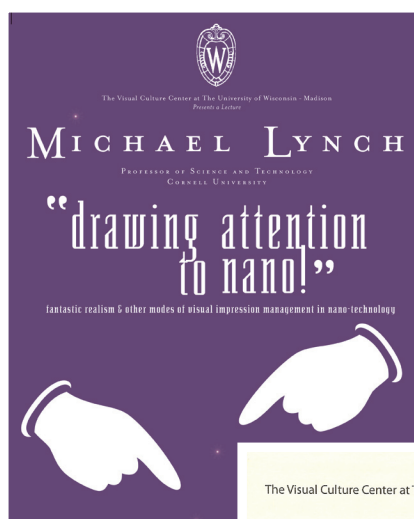
THE EYE RESEARCH INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Sight and Insight

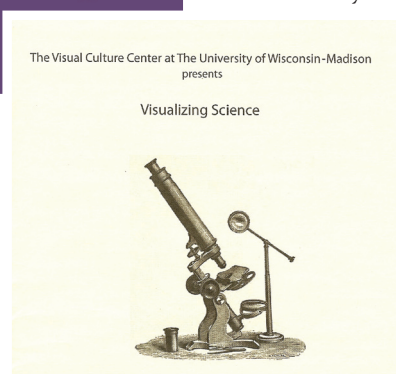
The emerging transdisciplinary field of Visual Culture connects the study and practice of all that is visual across the sciences, humanities, social sciences and arts. Its objects of study and materials of practice include not merely images, visual objects, imaging technologies and devices of visual representation but also the ways of seeing, valuing and interpreting the visual. The field's methodologies are, therefore, diverse and hybrid, including the empirical, practical, creative and theoretical.

(from the UW Visual Culture Center)

"Is seeing physiological or cultural?" This was one of the first questions that Jill Casid, associate professor of Visual Culture Studies and director of the UW Visual Culture Center, asked during the planning of the recent "Visualizing Science" conference. The question represented a starting point for a dialogue between those who study vision from the seemingly disparate viewpoints of science and the humanities.



Posters and materials from the conference illustrate the ways in which artistic images can evoke science concepts.



As a historian, a theorist of visual culture, and a practicing artist in photo-based media, Casid, also a member of the UW Eye Research Institute, is helping to build research and educational collaborations with colleagues in the sciences who are also working on aspects of vision.

As part of this ongoing collaboration among scholars from the sciences, arts and humanities, the February 7-8, 2008 "Visualizing Science" conference, co-sponsored by the UW Eye Research Institute, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, the Robert F. and Jean E. Holtz Center for Science and Technology Studies, and the departments of Art, Art History, Medical History and Bioethics, and Sociology, was held to explore issues of visuality and visual technologies in the sciences.

Michael Lynch, professor and director of Graduate Studies and Science and Technology Studies at Cornell University, was the guest lecturer on Thursday evening. His talk, "Drawing

Attention to Nano: Fantastic Realism and Other Modes of Visual Impression Management in Nanotechnology," examined science imagery in general, then specifically focused on how science illustrators are representing the otherwise unseen tiny world of "nano."



Jill Casid, PhD, is associate professor of Visual Culture Studies and director of the UW Visual Culture Center.

Friday's conference featured two panels of speakers in the morning sessions. The first panel addressed the question "How do issues of audience and communication shape the way science is visualized?" and the second focused on "What are the roles of culture, technology and subjectivity?" Speakers represented the departments of Life Sciences Communication, Genetics and Medical Genetics, Art History, Engineering Physics, and the Materials Research Science and Engineering Center. Panel-

ists' conversations illustrated the many linkages - both apparent and subtle - between these diverse disciplines and centered on the importance of communication and conceptual "framing" in how public opinion about science and technology is shaped.

Michael Lynch's afternoon workshop, "Topical Contextures and Objectivity," included specific examples and exercises in which participants explored how visual imagery is employed in scientific communication, demonstration and argument.

In conjunction with the conference, an exhibit titled "The Scientist's Eye: Dialogues between Art and Science," was co-curated by Amy Noell and Beth Zinski, PhD students in Art History. The exhibition featured rare books from the Kohler Art Library and Special Collections at Memorial Library, some of which were from the collection donated by Daniel Albert, MD, director of the UW Eye Research Institute. The displayed texts highlighted the range of technologies associated with the eye, including imaginative drawings of early microscopes and the uses of projection.

There is growing interest among vision scholars in connecting art and science, and visual culture studies foster exploration of the physical properties of objects and the embodied perception and response to sensory and visual stimuli. "There is great interest in understanding how vision works," says Casid. "How do we understand the body in both health and disease? How

do disabilities affect our senses and our sense-based cognition?"

Casid sees possibilities for exploring how science research in perception, for example, may be combined with humanities and social science studies of the historical, social, and cultural construction of vision to more fully account for the ways people see. For that reason, the Visual Culture Center and the Eye Research Institute are already planning a future collaboration - a conference on perception - to be held early in 2009.



The detail of this print, from J. Mohns' Cartesian Dreams, imaginatively recasts a diagram originally from Descartes' 1637 Discourse on Method showing how the eye creates an inverted image on the retina.

Casid concludes,

"The developing program in Visual Culture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is committed to fostering research collaborations and dialogue across the humanities, arts, social sciences, and sciences. This dynamic and changing field also responds to the necessity of considering the major technological changes that have contributed to the saturation of everyday environments with visually mediated information and entertainment. In ongoing partnership with the Eye Research Institute, the conference on "Perspective" represents a fundamental part of our initiative to further these interdisciplinary links in the role of visual representation in both scientific practice and the world around us."



The UW Eye Research Institute

445 Henry Mall #307

Madison, WI 53706

608/265-0690

email: info@vision.wisc.edu

website: vision.wisc.edu

Retina Research Foundation

Emmett A. Humble Distinguished Director:

Daniel M. Albert, MD, MS

Associate Director:

Arthur S. Polans, PhD

Administrative Director/Editor:

Tracy D. Perkins, MPH



Above: Michael Lynch leads the afternoon workshop.

Left: Jill Casid mentors Amy Noell and Beth Zinski, co-curators of an exhibition of photos as interdisciplinary objects for the Visual Culture Center's conference on "Interdisciplinarity and the University Art Museum" at the Chazen Museum of Art.