

Critical Multimedia Analysis and Practice Based Arts Creation

This sample course syllabus in multimedia analysis and practice could be situated as either an introductory survey or advanced course in critical media analysis and production. The course could also be expanded from any one of the four modules into its own full or half semester course. Assignments for the course can be tailored to suit a variety of programs; shifting more towards either writing or creative production depending on the needs of the program, department or externally mandated guidelines.

Course Description

Media and imagery play an ever increasing role in society and the arts and can tremendously influence politics, consumption, identity, memory and our relationships with people and institutions. As technology continues on its exponential trajectory the importance of being visually and media literate becomes all the more crucial. In order to understand media imagery and their implications for both art and everyday life one must not only learn to critically analyze imagery and its delivery systems but one must also engage in its critical production and consumption.

“This awareness has always been reflected first by the artist, who has had the power—and courage—of the seer to read the language of the outer world and relate it to the inner world.”
–Marshal McLuhan

Course Outcomes

To become emerged in the history and diversity of creative production and its social and theoretical contexts, impacts and considerations for the future. This course will traverse back and forth between theory, creative practice and scholarly research; this combination is intended to give students a balanced and critical approach to the arts that seeks relevance in real world applications, informed by current trends and issues. This course also seeks to explore both fine arts aesthetics alongside design and industry related creative applications.

Expected Course outcomes:

- Acquire skills for multimedia material practices
- Gain knowledge on critical and theoretical perspectives on different art practices and apply them elsewhere (other fields, everyday practices, education)
- Make connections between different disciplines of art and how they evolved
- Development and/or Sharpening of visual, oral and written communication skills
- Critical engagement in spirited discussions/debates on selected topics

- Identify current trends in artistic practices and their possible impact
- Identify contemporary artistic practices and their functions in society

Expected Learner Outcomes:

- Garner a socio-cultural understanding of various forms of artistic practices with a focus on the interaction between media and technologies;
- Learn how to translate internalized concepts into project ideas and communicate them clearly to peers in oral, written and visual forms
- Establish skills in a variety of media related to drawing, photography, video/sound and new communications technologies
- Sharpened research and critical analysis skills
- Demonstrate ability to develop and manage a reflective journal that includes multimedia production, research and analysis
- Demonstrate ability to present and share new research, projects and concepts to peers

Course Format

This course will be a mixture of seminar, group discussions, media demos, student lead presentations, and hands on multimedia creation. The course will take place in classroom, in studios and online.

Course Readings

Each module has a list of selected readings which will help to supplement our discussions and perspectives on a variety of issues. Some of these readings will be chapters in books, peer reviewed articles and some will take the form of images, film and popular culture also required to be read in and outside of class. Students are also encouraged to share and suggest other supplements that are timely and relevant to the course outcomes and topics.

Theoretical Grounding

This course will draw on a range of theories from critical theory and pedagogy to postmodern theories of art to network theory and other contemporary perspectives.

Assessment

This course's assessments are both process and product oriented, combining summative and formative review. Although we may set high goals for fully resolved and finished creative products the struggle and process to try and achieve those goals shall not be overlooked nor undervalued. The ultimate goal being to show engagement with the topics

and themes through reflection and changes in perspectives. The following are a brief overview of the assignments, more detailed instructions will be discussed in class and provided during each module.

Assignment	Description	Expectation	Weighting
Module 1: Drawing	In response to the issues and themes raised in module one create a comic, series of sketches or design/advertisement that exemplifies your understanding or thoughts on the subject. Use traditional or digital methods of your choice.	Project should be informed by readings and make direct references to theory and practicing artists that are researched by the student.	20% of the semester's grade
Module 2: Photography	Create a series of images using either analogue or digital cameras on a theme or issue that intersects photo (i.e truth, memory, documentary)	Draw on readings such as Proust, Sontag or Foncuberta and/or other critics, artists & theorists	20% of the semester's grade
Module 3: Film/Sound	Create a short film clip on a topic of choice OR write a review/critique of a pivotal film that contributed greatly to or advanced the concepts of cinema (in lieu of film, a sound project can also be conceived)	Reference Benjamin's work as well as contemporary film theorists and artists from our resources and individual research	20% of the semester's grade
Module 4: Technology	Choose an app, software or other communication technology to explore a previously unknown or new technique for art making	Use critical and post-modern theory to contextualize this new method	20% of the semester's grade
Multimodal Journal (Ongoing)	Throughout the semester each student will keep a multimedia journal. The medium should follow those discussed in each module but not necessarily synchronously so long as all media are represented. Journal can be traditional, digital or hybrid.	This journal should parallel your learning and reflection from each of the modules covered	20% of the semester's grade

Course Outline

Module 1: From Cave Paintings to Modern Mark Making



Drawings as discovered in the caves of Lascaux, Altamira and most recently in Sulawesi are the earliest known forms of both art and human communication. They represented a substantial leap in human cognition in that we became able to express symbolic forms of our understanding of the real world and communicate those interpretations with others. Drawing basically spawned all forms of artistic creation and spurred conceptual thinking throughout the centuries in various forms. Drawing and draftsmanship were in no small part responsible for the robustness of the industrial revolution and continue to be at the core of art, science and engineering.

Questions:

- What did primitive drawings/paintings accomplish at that time and what do they tell us now?

- Art and technology have often if not always had a very intimate and reciprocal relationship throughout history, how would you define their relationship today?
- What roles or functions does drawing provide in today's society outside of art/design paradigms? How has it evolved?

Topics:

- Prehistoric art
- From 'Techne' to Fine Art
- Industrial Revolution
- David Hockney's iPad series

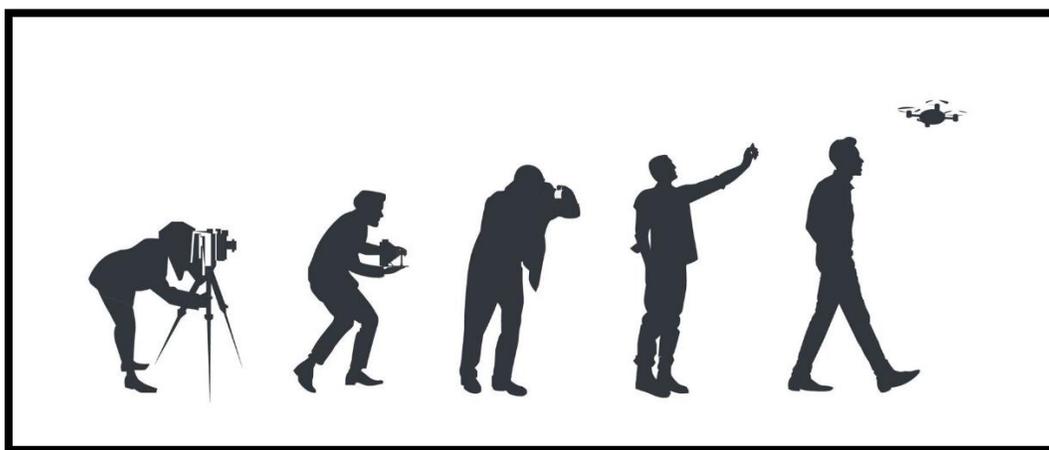
Media:

- Various drawing methods
- Digital drawing tools

Suggested Readings:

- Herbert Read, Arts Education
- Meyer Schapiro, Words and Images
- Elliot Eisner, arts and the creation of mind
- David Hockney, (various)

Module 2: Camera Obscura, Mass Media and Instagram



Drawing on earlier ancient technologies and evolving from painting's 19th Century desire to depict *realism* and capture an accurate image reflective of the power of the human eye, the camera was born. Inherent in the photographic endeavour was the quest for truth and

objectivity that paralleled the new scientific method and epistemology of reason and logic. Early cameras were hailed as mechanical masterpieces capable of revealing the object truths present in everyday life. As cameras evolved into mass production, they became ingrained in society through magazines such as National Geographic, photos began to open up our visual consumption to a plethora of imagery that surpassed the average person's knowledge of history and redefined their place in the world. Photojournalism was born and textual narratives were no longer left to the reader's imagination alone; war, exotic landscapes and distant cultures were now confronted in a much more direct and intimate manner.

Questions:

- How has the field of photography and the still image contributed to and changed society?
- What do photos represent in today's cultures and how has it both changed and stayed the same? Is photography shifting towards a post-photographic era as some theorists suggest?
- How has the disposable and supersaturated nature of imagery in the digital landscape changed the meaning of a single photographic frame? What impact has this had on memory, both personal and collective?
- Has the advent of digital technologies and ease of photo-manipulation actually transformed the image and the truths it holds? Are people more skeptical of imagery today than in the past?
- What does it mean to participate in online image communities such as Instagram and Flickr?

Topics:

- Brief history of photography
- Mass media production
- Photojournalism
- Truth in contemporary digital photography
- Post-photographic condition

Media:

- Primitive, Analogue or digital cameras
- Cell phone camera

Suggested Readings:

- Barthes, Camera Lucida

- Brassai, Proust in the Power of Photography
- Panofsky, Studies in Iconology
- Susan Sontag, On Photography
- Joan Foncuberta, Works and Writings
- Lev Manovich, Subjects and Styles in Instagram Photography (Part 1-2) & The Paradoxes of Digital Photography

Module 3: Celluloid, Sound and Star Wars



Capitalizing on photographic technologies and a public thirst for imagery moving pictures were born. Just over a century ago the first moving images graced screens in Europe and quickly spread around the world. The silent age of cinema was quickly surpassed by 'talkies' and then later soundtracks added another intricate layer to this process of storytelling. Hollywood made cinema a global industry and spawned Bollywood and other hubs of cinematic production, niche indie films, subcultures and festivals and now crowdsourced cinema and production is possible without a studio or corporate sponsor.

Questions:

- How did the introduction of moving images change how we consume and approach them? How did it change the ways in which we tell narratives?

- What impact has moving imagery had upon textual storytelling?
- What did the addition of sound to film mean for creative industries?
- Explore the intersection of cinema and music; how did the soundtrack become an essential part of film?
- What are some of the cinematic techniques developed 100 years ago that are still in use today?
- Has digitization effected the affect of film? What about the digitization of sound? What do we gain or lose when the physicality of media objects become virtual and intangible?

Topics:

- Birth of cinema
- Advent of sound and the soundtrack
- The global progression of cinema and television
- The people vs. Georges Lucas: The case of the not so 'special' edition
- Tarantino's Triumphant? Return to 70mm
- Goodbye cable, hello Netflix: binge watching and the rise of niche viewing

Media:

- Video and/or cell phone video camera
- Sound capturing devices

Suggested Readings:

- Water Benjamin, Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
- Tanya Leighton, Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader
- Mark Harris, The Day the Movies Died
- Mary-Ann Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time

Module 4: From Card Punches to the Singularity



Computers, at least from the perspective of those who grew up as part of *Generation X & Y*, seem to have followed a gradual progression up until the mid-1990s when the Internet became a fixture in public life. Since then changes have appeared more and more rapid and exponential in their growth, power and global reach. Machines that once took up the space of an entire building now fit right in our hands and are posed to fit inside of us very soon. Explore new media communications, electronic arts, gaming, virtual worlds and wearable technology that attempt to redefine art in the *age of information*.

Questions:

- What do sites like Deviant-art do for young artists? Does online curation ever rival traditional exhibition? What about hybrid forms of dissemination?
- How does material creative practice survive in the digital age?
- How has technology and a 24/7/365 globalized platform changed how we view and create art?
- Is 3-D technology the next big thing or will we quickly move beyond it?
- Imagine a near or far future technology; what will its purpose be? What capabilities will it have? What kinds of art will it allow us to create?
- If humans do merge with technology how will art and creativity change or evolve?

Topics:

- Ray Kurzweil: from digital keyboard to the Singularity
- Virtual communities of practice
- Computational, digital and new media art movements
- Youtube, Remix culture and copyright challenges
- 3-D printing and makerspaces

Media:

- Open

Suggested Readings:

- Walter Benjamin, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*
- Jean Baudrillard, *Hyper-reality and Simulacrum*
- Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity*
- Manuel Castells, *The information age: economy, society and culture*

Course Policies and Guidelines

Please refer to your student handbook and/or the online syllabus for information about Special Needs, Grading, Attendance, and Academic Integrity.