

Theories of Media Arts and Practice

IML 604 | 4 units
Fall 2019
Tuesday 4:00-6:50 pm
SCI 209

Professor: Vicki Callahan, Ph.D.
Office: 101 G, Hours: Thursday Noon – 1:00 pm;
and by appt.
email: vcallahan@cinema.usc.edu

IML 604: *Theories of Media Arts and Practice* offers an overview of the major trends in critical theory, helping to introduce the seminal ideas, terms and theories of the last century, applying them to the practice of media art understood broadly. The survey begins with an exploration of notions of “praxis” as our grounding to our pathway through the worlds of critical theory. We then set out with an introduction to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and move on to address structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, queer theory and theories of race. Woven into this broad overview is a second survey focusing on the foundational theories and concepts related to media, with the goal of providing a productive vocabulary and historical context.

The goals of the course include the following: 1) to sketch the terrain of theory as it has affected more than 50 years of media production; 2) to build a critical vocabulary useful for the informed production of media art works and their interpretation; and 3) to model one pathway through several histories – those of literary theory, political theory, and cultural studies – as a means for crafting one’s own sense of intellectual context. The course does not pretend to present *the* theory of media arts and practice but instead recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of the field and of the iMAP program, and the need for students to assemble their own hybrid network of thinkers most useful to their own work.

Required book (please purchase via the bookstore, Amazon, or other online vendor. The book is also on reserve at Leavey; you will need as of week 2 for readings in Week 3.

*Robert Dale Parker, *Critical Theory, A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*
Oxford University Press, 2012

All other readings will be available via the course wiki

COURSE PROJECTS and GRADING

40% Writing | Dialogue: weekly writing based on readings/viewings assigned and in class engaged conversation

10% Curation Exercise: short presentation (10 mins max) on work or works you find relevant to an issue or theory you want to explore. It may build on topic/theorist we have addressed or may take up something not addressed. It should however have some relation to a theoretical frame or problem that will enable to sharpen our toolkit skills. You don’t need additional written support for the presentation, simply bring an object/s, an idea/issue/problem/theory you would like us to address and the why behind the selection.



25% Mini Lit | Media Review: Due Week 9 The literature review is fundamental to traditional scholarly practice and often constitutes a first step in the production of a dissertation. It is also incredibly useful in the creation of fields for the qualifying exam. You'll be asked to write a brief literature or media review, due mid-semester.

25% Final Project -- Proposal Due Week 11; 10 mins. presentation of basic ideas and slideshow or website due Week 15 with full written text due exam week

The final project will be a written essay that performs a cross media analysis, applying a chosen theoretical framework to three forms of related media that remain distinct with regard to format. Your written work will be 5-8 pages (1250 – 2000 words) and should be accompanied by your 3 media “objects” under study (either slideshow or other presentation platform, e.g., Scalar, Wordpress, etc). If using a site, you may accompany your media objects with your text, but one version of the text should be a stand-alone document that you print out and hand in.

Course Schedule may be altered, please check course wiki for latest info.

Course Schedule:

Week 1, August 27: Why Theory?

Introduction to the Course

View: Ayoka Chenzira, “Revel in the Physical”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKAPya4lF_M

Trinh T. Minh ha, *Reassemblage*

Theory Toolkit Workshop: Theses on Writing

Toni Morrison: “The Foreigner’s Home”

Gregory Ulmer: Introduction to *Electronic Monuments*

Linda Martin Alcoff: “The Pathologizing of Identity”

for week 2 read:

Hannah Arendt, selection from *The Human Condition*, from section 5, “Action”

http://sduk.us/afterwork/arendt_the_human_condition.pdf

Antonio Gramsci, selection from *The Prison Notebooks* (pdf)

Week 2, Sept 3: Praxis as Method

Discuss Arendt and Gramsci

View work of Adrian Piper, Allan Sekula, John Akomfrah

For Week 3:

Read

Karl Marx, *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Parker)

Marx, *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof* (Parker)

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (Parker)

Louis Althusser, *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses* (Parker)

Charles Mills, selection from *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*

W.E.B. Du Bois, selection from *Black Reconstruction*

Week 3, Sept 10: On the Origins of Critical Theory

Discuss Marx, Horkheimer|Adorno, Althusser

View:

Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera*
Clips from Jean Luc Godard's, *Tout va bien* and *Film Socialisme*
Photomontage work of Heartfield, Hock, Rosler, Carrie Mae Weems

For next week read:

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in Mechanical Reproduction" (in Parker)

Marshall McLuhan, selection from *Understanding Media*

Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" (Parker)

Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, Intro

<http://hdl.handle.net.libproxy1.usc.edu/2027/heb.08244.0001.001>

Week 4, Sept 17: Media

Discuss Benjamin, McLuhan, Hall, Friedberg, Noble

View:

Jean Luc Godard *Histoire Du Cinéma*

Jenny Holzer, "For 7 World Trade" and "Redaction Paintings"

<http://artblart.com/tag/redaction-paintings/>

<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s4/jenny-holzer-in-protest-segment/>

40 mins. into the clip

For week 5 read,

Ferdinand de Saussure, selection from *Course in General Linguistics* (in Parker)

Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image"

Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive"

Week 5, Sept 24: Image, Part I

Discuss Saussure, Barthes, Sekula

View:

Photography by August Sanders, Walker Evans

For week 6 read

Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which produces an Alienation Effect" (Parker)

Jacques Derrida, "The end of the book and the beginning of writing" (in Parker)

Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" and "The Death of the Author" (Parker)

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (in Parker)

Week 6, Oct 1: Image, Part 2

Discuss Brecht, Derrida, Barthes, Mulvey

View:

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*

View clips from

Douglas Sirk, *All that Heaven Allows*

Todd Haynes, *Far From Heaven*

For week 7 read:

Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on the Purloined Letter" (in Parker)
Frederick Jameson "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (pdf)
Jean-François Lyotard, selection from *The Postmodern Condition* (pdf)
Hardt and Negri, selection from *Empire* (pdf)

Week 7, Oct 8: The Postmodern Condition

Discuss Lacan, Jameson, Lyotard, Hardt and Negri

Listen to

Myra Davies, "Burroughs Bunker"

Meira Asher, "Refuse: military.01"

View clips from:

Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

David Lynch, *Blue Velvet*

Laurie Anderson, *Home of the Brave*

for Week 8

Work on your Lit Review and Curation Exercise

Week 8, Oct. 15: Discussion of Lit Review and Day of Curated Media Delights!

For week 9, lit review work

Week 9, Oct 22: LIT REVIEW DUE

For Week 10 read:

Michel Foucault, selection from *Discipline and Punish*, "The Panopticon," (Parker)

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, selection from *A Thousand Plateaus* (pdf)

Imani Perry, "Sticks Broken at the River: The Security State and the Violence of Manhood" in *Vexy Thing*

Week 10, Oct 29: Surveillance and Control Societies

Discuss Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari

For week 11, read

Selection from Edmund Husserl's Ideas

51-62 (book pages, not pdf). "The Positioning which belongs to the Natural Attitude and Its Exclusion"

Selection from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception Preface (vii-xxiv); "Sensation as a Unit of Experience" (3-14); "The Theory of the Body is Already a Theory of Perception" (235-239)

Sara Ahmed, "Toward a Queer Phenomenology"

Week 11, Nov. 5 Phenomenology

Discuss Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Ahmed

View:

Agnes Varda, *The Gleaners and I*, 2000

Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman*, 1975

Lynette Wallworth, *Coral*, 2012

For Week 12,

Michel De Certeau, selection from The Practice of Everyday Life
Gloria Anzaldúa, selection from Borderlands (in Parker)
J. Halberstam, "Queer Temporalities and Postmodern Geographies" (Parker)
Linda Martin Alcoff, "On Being Mixed" in Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self

Week 12, Nov 12: Space, Time, and Identity -- Proposal Due for Final Project (one paragraph with issue or method you want to explore)

Final Project Proposal Due

Discuss De Certeau, Anzaldúa, Halberstam, Alcoff

for Week 13:

Judith Butler, selection from Gender Trouble (Parker)
Alexander G. Weheliye, selection from Habeas Viscus, Alexander G. Weheliye, selection from Habeas Viscus, Chapters 1 and 2, "Blackness: The Human;" "Bare Life: The Flesh"
Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa,"
<http://www.jstor.org.libproxy2.usc.edu/stable/pdf/3173239.pdf?acceptTC=true>

Week 13, Nov 19: Embodiment

Discuss Butler, Weheliye, Cixous,

For Week 14

Read for next week:

J. Halberstam, "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine"(pdf)
Lisa Nakamura, "Introduction to Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet"(pdf)
Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology"(pdf)
Ruha Benjamin, "Innovating Inequality" (pdf)
Safiya Umoja Noble, selection from Algorithms of Oppression (pdf)

Week 14, Nov 26: Gender, Race, and/as Technology

Halberstam, Nakamura, Coleman, Benjamin, Noble

Read for Week 15

Alexander Galloway, selection The Interface Effect
Lev Manovich, selection from Software Takes Command
Wendy Chun, selection from Updating to Remain the Same

Week, 15, Dec 3: Software and Ideology – Present "Draft" of Final Project/Slideshow or Website

Discuss Galloway, Manovich, Chun

Exam Week: Paper Due + any revisions to slide/site on Dec. 17 at 6:30 pm (end of class exam time)

Course Policies

Fair Use

Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. The iMAP program seeks to apply a reasonable working definition of fair use that will enable students and instructors to develop multimedia projects without seeking authorization for non-commercial, educational

uses. In keeping with section 107 of the Copyright Act we recognize four factors that should be considered when determining whether a use is fair: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. In general, we regard the reproduction of copyrighted works for the purposes of analysis or critique in this class to be covered by the principle of fair use.

Citation Guidelines

All projects will need to include academically appropriate citations in the form of a Works Cited section, which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The Works Cited is either included in the project or as a separate document, as appropriate to your project. We will use MLA style, and you may refer to these guidelines: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

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/publications/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/>.

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 be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.