

**FMST 630G / 830G
Media Theory: Object Lessons**

**Classroom: FB 250
Instructor: Prof. Marc Steinberg**

**Office: FB 421-9
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Course Description & Objectives

A proliferation of theoretical approaches to contemporary media has accompanied the recent proliferation of digital media forms. This course introduces students to recent developments in film and new media theory, offering a succession of texts that seek, each in their own way, to engage the central questions of this course: What is a medium in this age of multimedia? And by what theoretical avenues may we approach the issues of medium specificity, the multiplicity of media formations, and the emergent, culturally specific uses of media forms? Might we require new frameworks to adequately describe recent transformations in the media landscape? This course will draw on theoretical writings on film, television, blogs, the Internet as well as more abstract texts to give a sense of the past and present of media theory.

Required Readings:

All required readings will be distributed in electronic format, except for the following two books, which are available at the Concordia Bookstore:
-Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan Abel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
&
-Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*. Trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation: 20%
Class Presentation: 20%
Midterm Paper: 25%
Final Paper: 35%

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation: 20%

Attendance and participation in class are mandatory, and will be counted toward your final grade. You must come to class having thoroughly read the assigned readings, and be prepared to discuss them. You should come to class with questions and comments on the readings. We will draw on the readings in discussing the animation shorts, films and television series screened in class. As this is a seminar,

reading the texts and participating in discussion are essential elements of the course.

2. Class Presentation: 20%

Each week one or two students will start the class by presenting on the week's assigned readings. This presentation should include an introduction to the readings, a summary of the main arguments within the readings, and a critical assessment of the articles. The presentation should introduce the wider context in which the article(s) are situated, as well as offer a critical engagement with the text(s) being discussed (and hence should not simply be a point-by-point recapitulation of the author's argument). This may of course include a critique of the article, noting its limitations, or its problems. **The presenter(s) will be responsible for all articles of the week**, but may choose to each focus on a particular article, or a section of the book in question. **The total oral presentation should last no longer than 30 minutes (one student) or 40 minutes (two students).**

3. Midterm Paper: 25% Due October 15th

A **5-6 page paper** on the topic of media theory, drawing on texts read in Week 1 to Week 6. This paper should engage with **two or three** different approaches (by **two or three different authors**) to media introduced during weeks 1 to 6. In this paper you should offer a synthetic account of two/three texts or bodies of work that engages with them closely. You should note their similarities and/or differences, and you should organize your paper around a central problematic or concept that runs through the work you are considering. You may conclude by assessing the strengths and weakness of a given approach. You may refer to film or other media as examples if they support your account of the theories, but since this is not a film/media analysis paper, any such analysis should be secondary to your account of the theories. This paper is short, so be precise and concise.

4. Final Paper: 35% Due December 4th

A **10-12 page** critical or research paper on a topic of your choice, relating to material or issues covered in this course. This paper may take the form of a critical engagement with material presented in class along the lines of the midterm paper (a critical engagement with the texts dealt with in class), or a research paper on a topic of the student's choice. Whichever format you choose to follow, you must **engage with at least 3 texts** from this course. You should discuss your paper topic with the instructor.

Important Note: Plagiarism

I remind you that plagiarism is a serious offence that can lead to expulsion from the University. Do not copy, paraphrase or translate anything from anywhere without saying where you obtained it! (Please consult the "Code for Academic Conduct" in the University Undergraduate Calendar, also available on the Concordia website at <http://provost.concordia.ca/academicintegrity/plagiarism/>).

Section 1: Introduction to Media Theory

Week 1: September 5th

From Mediation to Media

- W.T.J. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, "Introduction" in *Critical Terms in Media Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010, pp. vii-xxii.
- Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?" *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009), pp. 319-331.
- Kitada Akihiro, "An Assault on 'Meaning': On Nakai Masakazu's Concept of 'Mediation,'" trans. Alexander Zahlten, in *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* (December 2010), pp. 88-103.

Screening:

Double Take (Johan Grimmonprez, 2009, 80')

Week 2: September 12th

Genesis of Media Theory: Marshall McLuhan and Media Ecology

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994, Chapters 1-7 (ending with "Challenge and Collapse") (pp. 5-86).
- Marshall McLuhan, "The Galaxy Reconfigured," from *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1962, pp. 314-330.
- J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1999, pp. 53-73.

Screening:

Battlefield 3 (Electronic Arts, sample gameplay, 12')

Redacted (Brian De Palma, 2007, 90')

Section 2: Media Critique, Spectacle, Worlds

Week 3: September 19th

Television Destroys Your Soul

- Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" *The New Media Reader*, 261-275.
- Jean Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media" in Nick Montfort and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, eds. *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge: MIT, 2003, pp. 277-288.
- Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (any edition), Chapter 1.

Recommended:

- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968, pp. 217-252.

Screening:

La société du spectacle (Guy Debord, 1973, 88', excerpts)

Network (Sidney Lumet, 1976, 121')

Week 4: September 26th

Televisual Flow and Liveness

-Jane Feuer, "The concept of live television: ontology as ideology" in E. Ann Kaplan, ed. *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches – an Anthology*. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983, pp. 12-21.

-Mary Ann Doane "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe" in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan, eds. *New Media, Old Media: a History and Theory Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 251-264.

-Patricia Mellencamp, "Disastrous Events" (excerpts) in *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, & Comedy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 90-107.

Screening:

Television crisis reporting, excerpts

Week 5: October 3rd

Media Worlds and Belonging

-Maurizio Lazzarato, "From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life" in *Ephemera* 4:3 (2004), pp. 187-208.

-Brian Massumi, "The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation" in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005, pp. 68-88.

Screening:

Offside (Jahar Panahi, 2006, 93')

Section 3: Circulation, Platforms and User Generation

Week 6: October 10th

Video and Circulation

-Brian Larkin, "Degraded Image, Distorted Sounds: Nigerian Video and the Infrastructure of Piracy" from *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, pp. 217-241.

-Barbara Klinger, "Contraband Cinema: Piracy, Titanic, and Central Asia," *Cinema Journal* 49 no. 2 (Winter 2010), pp. 106-124.

-Lucas Hilderbrand, "Grainy Days and Mondays: *Superstar* and Bootleg Aesthetics," in *Camera Obscura* 57 (vol. 19, no. 3), pp. 57-91.

Screening:

Nollywood Babylon (Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal, 2008, 74')

*****Midterm Papers due October 15th, by 5pm in the box outside the Cinema Office (FB 319)*****

Week 7: October 17th

New Tubes: YouTube, RuTube, Nico Nico Douga

-William Uricchio, "The Future of a Medium Once Known as Television," in *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009, pp. 24-39.

-Andrei Gornyxh, "From YouTube to RuTube, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love All Tubes," in *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009, pp. 441-455.

-Satoshi Hamano, "The Generativity of Nico Nico Douga: The new type of creativity enabled by metadata," trans. Naoki Matsuyama,

<http://global.genron.co.jp/2012/05/14/the-generativity-of-nico-nico-douga/>
(First appeared in *Shisō chizu vol.2: Generations*, NHK Publishing, Dec 2008.)

-Mark Andrejevic, "Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour," in *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009, pp. 406-423.

Screening:

Selections from RuTube, YouTube, NicoNico Douga

Week 8: October 24th

Platforms Politics, Anonymity and Internetz Culture

-Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" in *New Media & Society* 12(3) (2010), pp. 347-352 (excerpt).

-Jean Burgess (2008) 'All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong to Us?' Viral Video, YouTube and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture. In *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, pp. 101-109.

-Whitney Phillips, "LOLing at tragedy: Facebook trolls, memorial pages and resistance to grief online," in *First Monday*, [Volume 16, Number 12 - 5 December 2011](http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3168/3115), <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3168/3115>

-Ned Rossiter and Soenke Zehle, "Towards a Politics of Anonymity: Algorithmic Actors in the Constitution of Collective Agency," in *Organized Networks*, <http://nedrossiter.org/?p=360>

-Giorgio Agamben, "Whatever," "Bartelby," "Dim Stockings" and "Shekinah" in *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

-<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sites/4chan>

-<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rules-of-the-internet>

Screening:

We Are Legion: The Story of the Hactivists (Brian Knappenberger, 2012, 93')

Section 4: Networks, Systems and Media Method

Week 9: October 31st

Viral Theory?

-Tony D. Sampson, "What Spreads?" in *Virality: Contagion Theory in Network Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, pp. 61-95.

-Jodi Dean, "Blog Settings" and "Affective Networks" in *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, pp. 1-32; 91-126.

Recommended:

-Geert Lovink, "Facebook, Anonymity, and the Crisis of the Multiple Self" in *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, pp. 38-49.

-Jussi Parikka, "Contagion and Repetition: On the Viral Logic of Network Culture," in *Ephemera* 2007, 7(2): 287-308.

Screening:

28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002, 113')

Week 10: November 7th

Fan Consumption in and around Japan: Otaku and/as Media Theory

-Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan Abel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 3-116.

-Marilyn Ivy, "Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts: The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 21-46

Screening:

Lucky Star (Yamamoto Yutaka, 2007, one episode)

Di Gi Charat nyo (Sakurai Hiroaki, Episodes 29 & 30, 20')

Welcome to the NHK (Yamamoto Yusuke, 2006, Episode #4, 24')

Week 11: November 14th – Class Cancelled

Attend Takeshi Kadobayashi's lecture on Azuma, on Wednesday November 13th, time and place TBC

Week 12: November 21st

Media Archaeology and German Media Theory

-Friedrich A. Kittler, "Translators' Introduction," "Preface," and "Introduction" in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999, pp. xi-xxxviii; xxxix-xli; 1-19.

-Wolfgang Ernst, "Media Archaeography: Method and Machine versus History and Narrative of Media," in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka eds. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011, pp. 239-255.

Screening:

Toute la memoire du monde (Alain Resnais, 1956, 21')

Week 13: November 28th

Air Conditioning, Or, Air as Medium

-Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*. Trans. Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.

Screening:

WALL · E (Andrew Stanton, 2008, 98')

******DECEMBER 4th: FINAL PAPER DUE******