

Recurring Concepts in Art (ITPG-GT 2586), Spring 2018

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MON 12:10-2:40pm, 7 weeks

Office hours: By appointment

Introduction

New media art is a genre that encompasses artworks created with new media technologies, including digital art, computer graphics, computer animation, virtual art, Internet art, interactive art, video games, computer robotics, and art as biotechnology. The term differentiates itself by its resulting cultural objects and social events, which can be seen in opposition to those deriving from old visual arts (i.e. traditional painting, sculpture, etc.). - Wikipedia –

Wikipedia can be problematic and the above statement is no exception. Positioning new media art “in opposition to...old visual arts” is debatable and provides a good starting point for this course.

What is the relationship between new media art and the art that preceded it? Has the revolutionary impact of digital media produced entirely novel spaces of art making and creativity? How new is new media? Thinking around such questions tends toward historical dialectic, or the idea that the present is always in dialogue with the past. There is a long history of ties between the making of art and technological advancement.

Course Description

Taking this history as its foundation, this course focuses on pre-digital media. While observing how digital technologies have produced new arenas for artistic expression and interpretation, we will examine how 20th-century artists working before the digital boom utilized other media, techniques and approaches to effect comparable formal, conceptual and experiential dynamics. For example, the concept of interactivity, commonly observed as original and specific to the user-interaction component of digitally mediated works, was equally if differently specific to Minimalist sculpture and Environment art of the 1960s. The play between figuration and abstraction, today with vast applications via sophisticated computer software, has roots in the Impressionist's rejection of Academic imperatives in the late 19th century. The very concept of new media and the

implication of radical artistic shift applies throughout history. In the second decade of the 20th century, the found object indelibly altered the definition and valuation of art, notions of the artist and the role of the institutional voice. The reigning importance of the art object was toppled (for a spell) by the concept (Conceptual art) at the end of the 1960s.

The course is organized thematically. Each class will focus on a topic central to contemporary new media, as examined in relation to earlier 20th-century art. For instance, Tim Hawkinson has explored the contemporary body and identity as reconfigured by new technologies (*Emoter*, 2002): Picasso explored the contemporary body and identity as reconfigured by Cubism.

The course has been conceptualized and designed to enhance perception and understanding of art through a variety of channels - from sustained, close looking to exploratory conversations to more rigorous thinking and discussions informed by readings, projects and written assignments.

The ultimate goal of this course is to expand students' sense of artistic possibility *in their own work* through an expanded awareness and understanding of the tremendously rich history of artistic creativity.

Disability Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability who is requesting accommodations, please contact New York University's Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu. You must be registered with CSD to receive accommodations. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

Work

This course involves reading, discussion, writing and making. The reading and discussion components are vital to the success of the course and comprise a significant portion of the final grade. Students are expected to fully prepare all readings and fully participate in class discussion. If anyone has concerns about reading or discussion, please see me immediately.

Assessment

1. Class preparation and participation, 30%
2. Three assignments: two response papers and a project proposal, 45% (15% each)

3. Final project, 25%

All work must be submitted on time.

All work must be submitted in order to pass the course.

Conduct

Students are expected to demonstrate continued effort, participation and progress in all aspects of the course. Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on time.

- No email, phones, IM or work on other classes - it is important that all students remain present and focused.
- Laptops must be down when other students are presenting.
- This is a short course, so students are expected to attend every class – excuses will be made in exceptional cases only:
 - * Unique and compelling professional opportunities relevant to your studies
 - * Important family events (weddings, funerals, etc.)
 - * Incapacitating or contagious illness.
 - * Religious holidays
- One unexcused absence will count against the final grade; two unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.
- Unexcused lateness to (more than 5 minutes) or early departure from class will count as ½ an absence.
- Students are encouraged to read about the ITP grading policy here: <http://help.itp.nyu.edu/academic-policies/pass-fail> C-level work results in failure at ITP – the same holds for this course.

Class outline (subject to change)

WEEK 1, 1/22: 1) Syllabus review 2) New Media Before New Media: Radical Artistic Shifts in the 20th Century.

The concept of new media and the correlating implication of radically significant artistic shift applies throughout history. The 1960s ushered in a particularly fertile rejection of traditional media and artistic goals, with fervent embrace of innovation. After the syllabus review, we will look at some of these shifts (the found object, popular culture, Conceptual art, the body, the land/natural environment, installation, etc.)

Response paper (assignment #1) assigned this week.

Final project assigned next week.

WEEK 2, 1/29: Art and Technology: Early Kinetic Art; Laszlo Moholy-Nagy; E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology).

The convergence of art and technology is not unique to the digital age. Today we will look at some pioneering work of the early- and mid-20th century.

Preparation due this week

- 1) Explore the pages on Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T), 9 *Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, Daniel Langlois Foundation website <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1840>
- 2) View the exhibition, *Thinking Machines: Art and Design in the Computer Age, 1959-1989* at MoMA.

Further material:

- Billy Kluver with Julie Martin, "Working with Rauschenberg," *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, Guggenheim Museum, 1998, pp. 310-27 (PDF)
- Pepper Stetler, "The New Visual Literature": Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Painting, Photography, Film*, *Grey Room*, 32 (Summer 2008), pp. 1-26.
<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/grey.2008.1.32.88>

Response paper (assignment #1) due this week.

Final project assigned this week.

WEEK 3, 2/5: Interactivity: The Rise of Viewer Participation in 20th-century Art.

The concept of interactivity, today commonly observed as original and specific to the user-interaction component of technology-mediated works, has been equally if differently specific to much art throughout history. Marcel Duchamp, the important Dada pioneer, stated in 1957: "All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." (<http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2012/08/23/the-creative-act-marcel-duchamp-1957/>) This class will explore how notions of interactivity have informed modern and contemporary art.

Preparation due this week:

- 1) Olafur Eliasson and Robert Irwin, "Take Your Time: A Conversation," *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, Thames and Hudson, 2007, pp. 51-61 (PDF)

- 2) Carolyn Miranda, "How the Art of Social Practice is Changing the World One Row House at a Time," ARTnews, April 2014
<http://www.artnews.com/2014/04/07/art-of-social-practice-is-changing-the-world-one-row-house-at-a-time/>

Further material

- Roy Ascott, "Art and Telematics: Towards a Network Consciousness," 1983
http://www.basearts.com/curriculum/PDF/theory/Art_and_teleomatics.pdf

WEEK 4, 2/12: Light and Perception.

As discussed by Michael Govan, light has played a role in artistic creation for centuries. Light has been considered as a means for suggesting the illusion of naturalistic form (shading), space (shadow) and movement (highlights). Light as an artistic medium in and of itself emerges in the 1960s with artists like Dan Flavin, and the west coast "Light and Space" artists like James Turrell, Robert Irwin, Mary Corse and Doug Wheeler. Light becomes a means to construct spaces and environments, convey the limitless, and sensitize viewers to perception and apperception.

Preparation due this week

- 1) Michael Govan, "Inner Light: The Radical Reality of James Turrell," *James Turrell*, Delmonico/Prestel, 2013, pp. 13-36 (PDF)
- 2) InConversation, Mary Corse with Alex Bacon, *The Brooklyn Rail*, 2015. <https://brooklynrail.org/2015/06/art/mary-corse-with-alex-bacon>

Further Material

- Jonathan Crary, "Techniques of the Observer," *October*, Vol. 45, Summer 1988, pp. 3-35 (PDF)

(Strongly) Suggested Viewing

- James Turrell, *Meeting* at MoMA PS1. Go when the light begins changing, late afternoon/early evening.

Project proposal (assignment #2) due this week.

PRESIDENT'S HOLIDAY, 2/19

Week 5, 2/26: The Body/Identity.

The body as a physical, multi-sensory, perceptual and social apparatus is of great interest to new media artists and theorists with the

tools to enhance, disrupt and reconfigure one's sense of physical, sensory and psychological space. Virtual, augmented and mediated reality are obvious examples of how digital technology has driven an interest in expanding and altering one's perception of their relationship to the world. This class will focus on the emergence of the body as medium in the 1960s and its evolution through ensuing decades as a vehicle for the representation of identity.

Preparation due this week:

- 1) Hilton Als, "The Shadow Act: Kara Walker's Vision," *The New Yorker*, October 8, 2007.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/10/08/the-shadow-act>

Further material

- Michel Foucault, "Utopian Body," in Caroline A. Jones ed., *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, MIT Press, 2006, pp. 229-34 (PDF)

Response paper (assignment #3) assigned this week.

WEEK 6, 3/5: Original/Copy: Reproduction/Re-Production.

The reuse of imagery, music, sound, etc. is a signature element of new media production. The doctrine of Fair Use regulates intellectual property rights within domains of electronic technologies, but their rapid advancement outpaces the law – there are a lot of gray areas and laws are regularly disregarded (discussed in Buskirk, assigned reading). The use of appropriated materials – and questions regarding copies and originals - can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century in the collages of Georges Braque and the found objects/readymades of Marcel Duchamp. Interest in the "found object" (and in intellectual property rights) had a resurgence in the 1960s. The Pictures Generation of the 1970s-80s exemplifies the continuing interest in appropriated material.

Preparation due this week

- 1) Mark Hansen, Ben Rubin, "Listening Post: Giving Voice to On-Line Communication," Proceedings of the 2002 International Conference on Auditory Display, Kyoto, Japan, July 2-5, 2002 (pdf)
- 2) Martha Buskirk, "Original Copies," *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, MIT Press, 2003, pp. 59-105 (pdf)

Further material

- Douglas Eklund, “The Pictures Generation,” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Introductory essay plus slide show entries.
- Gary Indiana, “These ‘80s Artists Are More Important Than Ever,” *T Magazine*, *The New York Times*, February 13, 2017.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/t-magazine/pictures-generation-new-york-artists-cindy-sherman-robert-longo.html>

Response paper (assignment #3) due this week.

SPRING BREAK, 3/12

WEEK 7, 3/19: Final presentations.