



# VISUALITY / MATERIALITY

## Reviewing Theory, Method and Practice

Durham University (London)

Date: July 9-11, 2009.

Application deadline: December 1,  
2008.

Please send a 200 word abstract to  
Visuality-Materiality-  
Conference@open.ac.uk.

The conference fee will be approximately  
£180.00 (waged) / £85.00  
(students).

Conference Organisers: Gillian Rose  
(Geography, Open University), Divya  
P. Tolia-Kelly (Geography, Durham  
University).



The conference organised by the Department of Geography at Durham University takes as its starting point the apparent exhaustion in much critical theory of the term ›representation‹ as a means of grasping the effect of the visual in contemporary times (although, in contrast, ›representation‹ remains a key driver in advertising, geopolitical policy and military practice). Conventionally, critical interpretation has concerned itself with the meaning of images by situating their connections to broader discursive formations, but for many this is now a reductive analytical schema. There are suggestions that these approaches have become formulaic; that they ignore the physical materiality and political and cultural power of visual imagery and visualities; and that this approach can reinstate the power structures it intends to critique. The aim of the conference is to consider where representation and the need for a new interpretive paradigm may coalesce / intersect.

*Visuality / Materiality* attends to the relationship between the visual and the material as a way of approaching both the meaning of visual and its other aspects. The image as sign, metaphor, aesthetics and text has long dominated the realm of visual theory. But the material role of visual praxis in everyday landscapes of seeing has been an emergent area of visual research; visual design, urban visual practice, visual grammars and vocabularies of domestic spaces, including the formation and structuring of social practices of living and political being, are critical to 21<sup>st</sup> century networks of living. The relationship between visuality and materiality here is about social meaning and practice; where identity, power, space, and geometries of seeing are approached through a grounded approach to material technologies, design and visual research, everyday embodied seeing, labour, ethics and utility.

The conference is aimed at providing a dialogic space where the nature and role of a visual theory can be evaluated, in light of materiality, practice, affect, performativity; and where the methodological encounter informs our intellectual critique. One strand will invite sustained engagements with the theoretical trajectories of the ›material turn‹, the ›emotional or affective turn‹ and the ›practical turn‹ away from the ›cultural turn‹. Where are these turns taking us, exactly? What are we leaving behind when we turn, and does that matter? The organisers are also keen to encourage contributions based on research experience and practice into specific aspects of visuality and visual critique including:

- What is the relationship between the material and the visual?
- How do we develop new theoretical approaches to new visual practices?
- What can we learn from everyday visualities?
- How can we approach the ethical through visual practices?
- How valuable are theories of materiality, performance, embodiment in research on the visual?

The organisers welcome participation from all disciplines and from varying research approaches.

