

FMST 803 PhD Seminar
Media Theory 2.0: Capitalism, Media, Politics

Classroom: SGW H-333 (at Visual Media Resources)
Instructor: Prof. Marc Steinberg

Office: FB 421-9
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30pm
Phone: (514) 848-2424, ext. 8728
Email: marc.steinberg@concordia.ca

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?

Media Theory 2.0

Over the last two decades we have witnessed a proliferation of media theorization subsequent to the arrival of digital media. We have now arrived at a turning point when we need to reopen the question: "What is media theory?" There are many ways to answer this question, and this course itself is one possible response to it. Specifically, this course proposes three avenues by which to answer this question, and each avenue responds to different pedagogical imperative in a course designed to give film studies students the theoretical tools they need to engage the moving image in the contemporary media ecology. *First, we will look at the established texts of media theory.* In doing so this course will give students an overview of classic texts in media theory from the 1960s to today, covering key texts by authors such as Heidegger, McLuhan, Debord, Baudrillard, Feuer, Doane, Kittler and Chun. Here we will encounter some of the classic debates around media technology and technological determinism, and the relation between media and capitalist modes of accumulation. *Second, we will look at the debates that have arisen around particular media forms, whether television, animation, or digital media artifacts such as the blog or the MP3.* In so doing this course will introduce students to multiple forms of media and the theoretical work that has come out of a close engagement with them, from television studies, to animation studies to work on the videotape and its circulation, to work on platforms, formats, GUIs, blogs, brands, and so on. In examining some of these debates this course will try to do some justice to the astounding variety of media forms and the media theoretical work that comes out of the engagement with them. *Third and finally, we will look at philosophical or politico-philosophical work that engages in some manner with questions of media, mediation, or media effects.* In so doing this course will introduce students to different approaches to media objects, and different possible futures for media theory, found

in the work of Massumi, Agamben, Lazzarato, Tiqqun, Galloway and Harman.

Required Readings:

All required readings will be distributed in electronic format, except for the following books, is available at the Concordia Bookstore:

- Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (University of Minnesota Press)
- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (MIT Press)
- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Vision: Software and Memory* (MIT Press)

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Class Presentation: 20%

Short Paper: 20%

Final Paper: 40%

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 are also encouraged to come with questions and comments on the readings, and 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, and leading discussion for 20 minutes thereafter. This presentation should include a summary of the author's main arguments. However the presentation should also introduce the wider context in which the article(s) are situated, as well as 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). However the student(s) should be prepared to lead the discussion of the article(s) for an additional 20 minutes, preparing questions about the articles to ask the class. Here the presenter(s) may wish to address articles not discussed in the presentation.

3. Short Paper: 20%

Due February 20th

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 seeing that this is not a film/media analysis paper, any such analysis should be secondary to your account of the theories.

4. Final Paper: 40%

Due April 19th

A **16-20 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, or a research paper on a topic of the student's choice. You must 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: January 9

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.
- John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept" in *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2010), pp. 321-362.
- 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: January 16

Genesis of Media Theory: Marshall McLuhan and Media Ecology

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994, pp. 3-73; 119-130 (Clothing; Housing); 179-187 (Wheel); 284-337 (Movies; Radio; Television).
- 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: January 23

Marxist Media Theories

- 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), Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (Theses 1-72).

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: January 30

Spectacle and its Inversion: Making the Whatever-Image Common

- Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Vernon Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row, 1977, 3-35.
- Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life," "Notes on Gesture," "Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle," and "Notes on Politics" in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Giorgio Agamben, "Whatever," "Bartelby" and "Dim Stockings" in *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Tiqqun, "A Critical Metaphysics Could Emerge as a Science of Apparatuses" from *This Is Not a Program*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 135-156.
- Paul Frosh, "The Realm of the Info-Pixel: From Stock Photography to the Visual Content Industry," in *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry* (London: Berg, 2003), pp. 193-213.

Recommended:

- Giorgio Agamben, "What Is an Apparatus" in *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 1-24.

Screening:

- The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011, excerpts)
- Get Rid of Yourself* (The Bernadette Corporation, 2003, 61')

Week 5: February 6

Building Worlds in Communicative Capitalism

- Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds. *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Maurizio Lazzarato, "From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life" in *Ephemera* 4:3 (2004), pp. 187-208.
- Adam Arvidsson, "Brands: A Critical Perspective." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5: 2 (2005), pp. 235-58.
- 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:

- Gamer* (Mark Neveland and Brian Taylor, 2009), excerpts
- Offside* (Jahar Panahi, 2006, 93')

****February 8: JungBong Choi, Invited Lecture (ARTHEMIS Speaker Series)****

Section 3: Animation, Technology, and Platforms

Week 6: February 13

Platform Worlds

-Jonathan Sterne, "Format Theory" and "Making a Standard" in *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, pp. 1-31; 128-147.

-Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" in *New Media & Society* 12(3) (2010), pp. 347-364.

-Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005, pp. 93-98; 127-132.

Recommended:

-Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, "Platform Studies: Frequently Asked Questions" (Working paper, 2009, December 12). Retrieved August 14, 2012, from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/01r0k9br>

-Gavin Walker "The Filmic Time of Coloniality: On Shinkai Makoto's *The Place Promised in Our Early Days*" in *Mechademia*, Volume 4 (2009), pp. 3-18.

Screening:

Voices of a Distant Star (Shinkai Makoto, 2002, 25')

Lucky Star (Yamamoto Yutaka, 2007, Episode 1, 25')

*****Short Paper Due: Friday February 15, by noon in box in FB 319*****

February 20: Midterm Break, No Class

Week 7: February 27

A Media Theory of Animation

-Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. xiii-154; 184-206.

Screening:

Laputa: Castle in the Sky (Miyazaki Hayao, 1986, 124', excerpts)

Neon Genesis Evangelion (Anno Hideaki, 1995-6, Episode 26)

Kareshi to kanojo no jijo (His and Her Circumstances), Anno Hideaki, 1998-99 Episode 19, dir. Imaishi Hiroyuki)

Week 8: March 6: SCMS Conference, Class Cancelled

Section 4: Formal and Informal Flows & Circulation

Week 9: March 13

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.
- Mimi White, "Flows and Other Close Encounters with Television." *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar. New York: New York University Press, 2003, pp. 94-110.

Screening:

Television crisis reporting, excerpts

Week 10: March 20

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.
- Laikwan Pang, "Copying *Kill Bill*," *Social Text* 83, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer 2005), 133-153.
- 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')

Section 5: Networks, Systems, Archaeologies

Week 11: March 27

Media Networks, Systems, Methods

- 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.
- Lev Manovich, "Import/Export" in Matthew Fuller, ed. *Software Studies: a Lexicon*. Cambridge: MIT, 2008, pp. 119-125.
- 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 12: April 3

Software, Interface, Drive

-Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2011, pp. 1-95.

-Jodi Dean, "Blog Settings" and "Affective Networks" in *Blog Theory*, 1-32; 91-126.

Screening:

Thomas in Love (Pierre-Paul Renders, 2000, 97')

Week 13: April 10

Theory in the Age of Web 2.0: Object Oriented Ontology (or Blog Based Theory)

-Graham Harman, "Realism without Materialism" in *SubStance*, Volume 40, Number 2, 2011 (Issue 125), pp. 52-72.

-Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, "Towards a Speculative Philosophy" in Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds. *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne, Victoria, S. Aust.: Re.press, 2011, pp. 1-8.

-Alexander Galloway, "The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Winter 2013), pp. 347-366.

-"Realists are preventing us from having electric cars that run on \$10/yr!"
<http://moacir.com/donkeyhottie/2012/12/06/realists-are-preventing-us-from-having-electric-cars-that-run-on-10yr/>

-Graham Harman (blog), "With Enemies Like These, Who Needs Friends?"
<http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2012/12/07/with-enemies-like-these-who-needs-friends/>

-<http://itself.wordpress.com/2012/12/10/the-secondary-correlation-further-thoughts-on-the-realism-kerfuffle/#comment-32788>

****April 12: Wendy Chun Invited Lecture (ARTHEMIS Speaker Series)****

******APRIL 19: FINAL PAPER DUE******