A CRITICAL READER OF "NEW" MEDIA

1.   The Real Introduction

Co-funded by
the European Union

IN THIS CLASS

- The Actual Introduction™ to the class
- The meaning of the meaning of meaning
- The boring era of media analysis
- Two key concepts for today: *meaning* and *media*

WHAT IS THIS CLASS ABOUT?

- What do we mean by "new" media again?
- What is the reason for studying said "new" media?
- What does it mean to be critical?

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

Session 1. The meaning of meaning and how to deal with it.
Session 2. Signs, what they do, what they are.
Session 3. The semiotics of culture.
Session 4. Narrative and possible worlds.
Session 5. The problem of interaction.
Session 6. The semiotics of art.
Session 7. Gamer Wittgenstein.
Session 8. Political power in the funnies.
Session 9. Traditionalizing the weird.
Session 10. Texts beyond their container.
Session 11. How to do things with images.
Session 12. Rinse and repeat in the normalization of new media.

- The structure is tentative! We'll talk about these topics more or less in this order, but we'll shake things up every so often!

EVALUATION

- Two written assignments

- The first one will be a short writing assignment at around the 6th session dealing with a number of fixed topics you can write about

- The second one will be a slightly longer assignment at the end of the semester with a partially free topic selection

- Assistance is expected, as is participation to the extent of your possibilities

READINGS

- The class will deal with multiple readings, from philosophical texts to comic books that will be assigned throughout the semester. All the readings will be available to you online either through Moodle or email

- We will do quite a bit of reading here, as it will be one of our main commitments. Many of them will be, I hope, fun texts though, not only from what is considered 'entertainment,' but also from our philosophical, semiotic and artistic choices

KEY INTERESTS

- Much of what we want to deal with is the analysis of non-traditional media that has emerged either side by side or as a consequence of more canonical forms of expression

- We want to take a critical, but serious look at non-traditional media and its dialogue with the history of traditional media

- We also want to develop a semiotic theory of analysis that can be robust enough to talk about these platforms without trivializing them

- Our interest is twofold then: Philosophical in that we want to have a philosophically informed theory; and artistic in that we want to approach new media critically in dialogue to other art forms as pertaining to the same domain

- The guiding word for us will be *meaning*

MEANING

- How do we define *meaning*?

- We usually tie the concept of meaning to different situations: meaning as correspondence, meaning as intention, meaning as *intension*, meaning as *ostension*, etc.

- Let's go through each of those

CONCEPTS OF MEANING

- **Correspondence**
- The idea that there is a 1:1 correspondence between a concept and an object
- **Intention**
- The aboutness of a mental state
- **Intension**
- The properties adduced by a concept
- **Ostension**
- Signification by enumeration or indices

THE MEANING OF MEANING

- Before we tackle how meaning is produced, we need to ascertain the most effective way for us to understand what *meaning* defines exactly

- Remember the Fregean notion of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*?

- But when we deal with *meaning*, we mean more than a **theory of reference**

- We don't want to stick to meaning as reference or meaning as psychological state

- The "meaning of meaning" is generally either linguistic or psychological, but we want to argue for a different approach related to our future objects of study

THE MEANING OF THE MEANING OF MEANING

- So when we try to define the meaning of meaning, what do we mean exactly?

- If the definition of what we mean when we use the word *meaning* depends on our theory of how we make sense of things, then meaning will depend on whether we think it is sufficient to think of reference or equivalence

- This view is however insufficient when we use the same concept of *meaning* to complex cultural objects! **(Or is it?)**
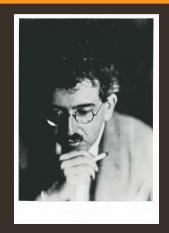
THE BORING YEARS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

- When did talking about art theory split into talking about media and about art as separate categories?

- Actually, what do we mean by *media*?

- In general, when we talk about *media* in the context of communication, we may refer to:

- The press

- The support of works of art

- Works of art

- What sort of distinction is useful for us here?

DEFINING MEDIA

- In our context, we care about *meaningful texts* in a *cultural* setting that fulfils an *artistic function* of some sort

- DANGER DANGER DANGER

- Lots of keywords here!

- So we need to thread carefully here. We need to define *meaning*, *text*, *culture*, *art* and *function*! Ugh!

- Let's start with claims about art, meaning and text

WHAT'S UP WITH THIS GUY?

ART AND REPRODUCIBILITY

- What makes art *art*?

- If we want to answer this question, we need to develop a *theory of art*

- Why does this matter to us exactly?

- Our working thesis for this course is semiotic-historical, so we want to understand meaning in context, meaning as context and meaning to create context, so to speak

DEALING WITH THEORIES OF ART

- In the case of Benjamin, it's a good initial approach for us because it's set as a theory of art against the background of mass reproducibility and capitalism—we find ourselves in an era way past this elucidation and yet its problems seem current enough

- The main things to take away at this point are:

- For Benjamin, art objects have an *aura* derived from their uniqueness, their genuineness

- Historical materialism is a key concept to keep in mind to explain this!