	BIOGRAPHY: RUDOLF ARNHEIM by Igor Shteyrenberg, 9/27/2002
	<u>Early Life And Education (Berlin to 1928)</u>
	<u>Journalistic Career On Film (1928-1933)</u>
	<u>Departure From Germany To Rome To England (1933-1938)</u>
	<u>America Here I Come (1940 - To Present)</u>
	<u>SLC TENURE (1943)</u>
	<u>Art And Visual Perception (1951-1954)</u>
<u>Bibliography</u>	

Early Life And Education (Berlin to 1928)

15 July 1904 -- the year when Salvador Dali, Vladimir Horowitz, and Deng Xiao-pin are born; the year that Frank Lloyd Wright designs the Martin House in Buffalo (New York), Paulo Cézanne paints Mont Sainte Victoire, Henry James writes *The Golden Bowl*; the year of the opening of the first formal motion picture theatre (near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and finally -- the year of Rudolf Arnheim's birth (Behrens, 3).

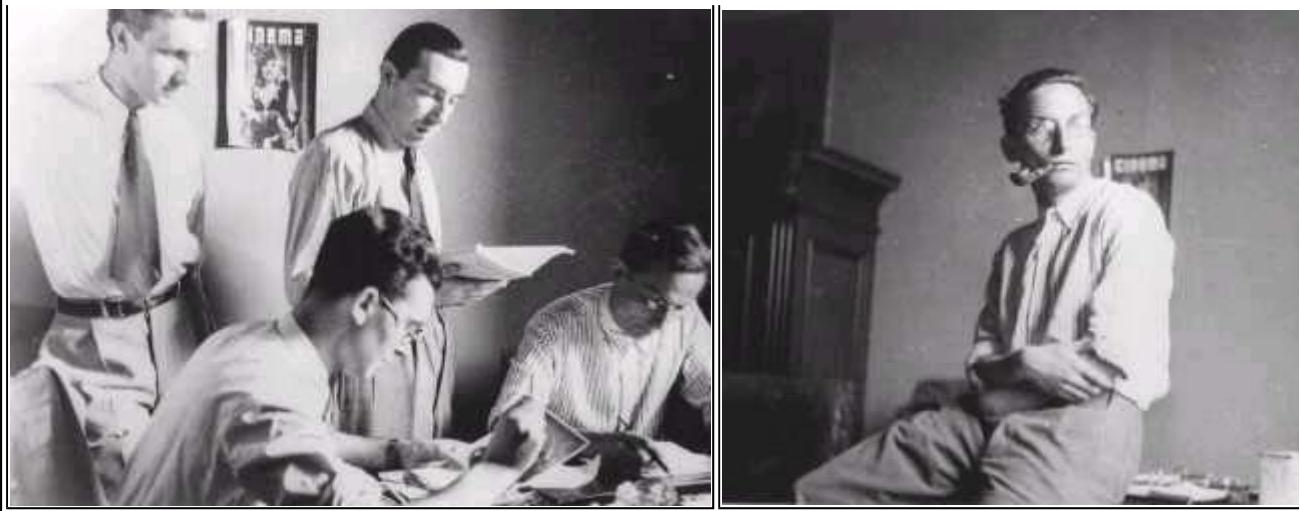
	<p>Arnheim has three younger sisters -- the oldest, Leni, marries the German artist and art historian Kurt Badt -- who would become a crucial influence on Rudolf's entire vocational life. Rudolf remembers, "As a child he [Kurt Badt] already showed me works of art . . . took me to the museum and taught me fundamental ideas of the art, which never left me" (Diederichs,</p>	
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His father -- Georg Arnheim, is a Berlin businessman who owns a small piano factory and is under the hopes and plans for his son to take over the family trade. Rudolf recalls it being "a small factory," where only "fifteen pianos a month" (Arnheim, 1984) would be created. But the young resolute Rudolf Arnheim is determined to enter the university, and after graduation from secondary school, his father agrees to allow him to spend "half the week at the university and half at the office" (Arnheim, 1984, p.3).



1923 -- University of Berlin -- Rudolf's primary interest is in psychology, which is regarded at the time as a branch of philosophy. As a result, Rudolf ends up with majors in two subjects, psychology and philosophy, and two minors, in the histories of art and music. Furthermore, while at the university Rudolf studies **Gestalt psychology** because it related closely to his interests in the arts, in that, it deals "with the problem of wholeness, of filed processes, situations, in which the whole is entirely determined by its parts, and the other way around" (Arnheim, 1984, p.3). At the university Rudolf is surrounded by the most distinguished and renowned figures of the century including physicists Albert Einstein and Max Pamong, and in the area of psychology, two of the founders of Gestalt psychology, Wolfgang Köhler and Max Wertheimer. Wertheimer would come to be Rudolf's mentor by advising his dissertation. Rudolf's dissertation was devoted to the problem of expression in 1928 and Wertheimer devised "matching experiments to test his claim that the different aspects of one person, their handwriting and their artistic work shared a 'radix' and could be matched with success" (Verstegen, 13). The matching experiments were completed with success and even today the study remains a classic in expression theory.



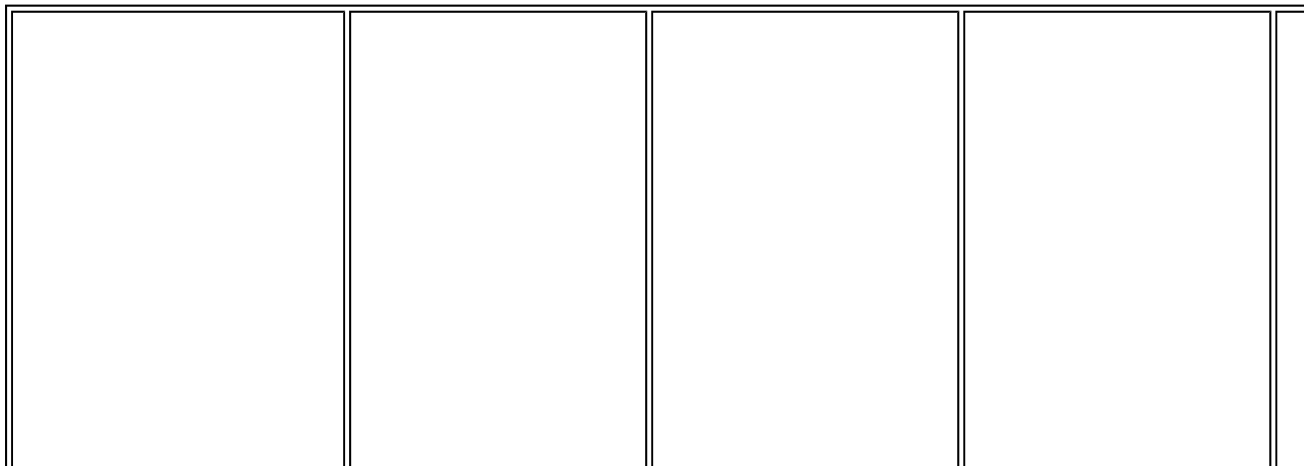
Life in Germany during the **Weimar Republic** (which began in 1919 and ended when the Nazis took control in 1933) is both exhilarating and precarious. It is an era of political and economic turmoil, but there are also amazing opportunities -- Rudolf remembers, ". . . attending performances of the provocative plays of Bertolt Brecht, seeing the first exhibitions of German Expressionist art, interviewing the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, and buying for fifty cents the first edition copies of Sigmund Freud's books" (Arnheim, 1984, p.5).

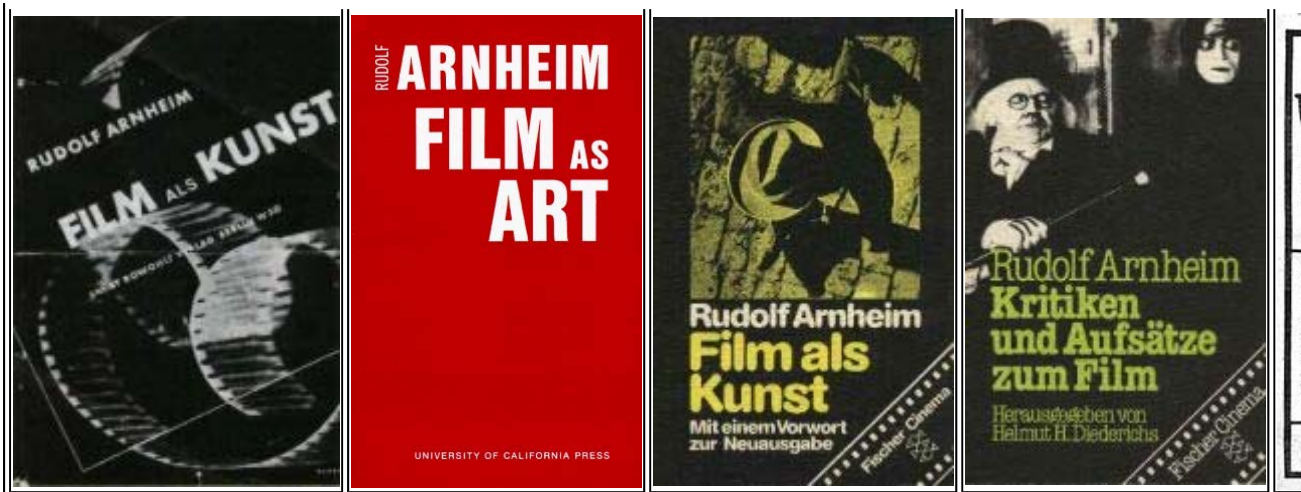
Journalistic Career On Film (1928-1933)

1928 -- the most influential art school of the century, the **Bauhaus**, is visited by Rudolf one weekend. He writes an article about the momentous visit and it afterward gets published in *Die Weltbühne*, a liberal political weekly edited by the social critics Carl von Ossietzky and Kurt Tucholsky (Behrens, 8). After the completion of his dissertation, at age twenty-four, he gets hired as junior editor for *Die Weltbühne*.

1932 -- Rudolf Arnheim's journalistic efforts culminate in his *Film als Kunst* (Film As Art), an analysis of the perceptual principles involved in film viewing. Arnheim's reasoning and motivation for the book is to disprove the antiquarian notion that "photography is a mechanical imitation of nature, and since it is a mechanical imitation, it couldn't be art" (Arnheim, 1984, p.6). Thus a major part of the book is an attempt to familiarize the public to the differences between film and reality that allowed it to be used successfully as an artistic medium:

"How do our eyes succeed in giving us three-dimensional impressions even though the flat retinae can receive only two-dimensional images? Depth perception relies mainly on the distance between the two eyes, which makes for two slightly different images. The fusion of these two pictures into one image gives the three-dimensional impression. As is well known, the same principal is used in the stereoscope, for which two photographs are taken at once, about the same distance apart as the human eyes . . . For display to a larger number of spectators the problem of stereoscopic film has not yet been solved satisfactorily (and is still an issue even today)--and hence the sense of depth in film pictures is extraordinarily small. The movement of people or objects from front to back makes a certain depth evident--but it is only necessary to glance into a stereoscope, which makes everything stand out most realistically, to recognize how flat the film picture is. This is another example of the fundamental difference between visual reality and film" (Arnheim, 1957, p.12).





More importantly, it is one of the most rigorous attempts to see how meaning can arise from cinematographic techniques and theory:

"If an ordinary picture of some men in a rowing boat appears on the screen, the spectator will perhaps merely perceive that here is a boat, and nothing further. But if, for example, the camera is suspended high up, so that the spectator sees the boat and the men from above, the result is a view very seldom seen in real life. The interest is thereby diverted from the subject to the form. The spectator notices how strikingly spindle-shaped is the boat and how curiously the bodies of the men swing to and fro. Things that previously remained unnoticed are the more striking because the object itself as a whole appears strange and unusual. The spectator is thus brought to see something familiar as something new. At this moment he becomes capable of true observation. For it is not only that he is now stimulated to notice whether the natural objects have been rendered characteristically or colorlessly, with originality or obviously, but by stimulating the interest through the unusualness of the aspect the objects themselves become more vivid and therefore more capable of effect" (Arnheim, 1957, p.44).

Additionally, Arnheim illustrates his understanding of the essence of film, which led him to deny the value of color and sound in film and to focus heavily on the role played by editing. The work also provides great insight into the aesthetics of the silent era, opening a window onto the intellectual climate of the Weimar Republic. As a final point, Arnheim in *Film As Art* declares that for film to be considered art, it must demonstrate not only the perfection of each element, but the perfection of those elements in relation to each other: melody, harmony and overall composition. Each frame must serve the whole; one frame more or one frame less and the work would be irreparably damaged (Arnheim, 1957, p.156).

Departure From Germany To Rome To England (1933-1940)

1933 -- The Nazis come to power and one of their earliest menacing acts is the dismissal of Jewish university professors, and correspondingly, because Rudolf's ancestry is Jewish, the sale of his innovative book about film, *Film als Kunst* (published only months earlier) is no longer permitted. Concurrently, *Die Weltbühne* is quickly put out of publication, leaving Rudolf little choice but to flee his homeland for Rome, where he continues to write about film for the next six years in association with the League of Nations and International Institute for Educational Film (Verstegen, 19-20). He also assists in the creation, preparation, and publication of a monumental encyclopedia of the cinema, which was to come out in three big volumes and in five languages.

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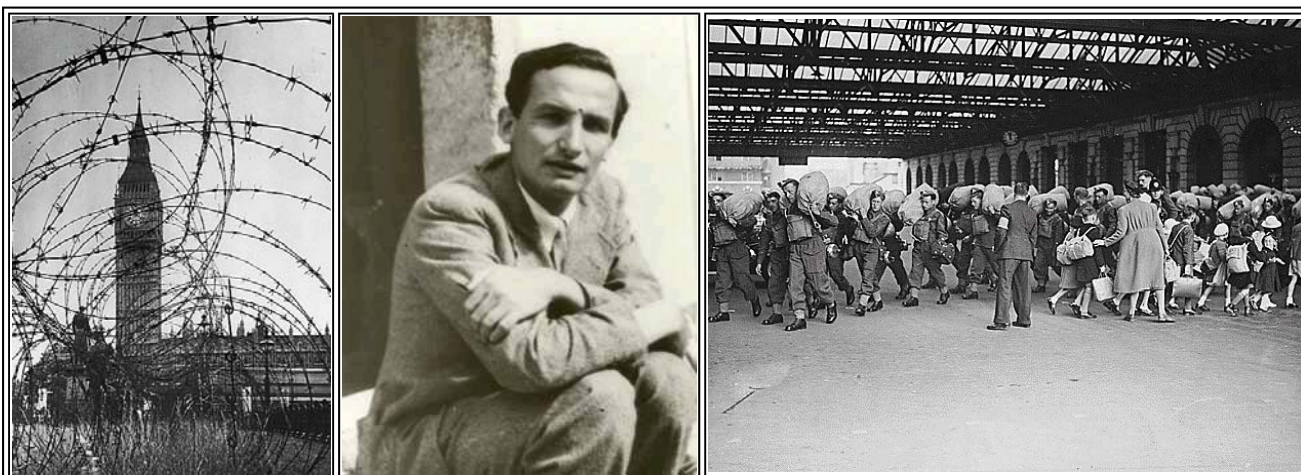


Furthermore, while still in Italy Arnheim writes a work on radio, titled in manuscript *Rundfunk als Hrkunst* (Broadcast As Art). When it is finished in 1935, it is impossible to publish it in Germany, where Arnheim had since only published a few articles, sometimes under a pseudonym. Instead, the manuscript is delivered to England and translated as *Radio: An Art of Sound* (1936). In this book, Arnheim contemplates the possibilities for what he perceives to be a new form of art, born from the invention of the wireless. He further discusses a range of ontological and conceptual considerations with topic headings such as "A New Art of Sound," "Voices Without Bodies," "The Hermit At The Loudspeaker" and "Armaments In The Ether" (Arnheim, 1936, p.7). Arnheim discusses one of the major contributing factors that has stifled the development of radio art: a hierarchy of the senses which installs sight at the top of the perceptual ladder:

"The eye alone gives a complete picture of the world, but the ear alone gives an incomplete one . . . The essence of broadcasting consists just in the fact that it alone offers unity by aural means . . . the essence of an event, a process of thought, a representation . . . The sensory preponderance of the visual over the aural in our life is so great that it is difficult to get used to considering the aural world as more than just a transition to the visual world. Thus there is a widespread fixed opinion as to the task of the wireless" (Arnheim, 1936, p.135-136).

Moreover, Rudolf's claims on the hierarchy of the senses are most significant when considering the gap in historical, theoretical, and practical developments of an art of radio.

But, with the outbreak of World War II and Mussolini's adoption of Germany's racial laws, Rudolf leaves Italy and attempts to go first to America, but due to immigration quotas he moves instead to London where he serves as a wartime translator for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Arnheim, 1984, p.8).



America Here I Come (1940 - Present)

1940 -- Finally, Rudolf Arnheim immigrates from England to the U.S. Rudolf most vividly recollects his journey

on coming to America:

"Now imagine, somebody who has been in a big city, completely blacked out for about two years, on a boat, an English passenger boat, which went from England to New York, the boat also completely blacked out because of the submarines, the German submarines. And you arrive in the harbour of New York (this was 1940), with the buildings blazing up to the sixtieth floor. You come into the harbour and you see all those buildings, and you see all those lights up in the sky (and remember, I hadn't seen any buildings higher than four or five floors, with very few exceptions, ever), and my friends were at the harbor and they picked me up with a cab, which was twice as long as any car I had ever seen. And it was driven by a black man, and that gave it a kind of Aida flavor -- something completely exotic -- because I hadn't seen many black people in my life. And here he was, in charge of that car, and they took me along Riverside Drive to the apartment of my friend, whom I was glad to have, because I arrived there with ten dollars in my pocket - all the money you were permitted to take out of England. And that's the way I started out" (Arnheim, 1984, p.10).

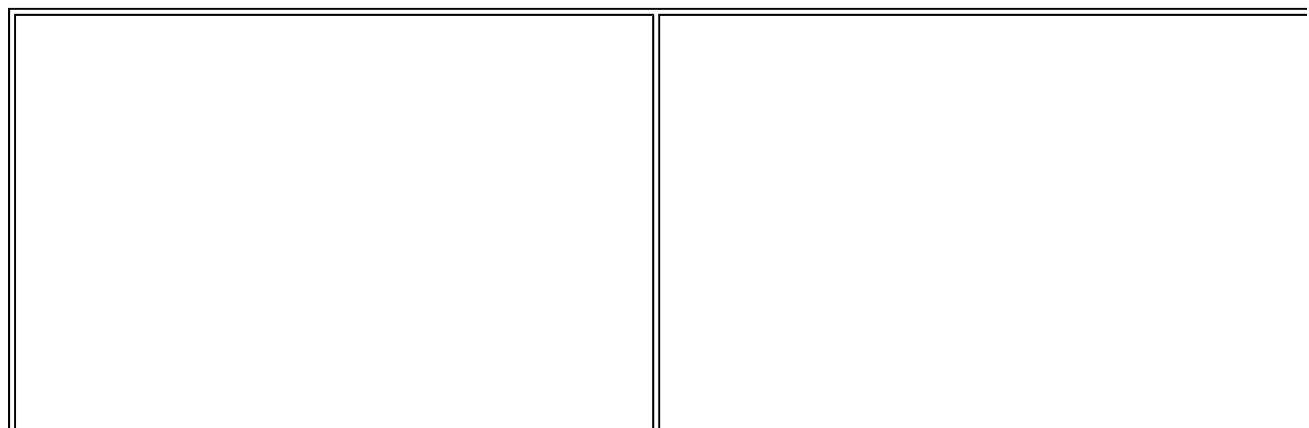


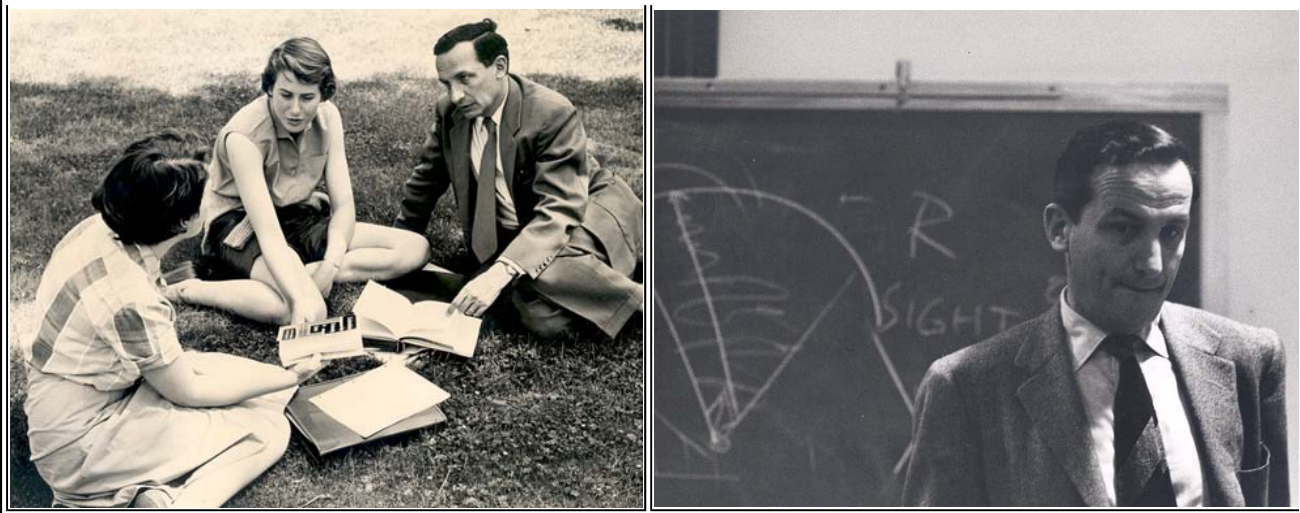
Before long, Rudolf applies for and is granted two major awards; one is a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation, in which he works with the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University in analyzing soap operas and their effects on American radio audiences. The second is a Guggenheim Fellowship, received in 1942, to study the role of perception in art and thereafter, to write a book about the application of Gestalt psychology of perception to the visual arts. But due to the projects prematurity he delays it in favor of further research (Behrens, 13).

SLC TENURE (1943)

1943 -- **Sarah Lawrence College** in Bronxville, New York invites Rudolf Arnheim as an undergraduate professor of psychology, a position he would hold until 1968. Rudolf's first course is a general introduction to "Psychology" that would focus on a psychological approach to "Learning," "Insight," "Perception," "Memory," "Theory of Expression," "Expression In Art," "Lying," and "Imagination" -- just to name a few (SLC Course Catalog, 1943-1944, p.32). Then, in 1945, Rudolf finally presents a course in the "Psychology of Art;" The Sarah Lawrence College Course Catalog describes the class as:

". . . concerned with an interpretation of creative and appreciative approaches to art with a consideration of why art exists, what is the meaning of music. Subjects of study and discussion include: intuition, awareness, and laws in the creative process; comparative study of the media -- visual form, sound, language; balance and dynamics; perception of color, depth, movement, sound; theory of abstraction and symbols; development of form perception and representation in children and primitives; the artist in the social group" (SLC Course Catalog, 1945-1946, p.34).





1950 -- Rudolf Arnheim offers a seminar course, "Seminar In Current Psychological Problems," which deals with "some of the theoretical key-problems with which psychologists are struggling today, such as the controversies on psychological method, the nature of emotion, social perception, concept formation . . . and new developments in content analysis and projection" (SLC Course Catalog, 1950-1951, p.44). Rudolf would four years later offer an expanded and more introductory "Problems in Psychology" course, which he thereafter would offer annually to any interested student. The most interesting and peculiar course in the 1953-1954 Sarah Lawrence College Course Catalog is Arnheim's "Readings in the Psychology of Art and Music," which aims at:

". . . exploring the characteristics of the various artistic media, and by constant cross-references from one medium to the other, at studying the common aspects of expression, movement, shape, space, time, organization, meaning and motivation. While starting from theoretical texts, discussions will deal with concrete psychological problems illustrated by specific works of art and music" (SLC Course Catalog, 1953-1954, p.48).

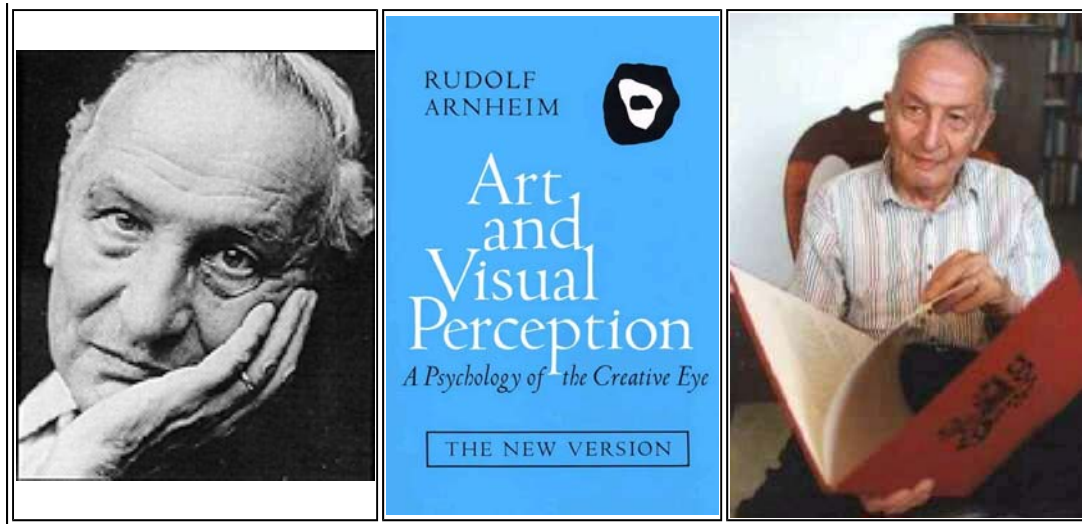
It is quite obvious that Rudolf Arnheim's pedagogical tenure at Sarah Lawrence College is one of a mutual discovery and admiration amid teacher and student. Rudolf reminisces on his amazing teaching experience at Sarah Lawrence College:

"I would say that that's [Sarah Lawrence College] the place where I think I learned whatever I've ever learned about teaching . . . In addition to the class meetings, I had individual meetings with each student, for the student to work on a particular personal project, in addition to work in the classroom. It was a situation in which there existed no compulsory class -- I've never in my life taught a class in which there was a human being who didn't want to be in that class. And there were those twelve faces looking at me, and if they didn't want to be there they didn't have to be there, and so I learned to teach by the response that came from the faces. If I saw glazed I knew I had to put it over some other way, or something was wrong with what I was saying. And that has helped me" (Arnheim, 1984, p.12).

What makes Rudolf Arnheim so distinct from the rest of the Psychology department and Sarah Lawrence College faculty is that his courses were always different from any other course listed in the college catalogue. They explored the perception of shape and color, asking the fundamental Gestalt question about why we see things as we do, why art exists, and how artistic work comes about (Convocation Statement Honoring Rudolf Arnheim, 1985). Moreover, Rudolf Arnheim was an innovator, a vanguard -- for his courses were the first in a new interdisciplinary field that he was creating.

Art And Visual Perception (1951-1954)

1951 -- Rudolf receives a second fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation, enabling him to take a leave from teaching. During the next fifteen months, he produces a definitive and original 500-page book, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, where he intends to "narrow the gap between scientific and artistic knowledge; to use scientific finding to better understand the arts while preserving the equally pivotal role of subjectivity, intuition, and self-expression" (Behrens, 15). Ultimately, through this book Rudolf Arnheim provides his greatest contribution to the fields of psychology and art -- balancing the scientific rationale of psychology with the reality of art. Completely revised in 1974 and translated into over fourteen languages, the tome has sold steadily since its initial publication and has become one of the most widely read and influential art books of the century.



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Friday, November 15, 2002 2:21 PM

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