

COURSE PROPOSALS: TOPICS IN ART + TECHNOLOGY

A topical seminar that each year examines a new issue in contemporary media/new media theory and practice through readings, discussion, presentation of work by contemporary artists and both analytic and creative assignments. While narrowly focused in theme, the seminar will tend to be broadly interdisciplinary in scope, connecting the practice of media artists to work in other forms, and could potentially be co-taught with faculty from other disciplines. I have outlined ideas for two courses in this series below.

1.

TOPICS IN ART + TECHNOLOGY: DATABASE FORMS

Description:

In today's computer age, it can be argued that the database has become the center of the creative process -- not only for new media artists but also for film & video makers, fine artists, and writers. Database form (the organization of information as collections on which users can perform operations determined by rules of access) is also by far the dominant idiom for anyone working with digital media. This course will examine some of the reasons for that dominance and look at the constantly changing and sometimes contested relationships between database and interface, database and algorithm, and database and narrative in works of art in both new and traditional media. The theory and history of database forms in the arts will be surveyed through readings and examples of pioneering works, beginning with the idea of open encyclopedias in early modern novels and including modernist photography's cataloguing and classification projects, Structuralist film, avant-garde music & dance experiments with sets of instructions as scores and subversions, encyclopedic cinema, interactive cinema, hypertext, networked databases, feedback performance, self-generating objects, accumulative installation practice, and responsive archives. Students will be expected to complete several readings and will also explore the possibilities of database forms for their own work by completing two practical assignments in any medium.

Primary Text: Lev Manovich: "Database As Symbolic Form," (Millennium Film Journal No. 34, Fall 1999: *The Digital*)

Secondary Texts:

- Italo Calvino, "Multiplicity" in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Harvard University Press, 1988)
- Espen J. Aarseth, "Nonlinearity and Linear Theory" (1994), reprinted in Noah Wardrip-Fruin & Nick Montfort, eds., *The New Media Reader* (MIT Press, 2002)
- Lev Manovich, excerpts from *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 2003)
- Janet Murray, "Agency" in *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Simon & Schuster, 1997)
- Grahame Weinbren, "The Digital Revolution is a Revolution of Random Access" (Telepolis Magazin der Netkultur, Movie Special Issue, 1997)

Exhibitions/Catalogues to be discussed:

- *Database Imaginary* show at Banff Centre, Canada, fall 2004; essay by Steve Dietz; website by Spencer Roberts for CRUMB with curators Steve Dietz, Sarah Cook & Anthony Kiendl, <http://databaseimaginary.banff.org>
- *Future Cinema* catalogue from ZKM show; essay by Jeffrey Shaw (MIT Press, 2003)
- *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing & Archiving in Art* catalogue from PS1 show; essay by Ingrid Schaffner (Munich: Prestel, 1998)

Artists to be discussed: Gustave Flaubert, Milorad Pavic, August Sander, Bernd & Hilda Becher, Hans Haacke, E.A.T., Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Peter Greenaway, Godfrey Reggio, Muntadas, Grahame Weinbren, Jody Zellen, Ellen Zweig, Michael Joyce, Jay David Bolter, George Landow & Jon Lanestedt, M.D. Coverley, John F. Simon, Jr., David Rokeby, Perry Hoberman, Lev Manovich, Annette Weintraub, Heath Bunting, Keith Piper, Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, Sophie Calle, George Legrady, Leah Gilliam, Miranda July & Harrell Fletcher, Stelarc, Jeanne Finley, Jennifer & Kevin McCoy, Golan Levin, Cory Arcangel, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Maya Sara Churi, Futurefarmers, WasTun.org, The Pool, Swipe, C5

Practical Assignments:

1. Create a diagram of the access structure(s) of one of the database form artworks covered in the course.
2. Create a work in database form. Examples might be an interactive or encyclopedic video on DVD or CD-ROM, a web-based project using hypertext or networked interactivity, a performance incorporating audience commands or feedback, or an installed accumulation of objects that must be navigated according to a certain set of instructions. The primary criteria for evaluation will be that the work must have its own internal structure or logic that could be extracted as the rules of access. The work will be presented to the class twice, first at a prototype stage for critique and feedback and then in a final form.

2.

TOPICS IN ART + TECHNOLOGY:

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART: NEW MODELS

In recent years, the choice of social engagement in art practice – that is, the choice made by an artist to create work that not only reflects but also is often intended to affect the society in which it is created – has become a key issue for artists in all disciplines. A new urgency among artists to respond to pressing social and political issues, a less risk-averse funding climate, high receptivity for this type of work in the art market and on the part of presenters, and renewed interest in socially engaged projects from the press and public have all combined to create an arts environment more hospitable to socially engaged artmaking than at any time since the end of the 1970s. The enormous changes in both activism and art practice since that period, however, have given rise to new models of social engagement in art practice -- deeply influenced by the networked communities of web-driven activism and the global concerns and discourses of both environmentalism and (paradoxically) the anti-globalization movement -- which have replaced the didacticism of classic political art with an emphasis on creating possibilities for unusual action, communication, information gathering or analytic understanding on the part of the viewer. This course will survey some of the most important and promising models for socially engaged art practice being proposed today, including collective and collaborative praxis; community-based and site-specific practices; public art and public dialogue; the performance art of civil disobedience; environmental intervention; witnessing and testimony; networking, translating, border crossing, knowledge carrying/information smuggling, smart mobs & other facilitations; and adopting/subverting surveillance technologies and viral marketing techniques in order to disseminate resistance. Students will look at examples of work and read accompanying texts produced by a number of artists and groups. They will be expected to either write one 3-5 page analytic paper, or propose and (subject to instructor approval) produce a creative project in any medium that demonstrates a significant degree of social engagement, along with an explanatory text.

Artists/groups to be discussed: Critical Art Ensemble, R™ark, Ricardo Dominguez/Electronic Disturbance Theater, Surveillance Camera Players, Radical Software Group, eTeam, subRosa, The Yes Men, Multiplicity, Bernadette Corporation, Temporary Services, Alison Cornyn & Sue Johnson/360degrees, Bradley McCallum & Jacqueline Tarry, Isaac Julien & Maureen Blackwood/Sankofa Film & Video, Gregory Sholette/REPOhistory, Reverend Billy & The Church of Stop Shopping, William Pope.L, Michael Rakowitz, Betty Beaumont, Mel Chin, Marko Peljhan/Makrolab, Patrick Clancy, Daniel Bozhkov, Eduardo Kac, Simon Attie, Walid Raad/The Atlas Group/The Arab Image Foundation, Emily Jacir, Jordan Crandall, Alex Rivera, Judith Barry, Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Ursula Biemann, Natalie Bookchin, Mark Napier, Minerva Cuevas, Oliver Ressler, Alex Villar, Josh On/Futurefarmers, Heath Bunting, Eric Saks, Tony Cokes/X-PRZ, Tana Hargest, Natalie Jeremijenko/Institute for Applied Autonomy, Trevor Paglen/Center for Tactical Magic, Trebor Scholz/Institute for Distributed Creativity, Center for Land Use Interpretation, C5, Neurotransmitter, 16Beaver, Google Will Eat Itself

Exhibitions/catalogues to be discussed:

- *Documenta = Documents 1,2,3*. Catalogue from Documenta X, edited by Jean Christophe Bailly, Catherine David, & Paul Virilio (DAP, 1997)
- *Documenta 11_Platform5: The Catalog*. Catalogue from Documenta XI, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Abdoumalig Simone, Ute Meta Bauer (Hatje Canz Publishers, 2002).
- *transmediale.03: play global!* (Hauptstadtkulturfonds, 2002).
- *Fugitive Sites: InSITE 2000..* Catalogue from 2000 edition of InSITE, edited by Susan Buck Morss (Installation Gallery, San Diego, 2001).
- *CTRL[SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*. Catalogue from ZKM show, edited by Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne & Peter Weibel (MIT Press, 2002).
- *Get Rid of Yourself*. Summer 2003 exhibition at Halle 14 Leipzig and ACC Weimar
- *Dystopia & Identity in the Age of Global Communications*. Fall 2002 exhibition curated by Cristine Wang at Tribes Gallery, NYC.
- *The Interventionists*. Catalogue from spring 2004 exhibition at MassMoCA, edited by Nato Thompson & Gregory Sholette (MIT Press, 2004).

Readings:

- Critical Art Ensemble, *Electronic Civil Disobedience & Other Unpopular Ideas* (Autonomedia, 1996); *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactile Media* (Autonomedia, 2003)
- Coco Fusco, “The bodies that were not ours,” “Bridge over troubled waters,” and “At your service: Latin women in the global information network” in *The Bodies That Were Not Ours: And Other Writings* (Routledge, 2001).
- Guillermo Gomez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back* (Routledge, 2000)
- Miwon Kwon, “Community-Specific Practice” in *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art & Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2002).
- Graham Meikle, interview with Electronic Disturbance Theater in *Future Active: Media Activism & The Internet* (Routledge, 2002)
- Temporary Services, *Public Inventions & Interventions PART 2: Public Phenomena* (Temporary Services, November 2000) and *Group Work: A Compilation of Quotes About Collaboration from Various Sources & Practices* (TS, April 2002).
- various artist statements in Kristine Stiles & Peter Selz, eds., *Theories & Documents of Contemporary Art* (University of California Press, 2000)

Assignment:

Students have two options for their major assignment for this course:

Option 1: Analytic Paper. Write a 3-5 page paper analyzing the strategies used by at least two different artists, collaborative groups or collectives to create socially engaged works during the last decade. Your analysis should address any issues of community

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involvement, site, legality, audience participation/interaction, public vs. private dimensions of the work, dissemination, impact/sustainability, presentation and reception that are relevant to the specific works under discussion. You may use the discussion of multiple works/groups to contrast different models of artistic social engagement or to develop a thesis about a larger trend. Before writing the paper, you will be required to submit a paragraph summarizing what artists and works you propose to write about and what the general direction of your analysis will be for instructor approval.

Option 2: Creative Project. Produce a creative project in any medium that uses one of the artistic strategies discussed during the course (for example, direct community involvement or environmental intervention, facilitated or networked communication or information gathering, electronic resistance or resource dissemination) in order to respond to an issue that concerns you and/or affect your immediate context. Before you begin work on the project, you will be required to submit a one-page proposal describing the conceptual, visual and social engagement strategies you will use to create your project. If this proposal is approved by the instructor, you will then be asked to adapt it into an artist statement or explanatory text that will either be integrated into or exist alongside your project. Collaborative creative projects are encouraged as long as they can be conceptually justified.