MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

AHIS 429: STUDIES IN ART, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

JOHN R. BLAKINGER JOHN.BLAKINGER@USC.EDU
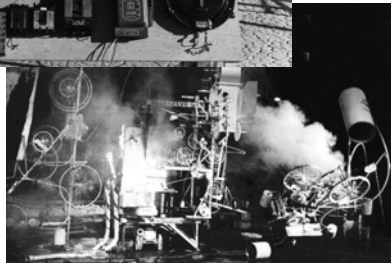
Jean Tinguely, *Study for the End of the World No. 2,* 1962

Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV,* 1965

James Whitney, Still from *Lapis,* 1966
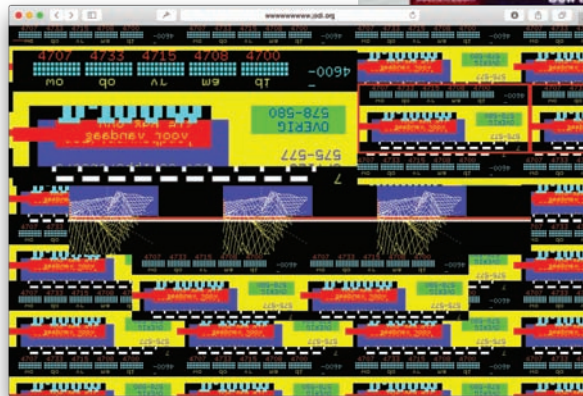
Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York,* 1960

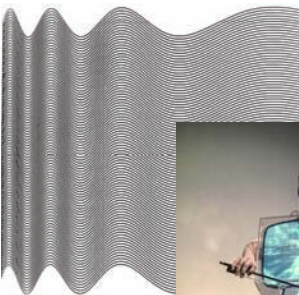The Yes Men, *Bhopal Disaster,* 2004

Dara Birnbaum, *Wonder Women* 1978-1979
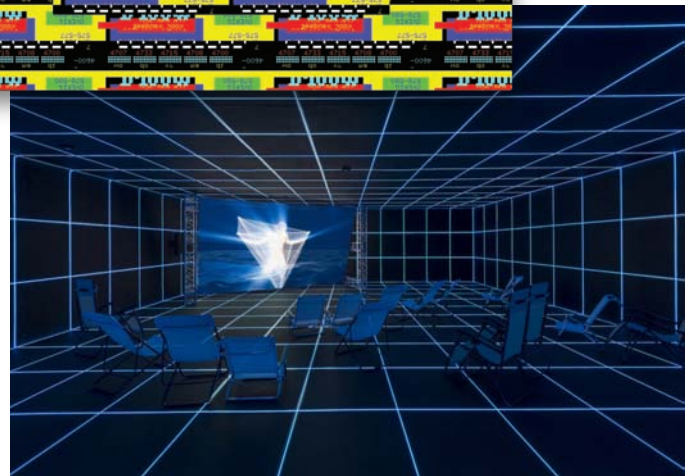
wwwwwww.jodi.org, 1996

A. Michael Noll, *Ninety Parallel Sinusoids with Linearly Increasing Period,* early 1960s

Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *TV Cello and TV Glasses,* 1971

Hito Steyerl, *Factory of the Sun,* 2015

Media Technologies in Contemporary Art

AHIS 429: Studies in Art, Science, and Technology
Spring 2017
Mondays 2.00-4.50 PM

John R. Blakinger
Email: john.blakinger@usc.edu
Office: THH 355-H
Office Hours: Wednesday 3.00-5.00 and by appointment

Prospectus:

Life is more digital now than ever before: we see through Instagram and Snapchat, speak with Twitter and text messages, and move in a world of endless screens, pixels, and data. What impact do these media technologies have on contemporary art?

This course explores the formative relationship between new media technologies and the visual arts from the mid-twentieth century to the present. It asks: What are the aesthetics and politics of using advanced technologies like the television, the computer, and the Internet to create art? How have scientific ideas from fields as disparate as engineering and biology transformed traditional ways of thinking about the art object? We will consider the dramatic cultural and social impact of science and technology on the art world from the early Cold War to today's so-called War on Terror. This course will provide both a chronological survey of the period, focused on selected case studies, and a thematic investigation of major debates and issues. At the end of the term, you will have a deep historical and theoretical understanding of the relationship between art, science, and technology in contemporary art today and in the recent past.

Topics include: art in the age of mechanical reproduction; cybernetics and systems theory as models for making art; the art-and-technology collaborations of the 1960s, and their utopian (and dystopian) visions of the future; the use of tools like the Xerox machine and the Portapak; feminist strategies of technological subversion and appropriation; computerization and early digital images; expanded cinema, experimental film, and immersive multimedia spaces; experiments in internet art and "hacktivism"; the culture of surveillance and technologies of observation; media parafictions, strategic deceptions, and the creation of artistic personae on social media platforms; and new ways to think about technology and new media in contemporary art.

We will use Los Angeles as our research laboratory throughout the semester. We will visit LACMA, L.A. MoCA, and the Getty Museum and Research Institute to see works of art in person and view archival material. During the first day of class we will discuss field trip logistics and scheduling.

Assignments and Grading:

Readings:
This course is intended to expose you to a wide range of texts, including primary documents—statements by artists, essays by critics, and key works of critical theory—as well as recent secondary scholarship and art criticism. Readings will be approximately 50 pages total per week. It is essential that you read before class; please give yourself the time necessary to finish reading before we meet. If there is too much to read, please let me know and we can discuss as a group and adjust the syllabus accordingly. Texts will be available on Blackboard as PDFs.

Engagement (20%):
Your goal is full attendance and engagement. I expect you to give your best. Engagement means completing readings before class, listening closely to your peers, and sharing your ideas collaboratively with the group. You should be comfortable asking both simple and more advanced questions. Respectful, generous, and supportive participation is expected from all students—we are all working together, so be mindful of everyone in the room.

In order to help us all stay focused, please do not use computers in the classroom—put away laptops, phones, and iPads. Instead, take out that archaic media technology: the notebook and pencil. It is too tempting to check email and social media while we should instead be engaging with each other.

Here is an explanation of why we will follow an "electronic etiquette policy":
http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom

Leading Discussion (20%):
Each student will introduce the weekly readings once during the semester. This presentation should include a brief summary of the major themes, figures, and chronologies in our texts. You will pose critical questions for the group and will lead our initial discussion.

Short Response Papers (20%):
You will write three short papers (500-750 words) in response to a set of readings from three different weeks. These papers should not summarize the readings but instead engage critically with the key arguments and present your position on the author's ideas.

Long Research Paper (40%):
You will write a longer (12-15 pages) research paper on a topic of your choice, based on consultation with me. Your topic can be inspired by a debate in our course readings, an artist we discuss or examine, or a work of art on view in the L.A. area, but it must have a thesis argument. I will help guide your research over the semester.

To begin your research paper, you will prepare a brief proposal (1-2 pages) explaining your topic. Your proposal must be accompanied by a few citations indicating the

direction of your research; this proposal will allow me to provide concrete feedback early in the semester so that you are can develop your paper further. It will also get you thinking about the project sooner rather than later in the term.

You will also submit a first draft three weeks before the final paper deadline, and I will supply feedback the following week. My comments will allow you to make any necessary revisions before the deadline for the final paper. Your first draft can be rough but must contain your main arguments and indicate how you will complete your paper.

Due Dates:

SHORT RESPONSE PAPERS: YOUR CHOICE
RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL: MONDAY, MARCH 6
RESEARCH PAPER FIRST DRAFT: MONDAY, APRIL 17
RESEARCH PAPER FINAL DRAFT: MONDAY, MAY 8, 5:00 PM

N.B.: All papers must be double-spaced with 1-inch margins and in a standard, 12-point font. Papers are due at the start of class in hardcopy. Final research paper is due at my office (THH 355-H) in hardcopy.

Possible Research Topics:

This course is an opportunity for you to pursue your interests. These ideas will give you a place to start:

* Modern art on TV in the 1950s
* The politics of the Vietnam War and the relationship between science, technology, and military power in art of the 1960s
* Interest in the arts among scientific pioneers like A. Michael Noll and Billy Klüver; experiments with early computer graphics and the work of Lillian Schwartz
* NASA's art collection and the visual culture of the space race
* Representing the atomic bomb and the technological sublime
* Gender, identity, and technology: Carolee Schneemann, Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Laurie Anderson
* Expanded cinema and experimental film; techniques of visual immersion and media surrounds, from Stan Vanderbeek's Movie Drome to USCO's psychedelic media art
* Kinetic art, the politics of movement, and the science of optical illusions
* Bio Art and the use of genetic manipulation in the early 2000s
* Race and surveillance technologies
* Postmodernism, virtual reality, and cyberspace
* Art and terrorism; hacking and cyber-warfare as artistic strategies
* New media in art on view in L.A. ("Doug Aiken: Electric Earth" at the Geffen Contemporary/L.A. MoCA, "Mickalene Thomas: Do I Look Like a Lady?" at L.A. MoCA, James Turrell's *Reignfall* at LACMA)

Availability:

I am eager to help you with readings, assignments, and course content. I am generally available via email and will try to respond within 24 hours of your message. I may not be able to respond during weekends or the night before an assignment is due—please plan accordingly. I am available in person at my office hours on Wednesdays, 3.00-5.00 PM, or by appointment. Just send me an email to schedule a visit.

A Note on Course Content:

During the semester we will look at many works of art, some of which may be challenging. The goal is never to intentionally shock or traumatize, but to discuss difficult, important, and complicated art. I will try to let you know before we encounter such material. If you do have difficulty with a particular image or discussion, please feel free to raise the issue in class or instead step out of the room. I am always happy to talk about these concerns further in office hours.

Statement for Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please deliver the letter to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8.30 AM to 5.00 PM, Monday through Friday; the phone number is 213.740.0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/pulications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

THE SYLLABUS (Draft as of 10/2016)

Week 1 (January 9):
Course Introduction. Syllabus Review. Apologia.

Week 2 (January 16):
NO CLASS. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

> "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."
>
> –Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, 1963

Week 3 (January 23):
Medium vs. Media vs. New Media

Greenberg, Clement. "Modernist Painting" (1960). In *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume 4, edited by John O'Brian, 83-95. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, Second Version" (1936). In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 3, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Others, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 101-133. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006.

McLuhan, Marshall. "Introduction" and "The Medium is the Message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 3-21. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997 (1964).

Manovich, Lev. Selection from "What is New Media." *The Language of New Media*, 19-26. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Week 4 (January 30):
Cybernetics, Systems, Networks

Wiener, Norbert. "Cybernetics in History." *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, 15-27. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954.

Burnham, Jack. "Systems Aesthetics." *Artforum* 7, no. 1 (September 1968): 30-35.

Burnham, Jack. "Real Time Systems." *Artforum* 8 no. 1 (September 1969): 49-55.

Alloway, Lawrence. "Network: The Art World Described as a System." *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (September 1972): 28-33.

Jones, Caroline A. "System Symptoms." *Artforum* 51, no. 1 (September 2012): 113-116.

Week 5 (February 6):
Kinetic Art, Op Art, Techniques of Movement

Krauss, Rosalind. "Mechanical Ballet: Light, Motion, Theater." *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, 201-242. New York: Viking Press, 1977.

Uroskie. Andrew V. "Moving Images in the Gallery." *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art*, 85-130. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Lee, Pamela M. "Bridget Riley's Eye/Body Problem." *OCTOBER* 98 (Fall 2001): 26-46.

In-class screening of Brian De Palma, *The Responsive Eye*, 1965.

Week 6 (February 13):
Media Immersion, Media Surrounds, Multimedia, Expanded Cinema

Colomina, Beatriz. "Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multimedia Architecture." *Grey Room* 2 (Winter 2001): 6-29.

Joseph, Brandon W. "'My Mind Split Open': Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable." *Grey Room* 8 (Summer 2002): 80-107.

McKee, Yates. "The Public Sensoriums of Pulsa: Cybernetic Abstraction and the Biopolitics of Urban Survival." *Art Journal* 67, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 47-67.

Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970. (Short selections)

Week 7 (February 20):
NO CLASS. President's Day.

Week 8 (February 27):
Art and Technology Collaborations

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 3-35. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Klüver, Billy. "Theater and Engineering—An Experiment: 2. Notes by an Engineer." *Artforum* 5, no. 6 (February 1967): 31-33.

Burnham, Jack. "Art and Technology: The Panacea that Failed." In *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture*, edited by Kathleen Woodward, 200-215. Madison, WI: Coda Press, 1980.

Goodyear, Anne Collins. "From Technophilia to Technophobia: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the Reception of 'Art and Technology.'" *Leonardo* 41, no. 2 (2008): 169-173.

Saturday, March 4 (Tentative—we will schedule so it fits everyone's calendar)
FIELD TRIP
Visit to LACMA

We will meet at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where we will view Random International's "Rain Room" (2012) and tour the exhibition "Moholy-Nagy: Future Present."

In advance of our field trip, please read the following:

Scott, Felicity D. "Limits of Control: The Rain Room and Immersive Environments." *Artforum* 52, no. 1 (September 2013): 350-357.

Moholy-Nagy, László. Short selections from *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Design, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1938.

Week 9 (March 6):
TV and Video Art

RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL DUE

Debord, Guy. "Separation Perfected" and "The Commodity as Spectacle." In *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 12-34. New York: Zone Books, 1995 (1967).

Antin, David. "Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium" (1976). In *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, edited by John Hanhardt, 147-166. Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149-181. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Hershman Leeson, Lynn. "The Fantasy Beyond Control." In *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, 267-273. New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1990.

Week 10 (March 13):
NO CLASS. Spring Recess.

Week 11 (March 20):
New Tools: The Computer and the Xerox Machine

Patterson, Zabet. "From the Gun Controller to the Mandala: The Cybernetic Cinema of John and James Whitney." *Grey Room* 36 (Summer 2009): 36-57.

Patterson, Zabet. "Pixilation." *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art*, 85-105. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015.

Eichhorn, Kate. "From Control Revolution to Age of Generative Systems." *Adjusted Margin: Xerography, Art, and Activism in the Late Twentieth Century*, 28-55. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016.

View:
Selection of films by John and James Whitney (10 minutes)

Week 12 (March 27):
Art and the Internet: Net.Art, Hacktivism, Tactical Media

Greene, Rachel. "Web Work: A History of Internet Art." *Artforum* 38, no. 9 (2000): 162-67.

Stallabrass, Julian. "The Aesthetics of Net.Art." *Qui Parle* 14, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2003): 49-72.

Galloway, Alexander. "Internet Art." *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, 208-239. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

Visit:
Selection of net.art sites (links TBD)

Week 13 (April 3):
Media Parafictions, Social Media Avatars, Role-Playing

Joselit, David. "Avatar." *Feedback: Television against Democracy*, 135-170.
        Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility." OCTOBER 129
        (Summer 2009): 51-84.

Visit:
http://www.nytimes-se.com/

Special guest Monica Steinberg, USC Postdoctoral Fellow, will visit our class to share
her research on artists, avatars, and social media.

Week 14 (April 10):
Surveillance

Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism." In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,
        translated by Alan Sheridan, 195-228. New York: Vintage Books, 1995 (1975).

Dawson, Ashley. "Surveillance Sites: Digital Media and the Dual Society in Keith
        Piper's *Relocating the Remains*."
        Available online: http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.901/12.1dawson.html

Stallabrass, Julian. "Negative Dialectics in the Google Era: A Conversation with Trevor
        Paglen." OCTOBER 138 (Fall 2011): 3-14.

Week 15 (April 17):
Bio-Art and Bio-Hacking * * * Art after "New Media" Part I: The Digital Canon?

RESEARCH PAPER FIRST DRAFT DUE

Hirsh, Robert. "The Strange Case of Steve Kurtz: Critical Art Ensemble and the Price of
        Freedom." *Afterimage* (May/June 2005): 22-32.

In-class screening of Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Strange Culture*, 2008.

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Bishop, Claire. "Digital Divide." *Artforum* (September 2012): 435-441.

Cornell, Lauren and Brian Droitcour. "Technical Difficulties." *Artforum* (January 2013): 36, 38.

Bishop, Claire. "Sweeping, Dumb, and Aggressively Ignorant! Revisiting 'Digital Divide.'" In *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter, 353-355. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015.

Week 16 (April 24):
Art after "New Media" Part II: Post-Digital, Post-Internet, "New Aesthetic"

Groys, Boris. "Art on the Internet." *In the Flow*, 171-188. London: Verso, 2016.

Joselit, David. Selections from *After Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Steyerl, Hito. "In Defense of the Poor Image." *The Wretched of the Screen*, 31-45. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.

Berry, David M. "The Post Digital: The New Aesthetic and Infrastructural Aesthetics." In *No Internet, No Art*, edited by Melanie Buhler, 287-298. Amsterdam: Onomatopee, 2015.

MONDAY, MAY 8, 5:00
RESEARCH PAPER DUE at my office (THH 355-H)