



SCHOOL OF MEDIA ARTS

SOMA 1600

Language of Digital Media

SEMESTER 1

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COURSE STAFF

Course Coordinator: Phil George

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Consultation times: Email

COURSE INFORMATION

- a) **Units of Credit:** 6
- b) **Teaching Times and Locations:** Lecture 1 pm EGO2

Tut 9-11am

Tut 11-1pm

Tut 2-4pm

Tut 4-6pm

- c) **Contact hours per week**

Please note that the expectation of time in this course is more than contact hours. The University has expectations of a total load of 25 – 30 hours per unit of credit. This means that you should spend no less than 8-9 hours per week on average on class work in addition to your timetabled hours.

- d) **Course Aims**

Language of Digital Media will provide an overview of theories of language and visual culture, and look critically at the way these apply to popular media in the digital age.

- e) **Course Description**

Starting with basic principles of communication and introducing theories of semiotics, students are encouraged to critically engage with the deconstruction of media as text. Lectures in this course provide an introduction to linguistic and semiotic theory, as well as newer concepts such as memetics. Media platforms are also examined in individual lectures ranging from comics to digital games and hypertext. In tutorials the concepts introduced in lectures are examined in more detail, and assessment is undertaken through presentation involving the examination and analysis of popular media.

- f) **Relationship to other courses**

Language of Digital Media is seen as introductory theoretical grounding for thinking through concerns of media arts practice. This subject importantly delivers a background in visual culture theory and semiotics implicit within all subjects of the Bachelor of Digital Media.

- g) **Student learning outcomes**

On completion of Language of Digital Media you should be able to:

- Gain a better understanding of the complexities surrounding the media in contemporary visual culture
- Gain a better understanding of the work of specific theorists dealing with issues of historical and contemporary visual culture
- Apply the process of critical thinking to your own practice
- Improve students' research skills and encourage critical thinking

Improve students' presentation skills and their articulation of theoretical ideas

h) Graduate Attributes Developed in this Course

Please refer to COFA Graduate Attributes which relate to broader educational goals at COFA: http://www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/export/sites/cofa/staff/cofa_staff_downloads0/COFAattributes23_10_02B.pdf. This course is primarily related to categories of knowledge, communication skills, critical thinking and ethics. This course is least interested in technical and entrepreneurial skills.

ASSESSMENT

Three pieces of assessment are set for students:

- 1. Tutorial Presentation (30%):** Using the theories discussed in that weeks' lecture, students are to discuss and analyse a nominated aspect of contemporary media (television, cinema, advertisements, internet etc). As the basis for the presentation, students should use the recommended readings for that week. The presentation length may vary depending on the size of the class however they will not exceed 15 minutes per student. Topics will be allocated in the first week, and the presentations will begin in Week 3.
- 2. Journal (30%):** Students are to take notes from lectures class discussions. Use these as basis for your own critical responses to the topics considered and issues raised. Your notes should be succinct (preferably in point-form), **no more than 300 words (A4 page)** per week. Reflect on how the discussed theories may influence/help your practice. Do you agree/disagree with the theories, and why? Remember to clearly state your name on the front of your notebook. This should be submitted in Week 11.
- 3. Essay (40%):** Students will submit an essay of around 1500 words, to set questions. Topics will be provided. This should be submitted in the final class. You will be expected to show evidence of achieving the course's learning outcomes as well as attendance and participation.

To qualify for a passing grade you must complete all set work, which is to be submitted on time. *Where absences in excess of three (3) classes occur, you may be given a fail grade.* You must be punctual and participate in all class activities.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is taking the ideas or words of others and passing them off as your own. Plagiarism is a type of intellectual theft. Plagiarism can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgement. Plagiarism can have serious consequences, so it is important that students be aware of what it is, and how to avoid it.

It is also plagiarism to claim credit for a proportion a work contributed to a group assessment item that is greater than that actually contributed, to submit an assessment item that has already been submitted for academic credit elsewhere, or to knowingly permit your work to be copied by another student. There are very serious penalties for plagiarism, ranging from re-submission, reduction of marks (including to zero), failure of the course, and exclusion from the university. The Learning Centre website has a lot of useful information. See www.lc.unsw.edu.au/plagiarism.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 Introduction, Critical Theory and Digital Media

Tutorial: Introduction to key theories and discussion of their relevance.

Allocation of Presentations (40%)

Week 2 Language of signs: the Frankfurt School and Arendt.

Tutorial: How does the understanding of the 'culture industry' advanced by the Frankfurt School help us understand and discuss contemporary culture. Is it a useful model? What are some examples of the 'culture industry'. Is there the possibility of counter-culture.

Recommended Reading:

Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception", from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Trans. By John Cumming, London: Verso, 1986.

Theodor Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered", from *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass culture*, London: Routledge, 2001.

Theodor Adorno, "How to Look at Television" and "Free Time", from *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass culture*, London: Routledge, 2001.

Week 3 Language of signs and power: Michel Foucault

Tutorial: Foucault argued for a very particular understanding of the relation between power, knowledge (information) and society. What is this understanding, and what can it teach us about contemporary forms of power?

Recommended Reading:

Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" in *Diacritics* 16-1, Spring 1986, reprinted in Documenta X-the book: politics poetics, eds. Catherine David ad Jean Francois Chevrier, Ostfildern: Cantz-Verl, 1997

Michael Foucault "Chapter 3: Panopticism" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage Books 1995

Miran Bozovic "Introduction" from *The Panopticon Writings* (Ed.) Bozovic, London: Verso 1995

Week 4 Semiotics: Roland Barthes and Ferdinand Saussure

Tutorial: What is semiotics and how does it help to understand signs? Can we speak of 'signs' today? What are some forms that signs take today?

Recommended Reading:

Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" from *A Barthes Reader*, Susan Sontag (Ed.), New York: Hill and Wang, 1972

Roland Barthes "From Work to Text" from *A Barthes Reader*, Susan Sontag (Ed.), New York: Hill and Wang, 1972

Week 5 Language of signs and prejudice 1: Post colonialism

Tutorial: What is post colonialism? What is orientalism? What are contemporary forms of

colonialism?

Recommended Reading:

Edward Said "Introduction" from *Orientalism* New York: Verso, 1978

Franz Fanon "History is a Weapon" from *Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Pelican, 1959

Week 6 **Language of signs and prejudice 2: Feminism**

Tutorial: What is feminism? What are the claims of feminist criticism of visual culture? How can prejudice be articulated visually? What forms does prejudice take today?

Recommended Reading:

Barbara Creed "Introduction" from *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny*, Melbourne University Press, 2005

Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*, ed. Paul Wood & Charles Harrison, Blackwell, Oxford, UK & Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995

Week 7 **Language of signs and prejudice 3: Post-structuralism**

Tutorial: What is post-structuralism? What is its theoretical and critical significance today? Why is psychoanalysis important for understanding of visual culture and media? What are the central critical concepts advanced by Derrida and Lacan?

Recommended Reading:

Slavoj Zizek "Introduction" *How To Read Lacan*, New York: Norton, 2007

Jacques Derrida Selections from "Chapter 2" *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, 1974

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/derrida.htm>

Week 8 **Digital signs 1: Baudrillard**

Tutorial: What is Baudrillard's understanding of the sign? What is simulacra? What can Baudrillard's reading of the 'Gulf War' teach us about contemporary warfare and its increasing reliance on computer generated imagery?

Recommended Reading:

Jean Baudrillard, "The Social Logic of Consumption" and "Mass Media Culture", from *The Consumer Society: myths and structures*, London: SAGE, 1998.

Jean Baudrillard, "Structures of Interior Design", from *The System of Objects*, Trans. By James Benedict, London, New York, Verso, 1996.

Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication", Trans. by Bernard & Caroline Schutze; edited by Slyvere Lotringer, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 1988.

Jean Baudrillard, "Transaesthetics", "Transsexuality", "Transeconomics", "Superconductive Events" and "Prophylaxis and Virulence", from *The Transparency of Evil: essays on extreme phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict, London: Verso, 1993.

Week 9**Digital signs 2: Deleuze and Guattari**

Tutorial: What is the rhizome?

Why are Deleuze and Guattari's ideas so pervasive and influential today?

How do they help us understand the emergence of the aesthetic of the digital?

How do they help us understand the internet?

Recommended Reading:

Brian Massumi "Interface and Active Space: Human Machine-Design" *Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on Electronic Art*, Montreal, 1995

Brian Massumi "Realer than Real: The Simulacrum according to Deleuze and Guattari", *Copyright*, No. 1, 1987

Week 10**Digital signs 3: Lev Manovich and Marshal McLuhan**

Tutorial: How profound are the changes to our life brought about by digital media?

How do we understand new media according to Manovich and McLuhan?

What is meant by 'Interactivity'?

What is meant by 'the medium is the message'?

What are the different phenomena grouped under the name 'new media'?

Recommended Reading:

Lev Manovich "Introduction" from *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press: London 2001

Marshall McLuhan "Part 1" from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Ginko Press: New York, 2003

Week 11**Contemporary Signs 1: Slavoj Zizek**

Tutorial: What is Zizek's understanding of ideology and belief today? What is their bearing on our relation to visual culture? What are Zizek's 'lessons' to practitioners?

Recommended Reading:

Slavoj Zizek "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism", *New Left Review*, No. 225, London, 1997

Slavoj Zizek "Passion In the Era of Decaffeinated Belief" *Lacan Ink*, No. 5, 2004

<http://lacan.com/passionf.htm>

JOURNALS DUE- 30% and ESSAY DUE- 40%

Week 12**Contemporary Signs 2: Agamben and Hardt/ Negri**

Tutorial: What is the nature of human freedom and agency today? What is the 'homo sacer'?

What is the 'empire' and 'multitude'? How do these concepts colour our understanding of contemporary politics and visual culture?

Recommended Reading:

Giorgio Agamben "Introduction" from *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press: New York, 1998

Hardt and Negri "Introduction" from *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000

Week 13**RESEARCH/NON TEACHING WEEK**

COMPUTING REQUIREMENTS

IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO BACK UP ALL YOUR WORK! You will need to purchase some CD-Rs to store files generated during the semester. The machines in the labs no longer have Zip drives but now have CD-burners and Toast software with which to burn CDs. You are advised to purchase your own external Firewire drive if you intend to work extensively with digital media.

REMEMBER: A hard drive is not a backup – CDs, DVDs or tapes are the only safe option. You should make two copies and keep them in separate places. Diligently backup all work that is important to you at regular intervals. **Extensions of time for assignments will not be granted if you lose work through software/ hardware /operator error or viruses on personal machines.**

SAFETY INFORMATION

You have a responsibility to not do anything that risks the safety or health of your fellow students and also staff.

This will involve informing your lecturer of any safety risks you become aware of, and also following the directions of staff in relation to such issues as equipment usage, and safety equipment and clothing.

You are responsible for:

- adhering to UNSW and COFA OHS policies and procedures,
- following instructions on safe work methods,
- promptly reporting hazards or accidents
- ensuring your conduct does not endanger others.

Emergencies and evacuation

In case of emergency you should follow the instructions on the emergency procedures displays, which are located on each level.

The emergency phone number is 9385-6666 (not 000).

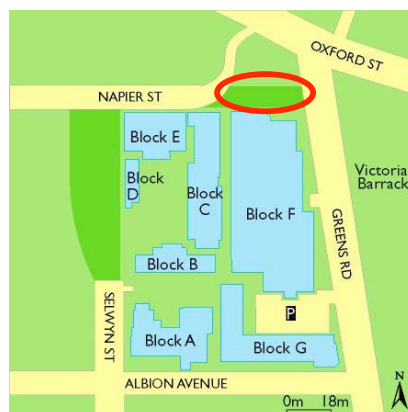
During evacuations always follow the directions given by fire wardens and proceed to the emergency assembly area, which is in front of the campus art store (red oval on diagram).

First aid information

If you are injured or are hurt in any way inform your supervisor. All accidents and incidents must be reported. The names and contact details of first aid officers on campus are displayed on the green and white first aid posters. Security staff are also trained first aid officers.

Electrical safety

Students should ensure that any portable electrical equipment they bring onto the campus (such as laptop computer power supplies) are tested and tagged. Such equipment will not be able to be used on campus if not tagged. Testing can be done at the Resource Centre.



RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

There are a number of resources available to students at COFA. Please acquaint yourself with the COFA library and the resources it has, including film and DVD. A particularly useful resource is the library home page which has a special section for COFA students outlining various resources for art, digital media and art history. E-journals are very useful; often it is best to use Google Scholar for searching and to access the journal through the library site (your access already having been paid for by UNSW).

CONTINUAL COURSE IMPROVEMENT

Periodically student evaluative feedback on the course is gathered, using among other means, UNSW's Course and Teaching Evaluation and Improvement (CATEI) Process. Student feedback is taken seriously, and continual improvements are made to the course based in part on such feedback. Significant changes to the course will be communicated to subsequent cohorts of students taking the course. CATEI will be available for this course at its completion.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

You may fail the subject if more than 2 absences are recorded in tutorial. You must actively participate in classes and complete all set work. You may fail the subject if you do not submit **all** set work to a satisfactory standard.

Lectures must be attended and will be the basis of your Journal (30%). Your Journal need not be in a notebook form, if you prefer, but may consist of 12 stapled A4 pages.

Where, because of illness or misadventure, you cannot hand in an assignment on time, or your work has suffered, you can apply for Special Consideration. For information on Special Consideration (see <https://my.unsw.edu.au/student/atoz/SpecialConsideration.html>).

- Applications for special consideration must be lodged with the COFA Student Centre (within 3 working days of the assessment to which it refers) – applications will **not** be accepted by teaching staff;
- Applying for special consideration does not automatically mean that you will be granted additional assessment or that you will be awarded an amended result;
- If you are making an application for special consideration (through COFAv Student Centre) please notify your Lecturer in Charge;
- Please note: a register of applications for Special Consideration is maintained. History of previous applications for Special Consideration is taken into account when considering each case.

Students who have a disability that requires some adjustment in their teaching or learning environment are encouraged to discuss their study needs with the course convener prior to, or at the commencement of, their course, or with the Equity Officer (Disability) in the Equity and Diversity Unit (9385 4734 or www.equity.unsw.edu.au/disabil.html). Issues to be discussed may include access to materials, including Library materials, signers or note-takers, the provision of services and additional exam and assessment arrangements. Early notification is essential to enable any arrangements to be made.

FURTHER READING

Theodore Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, Seabury Press, 1976

Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005

Marc Augé, "Prologue" and "From Places to Non-Places", from *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Trans. John Howe, London: Verso, 1995.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Trans. Helene Iswolsky, MIT Press, 1968.

Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, Power Institute Publication, 1987

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Semiotext, 1983.

Homi Bhaba, *Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and Colonial Condition*, Preface to republication, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1992

Rex Butler, *Slavoj Zizek: Live Theory*, London: Continuum Press, 2005

Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Macmillan, 1977

Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City", from *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984.

Iain Chambers, "Introduction, Popular Culture, Popular Knowledge" and "Theoretical Exposures: Framing Culture", from *Popular Culture: the metropolitan experience*, London, NY, Methuen, 1986.

Jonathan Crary, "The Eclipse of the Spectacle", *Art After Modernism: rethinking representation*, edited and with an introduction by Brian Wallis, New Museum of Contemporary Art ; Boston, D.R. Godine, 1984.

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle (selections)*, New York: Zone Books, 1994.

Hal Foster, "For a Concept of the Political", from *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, 1985.

Hal Foster, "Readings in Cultural Resistance", from *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, 1985.

Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture, ed. Hal Foster, DIA Art Foundation, 1988

Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", from *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Allen & Unwin, 1989

Deborah J. Haynes, "Answerability", from *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen, 1979.

Andreas Huyssen, "The Hidden Dialectic: Avant-Garde, Technology, Mass Culture" from *After*

- the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Indiana University Press, 1986
- Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in *Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, Pluto Press, 1985.
- Henri Lefebvre, "The Knowledge of Everyday Life" and "Marxism as Critical Knowledge", from *Critique of Everyday life*, Trans. by John Moore, New York: Verso, 1991.
- Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche, Cambridge University Press, 1999
- Geert Lovink, "The Principle of Networking: Concepts in Critical Internet Culture", Public Lecture, delivered 24 February 2005, HVA Publications.
- Wez Lundry, "Subvert the dominant paradigm – skateboarding and popular culture", from *Thrasher Magazine*, October 2002.
- Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?", in *The Postmodern Explained to Children: correspondence 1982-1985*, translations edited by Julian Pefanis & Morgan Thomas, Sydney: Power Publications, 1992.
- Margaret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, the Mall, and Television", from *Virtualities: television, media art and cyberculture*, Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media, the Extensions of Man*, Routledge, 1964
- Griselda Pollock, *Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction and Modernity and The Spaces of Femininity in Vision and Difference, Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, Routledge, 1988
- The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read, Seattle Bay Press, 1996
- John Roberts, "Mad For It!: Philistinism and the New British Art", *Third Text* no 35, Summer, 1996.
- Julian Stallabrass, "High art lite at the Royal Academy: Sensation exhibition and 1990s British Art", *Third Text* no 42, Spring 1998.
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post~Colonial Critic, Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Routledge, London New York, 1990
- Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991.
- Slavoj Zizek, 'Between Symbolic Fiction and Fantasmatic Spectre: Towards a Lacanian Theory of Ideology', *Analysis*, 5 (1994)
- The Stolen Generation*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Mission, Sterling Press, 1997