

Recurring Concepts in Art (H79.2586)

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THUR 3:30-6:00

Office hours by appointment only

“In the end [interpretive approaches to new media] borrow from existing paradigms. They weren’t conceived with digital media in mind, and as a result they don’t exploit the special qualities that are unique to digital worlds. Yet it’s those unique qualities that will ultimately define entirely new languages of expression. And it’s those languages that will tap the potential of digital media as new vehicles of expression.” – Media Theorist Steven Holtzman (1997)

“Holtzman misses the point. He himself appeals to a comfortable, modernist rhetoric, in which digital media cannot be significant until they make a radical break with the past. However, like their precursors, digital media can never reach this state of transcendence, but will instead function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced...” – Media Theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999)

Debates surrounding the “newness” of new media art continue to be examined from a wide range of perspectives regarding technology, appropriation, representation, subjectivity, visual and bodily experience, historical context, style, the list goes on. Indeed the very question of what constitutes “new media” and “when it began” continue to be explored. It is not the objective of this course to prove or disprove theories of “transcendence” or “constant dialectic” in the historical development of new media art, nor to define what is and what is not new media art. For the purposes of the course, we will steer a position somewhere between those of Holtzman, and Bolter and Grusin. While observing how advancing technologies are producing new territories in the making of meaning and languages of interpretation in contemporary art, we will examine how artists working before the boom of technology utilized other media, techniques and approaches to effect formal, conceptual and experiential dynamics comparable to those being investigated by new media artists today. For example, the concept of interactivity, commonly observed as original and specific to the user-interaction component of technology-mediated works,

was equally if differently specific to Minimalist sculpture and Environment art of the 1960s. The play between figuration and abstraction, today with vast and prevalent applications via sophisticated computer software, has its roots in the rejection of Academic imperatives in the late 19th century. Indeed the very concept of new media and the correlating implication of critically significant artistic development apply throughout history. In the 1910s, the found object indelibly altered definitions of art (as well as the artist, artistic critique, concepts of value and the role of the institutional voice), the primary significance of the object being consumed by that of the concept (conceptual art) in the 1960s.

This course is organized thematically. Each class will focus on a concept derived from new media production and examined in relation to 19th- and 20th-century art outside of new technology rubrics. The course will be conducted as a reading/lecture/discussion course. We will be making a number of visits to museums and other art spaces. Critical theory will be incorporated into all aspects of the course but this is not strictly a theory course. The course has been conceptualized and designed to enhance understanding of art through a variety of channels - from sustained, close looking at art/objects, to exploratory conversations, to more rigorous thinking and discussions informed by lectures, readings, projects and papers. The ultimate goal of the course is to expand students' sense of artistic possibility in their own work through an expanded understanding of the immensely rich history of artistic creativity.

Attendance and credit

Students are expected to attend all classes, on time. If you must miss a class, advance notification is required. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in failure of the course. Chronic late arrivals will weigh on your final grade.

All assignments must be submitted - on time - to pass the course.

- 1) Midterm project, 30%
- 2) Final 15-page paper, 30%
- 3) 3-page response papers, 2 x 10%
- 4) Participation, 20%

Participation: thoroughly preparing all weekly readings; verbally engaging in class discussions; timely submission of assignments.

2 students will be assigned to prepare and present the readings each week; all students should bring a copy of all readings to class. Readings are on the class varwiki in pdf format unless otherwise noted.

<http://itp.nyu.edu/varwiki/Syllabus/Recurring-Concepts-in-Art-F08>

Outline (subject to change)

Week 1, 9/4: Introduction to the Course. Radical Shifts: New Media before “New Media” (Dada, Collage, Installation Art, Body/Performance Art, Conceptual Art)

The concept of new media and the correlating implication of critically significant artistic development apply throughout history.

Week 2, 9/11: Art and Technology. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy; *Homage to New York* (1960); E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology); early Nam June Paik

Reading due:

1) Billy Kluver with Julie Martin, “Working with Rauschenberg,” *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, 1998, pp. 310-27
(handout)

2) John Hanhardt, “The Seoul of Fluxus: Composition, Performance, and the Transformation of Video and Television,” *The Worlds of Nam June Paik*, Guggenheim Museum, 2000, pp. 16-74 **(handout)**

3) Jennifer Gabrys, “Residue in the E.A.T. Archives (Residual Mechanisms, Projects Outside Art, End of System),” Daniel Langlois Foundation (online), pp. 1-3:

<http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=522>

Viewing in class:

3) Robert Rauschenberg, *Open Score*, New York, E.A.T., 2007 (35 minutes)

The use of technology in art is not specific to the boom of the digital age.

Week 3, 9/18: Dialoguing Between Past and Present: A Case Study of Louise Bourgeois

Off-site visit to the Guggenheim Museum, “Louise Bourgeois.”

Midterm project assigned.

*Meet at the Guggenheim no later than 3:50 (our visit will begin promptly at 4:00) at the side entrance on 89th St. (just around the corner from the main entrance on 5th Ave.).

*The museum is located at 1071 5th Avenue at 89th Street.

*The closest subway stop is the 4/5/6 at 86th Street and Lexington Avenue.

Reading due:

1) Robert Storr, “Abstraction, l’Esprit geometrique,” *Louise Bourgeois*, Tate Publishing, 2007, pp. 21-35 (**handout**)

2) Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, “Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation,” *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, 1999, pp. 20-52 (**handout**)

An examination of the art of Bourgeois demonstrates the reuse of past experiences, ideas, forms and meanings in the oeuvre of a single artist.

Week 4, 9/25: Original/Copy: Reproduction/Re-Production.

Reading due:

1) Martha Buskirk, “Original Copies,” *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, MIT Press, 2003, pp. 59-105 (**handout**)

2) Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,”

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

The recycling of images, sounds, styles, etc. is a signature element of new media production; the use of “found objects” (and questions of originality) can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century.

Week 5, 10/2: The Society of the Spectacle. Guy Debord; Considerations for Contemporary Art and Society

Reading/Viewing due:

1) “On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1956-1972,”

<http://www.ubu.com/film/si.html> (22 minutes, UbuWeb)

2) Claire Bishop, “Spectacle and Participation,” from the symposium *Rethinking Spectacle*, at the Tate Modern, March 31, 2007 (26:45 minutes)

http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/webcasts/rethinking_spectacle/default.jsp

3) Mark Godfrey, “Pierre Huyghe’s Double Spectacle,” *Grey Room*, No. 32, Summer 2008, pp. 38-61 (**pdf, varwiki**)

4) Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, “Debord, Cybersituations, and the Interactive Spectacle,” *SubStance*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Issue 90: Special Issue: Guy Debord, 1999, pp. 129-56 (**pdf, varwiki – just skim**)

As articulated by Best and Kellner, along with other critics of contemporary art (ie. Buchloh, referenced in Mark Godfrey), the advancement of new technologies has contributed to the increased spectacularization of our culture/society. Theories on the society as spectacle date back to the 19th century (ie. T.J. Clark).

Week 6, 10/9: Figuration and Abstraction. The Rejection of the Academy in the late 19th Century and its Repercussions.

No reading this week; midterm presentations next and the following week.

The play between figuration and abstraction, today with vast and prevalent applications via sophisticated computer software, has its roots in the rejection of Academic imperatives in the late 19th century.

Week 7, 10/16: Midterm presentations

Week 8, 10/23: Midterm presentations

Week 9, 10/30: Vision, Perception, Apperception: A Case Study of James Turrell

Off-site visit to P.S.1, James Turrell, “Meeting”

*Meet at P.S.1 no later than 3:20, on the steps at the entrance to the building.

*P.S.1 is located at 22-25 Jackson Ave. at the intersection of 46th Ave. in Long Island City (travel directions on the website)

***Wear warm clothing**

Reading due:

1) “Greeting the Light: An Interview with James Turrell” at:

<http://www.conversations.org/story.php?sid=32>

2) Jonathan Crary, “Techniques of the Observer,” *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, MIT Press, 1990 (pdf, varwiki)

Week 10, 11/6: The Body, the Self

Reading due:

1) Michel Foucault, “Utopian Body,” in Caroline A. Jones ed., *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, MIT Press, 2006, pp. 229-34 (handout)

- 2) Amelia Jones, "The Body and/in Representation," *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject*, London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 1-24 (**handout**)
- 3) Qian Zhijian, "Performing Bodies: Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, and Performance Art in China," *Art Journal*, vol. 58, no. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 60-81 (**pdf, varwiki**)
- 4) Caroline A. Jones, ed., *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology and Contemporary Art*, MIT Press, 2006: (**handouts**)
 - a) "Mathieu Briand," pp. 51-55
 - b) "Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller" pp. 57-61
 - c) "Ryoji Ikeda," pp. 68-71
 - d) "Bruce Nauman," pp. 77-83

Week 11, 11/13: The Body, the Self: An Architectural Perspective

Off-site visit to Artist's Space, "Matters of Sensation"

*Meet at Artist's Space no later than 3:20

*Artist's Space is located at 38 Greene St., 3rd floor

Reading due:

- 1) *Sensorium* (ibid), "Francois Roche and R&Sie(n)," pp. 85-90 (**handout**)
- 2) TBD

Week 12, 11/20: Temporality.

Off-site visit to MoMA, "Here is Every: Four Decades of Contemporary Art"; Postwar Art (4th floor)

*Meet at MoMA no later than 3:20, at the 53rd st. entrance.

*MoMA is located at 11 W. 53rd st. between 5th and 6th ave.

*Please bring your student ID.

Reading due:

- 1) Olafur Eliasson and Robert Irwin, "Take Your Time: A Conversation," *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, Thames and Hudson, 2007, pp. 51-61 (**handout**)
- 2) Pamela Lee, chapter from *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*, MIT Press, 2004, **TBD**
- 3) *Time Zones: Recent Film and Video*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, 2004, **TBD**

Week 13, 12/4: Interactivity.

Readings:

- 1) Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, MIT Press, pp. 56-71 and 91-127 (**handout**)

2) Janet Kraynak, "Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman's Environments," *Grey Room*, no. 10 (Winter 2003), pp. 22-45 ([pdf](#), [varwiki](#))

Week 14, 12/11: Papers due; extracts from papers presented