MCMCA 551, Spring 2015: Graduate Seminar--Theory of the Media Arts

W 3-6 PM, 2216 Communications

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Office hours: Monday & Thursday: 3:00-5:00 PM; Tuesday: 11-1:00

But you, do not say: that man is not an artist. By setting up such a barrier between yourselves and the world, you simply expel yourselves from the world.

…Say rather: He is an artist because he is human.

Bertolt Brecht. On Everyday Theater

But, who created the creator?

Pierre Bourdieu, Sociology in Question

…but if you really want me to console me, teach me to forget what has happened, or to see it from a proper artistic point of view….to become the spectator of one’s life …is to escape the suffering of life.

Oscar Wilde. The Picture of Dorian Gray

The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present. The eye becomes a human eye, just as its object becomes a social, human object – an object made by man for man.

Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

This graduate-level introduction to media arts theory will consider the major theoretical debates on the fundamental question of the arts and humanities: why do humans make art or why art-making makes us human? In particular, we will take up debates that began with the rise of the mechanical means of artistic production in the 19th century and into the digital era and our present. However, this is not a technology centered discussion of the arts; rather, media arts will be placed in their social, political, and economic contexts. We will consider theories and artistic practices historically, i.e., how they were formed by and against social reality and how they in turn formed and constituted social reality. The major issues considered will be:

1) The autonomy (or lack) of art and artists from the political economy of labor, sexuality, race and nation.

2) Art as a critique of and the crystallization of perceptive and experiential nature of everyday life (especially in relation to time and the notion of freedom) and its relation to the socio-economic and political realities of its time.

3) Art making as a form of language and means of grasping and transforming social reality

4) Contemporary arts practices, digital media technologies, and where we are
The class will run as a seminar and writing workshop. You should come out of this class with a broad understanding of the historical development of the major debates in media art theory; the ability to think historically and theoretically about contemporary media practices; and to think, write and speak theoretically about your own media practice and scholarship.

You will be expected to research and develop, over the course of the semester, a final paper which deals with one or several of the themes discussed in the class. It is possible to collaborate on your final paper.

Texts:
PDF files are available online at siu online.

Assignments:

1. Research proposal: 2 page proposal of a research project that you would like to explore though the semester. Your proposal should state your question, the reason why you are interested in it, its significance, and a working bibliography. The question can change over the semester. You will present the proposal to the entire class and revise it based on feedback. 10%

2. Position papers: Postings and responses
   a) Posting: 25%. You will sign up to present your position on the readings for the week and lead the discussion in class. Each paper should be about 8-10 pages and you should also be prepared to present it in class with examples. The posting should address the following: What is the essay about? What is the historical context of this essay? What was the author trying to explain and why? What, if any, is the significance of this essay? Research is an important component of this class and you are encouraged to add your own perspective, disciplinary interest, experiences, and research to the assigned readings. Each student will sign up to present the readings for one week in the semester.
   Responses: 35% (7 @ 5% each). Each response should be about 4-5 pages double-spaced and should highlight the main arguments of the readings, their historical context, and your response to it. For some readings, I will assign specific questions that you should incorporate in your responses. You may choose any 7 weeks (with the exception of Marx and Freud—2/03, which everyone must attempt).

3. Term paper. 30%

Schedule

1/20: Introduction

1/27: Current debates: The creative economy

- Chuck Kleinhans: “Creative industries,” neoliberal fantasies, and the cold, hard facts of global recession: some basic lessons
- Ursula Huws: The Spark in the Engine: Creative workers in the global economy
• Pierre Bordieu: Who created the creators?

2/03 Basic concepts: Alienation: Marx and Freud

• Marx: Economic and Philosophic manuscripts. Estranged labor
• Sigmund Freud: Civilization and its Discontents

Response # 1 due by 11:30 PM. Questions noted online.

2/10: The Ideology of the Aesthetic: Art, ritual, taste, and disinterestedness.

• Ernst Fischer: The origins of art
• Immanuel Kant: What is Enlightenment?

Response # 2 due by 11:30 PM

2/17: Mass media, mass movements, and critical theory.

• Walter Benjamin. The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (from Hannah Arendt, ed. Illuminations)
• Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, The Culture Industry

Response # 3 due by 11:30 PM

2/24: The historical avant garde: surrealism, Dada, the unconscious, and question of freedom.

• Tristan Tzara: Dada Manifesto 1918
• Andre Breton: First Manifesto of Surrealism, excerpts
• Salvador Dali: The Stinking Ass

Research proposal due
Response # 4 due by 11:30 PM

3/02: The question of realism

• Sergei Eisenstein: The dramaturgy of film form
• Brecht: Popularity and realism
• Andre Bazin: The ontology of the photographic image (Andre Bazin, What is Cinema, Vol. I)

Response # 5 due by 11:30 PM

Guy Debord: The commodity as spectacle: [http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/2.htm](http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/2.htm)

Christian Metz. The Imaginary Signifier

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Photography and Fetish

John Berger. The Suit and the Photograph

Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"

Response # 6 due by 11:30 PM

3/14-3/18: Spring Break

3/23: Anti-imperialism, global capital, and circulation of images

- Edmundo Desnoes. The Photographic Image of Underdevelopment

- Arjun Appadurai: Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy

Response # 7 due by 11:30 PM

3/30: Feminism/psychoanalysis/structuralism and theories of the spectator

- Laura Mulvey. Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema & The Male Gaze in Retrospect:

- Julia Lesage. Women’s Rage
  [darkwing.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/womensRage.html](darkwing.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/womensRage.html)

- Lacan. The mirror stage.

Response # 8 due by 11:30 PM

4/06: Queer theory, race, difference, and spectatorship.

- Tom Waugh. The Third Body

- Bell Hooks. In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life

Response # 9 due by 11:30 PM

4/13: Postmodernity/postmodernism and the question of history

- Fredric Jameson: Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism

- Francis Fukuyama: After Neoconservatism

- Judith Butler: On Never Having Learned how to Live

Response # 10 due by 11:30 PM

- Susan Sontag: Torture caused by cameras
- Slavoj Zizek: Welcome to the Desert of the Real
- Jean Baudrillard: The hyperrealism of simulation
- Lev Manovich: The politics of augmented space

Response #1 due by 11:30 PM

4/27: Ist drafts of papers due (please posted on the class website). In-class presentation (10 min. each on paper).

5/04: Writing Workshop: Each student will do a close reading of another and return the marked up essay.

Final Papers due 5/14 11:00 PM online