

ICAM130/VIS149 spring 2008: Contemporary Computer Topics

Visual Arts Department | UCSD

The syllabus for this class is online at www.janedealmeida.com (link teaching)

Additional materials will be added to the class website.

Class: Mondays, 9-11.50 am.

instructor: Jane de Almeida

office: Visual Arts Facility (VAF) 363

office hours: Monday 3,30-3,30pm or by appointment

email: jalmeida@ucsd.edu

Topic: The Sirian and the computer.

or How to explain to an inhabitant of Sirius what is a computer?

Class Description:

This topic is inspired by a question made by the German filmmaker Alexander Kluge to Jean-Luc Godard: how would you describe to a Sirian visitor, who knows nothing of us, what film is? In his answer Godard says he would explain to the creature that there is a special machine, the camera, which is a metaphor for something old. Besides, it is a necessary machine to see people, as the telescope is used to see far away, the microscope is used to see closer and the glasses to see better (in Kluge, *Cinema Stories*, New Directions, 2007). Kluge was referring to Voltaire's character, the gigantic explorer Micromégas, who is 120,000 feet high, possesses a thousand senses, and come to the Earth trying to find out if there would be inhabitants in the planet. He finds in a small pound, the Mediterranean, a vessel with a "flock of philosophers returning from the polar circle, where they had gone to make observations no one had attempted before", according to Voltaire. Trying to know better those "atoms", the giant asked them many physical matters and was surprised by perfect answers given by the people from the Earth. It was not the same when he asked about the nature of their souls and how they form ideas. Philosophers from distinct lineage answered distinctly, according to individual belief system. All of them were contested by Micromégas, except Locke's disciple, who affirmed to believe in his senses to know the world. Using this question as a metaphor, first of all, it is possible to establish relation to the idea of the film camera as a prosthesis that augments or replaces a missing part of the body, as well as the relation to the concept of the optical unconscious, defined by Walter Benjamin. Secondly, the updating of the metaphor to the computer reality, gives us the opportunity to question the position of the computer in terms of its cultural function and perceptual instrument. The main goal of this course is to survey the computer and its definitions in terms of perception, showing distinct explanations of its function. Different points of view will be showed aiming to organize and to understand positions, ideologies and approaches.

1. Introduction: Voltaire's issues about Micromégas and Kluge's interview My mother has always seen silent movies.
2. Modern consciousness: attention, distraction and reflection. Beginning of the last century's technological apparatus and the changing of the subjectivity. New optical instruments: the stereoscope, the kaleidoscope, the phenakistiscope, the diorama. The privilege of the visuality.

References:

CRARY, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, MIT Press, 1992. "Modernity and the problem of the observer" and "Subjective vision and the separation of the senses", 1-24 and 67-96

_____ *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, MIT Press, 2001. "Introduction", and "Modernity and the Problem of Attention", 1-79.

Voltaire, François. "Micromégas" in *Micromégas and other short fictions*. London, Penguin Books, 2003. pp. 17-35

Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microm%C3%A9gas>

About Micromégas: <http://www.globusz.com/ebooks/Micromegas2/00000010.htm>

Machines: <http://stephenherbert.co.uk/muychron02b.htm>

Diorama:

http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.midley.co.uk/diorama/Diorama_Wood_1_3_files/diorama_wood_fig_02.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.midley.co.uk/diorama/Diorama_Wood_1_3.htm&h=400&w=322&sz=35&hl=en&start=76&um=1&tbnid=gP9PhBSow1GBgM:&tbnh=124&tbnw=100&prev=/images%3Fq%3Ddiorama%26start%3D72%26ndsp%3D18%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26sa%3DN

Filmography:

Documentary about Georges Méliès. (*La Magie Méliès* - França - 1997 – 102 mins Directed by Patrick Montgomery e Luciano Martinengo).

3. The Optical Unconscious: Benjamin and "The work of art...". Rosalind Krauss and the influence of the optical unconscious in Modern Art. Chapter One, 1-30

References:

Benjamin, Walter. "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction"

<http://pages.emerson.edu/Courses/spring00/in123/workofart/benjamin.htm>

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

Krauss, Rosalind. *Optical Unconscious*, MIT Press, 1994.

About Optical Unconscious: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n10_v31/ai_14156134

Youtube: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=5VJgSy87b8U> (Mouvements des images – Marcel

Duchamp)

Filmography:

Clair, René. *Entr'Act*, 1924.

Youtube: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=FjFW138iqpc&NR=1>

Ray, Man, *Emak-Bakia*, 1926.

Youtube: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=IWoeE4J467lc>

Ray, Man. *Le retour à la raison*, 1923.

Youtube: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=SiFnC4fxBmw>

4. Mechanic machines – human traces and machines traces. When was very clear what media was...

References:

Cavel, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971); 2nd enlarged edn. (1979). "Automatism", 101-108.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Early film History and Multi-Media: An Archeology of Possible Future?" in *New Media and Old Media: a history and theory reader*. Ed. Chun and Keenan. Routledge, 2006, 13-25

Filmography:

Jean-Luc Godard. *Alphaville*, 1960.

Youtube: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=FbprR2W9pD4> (original trailer)

Alexander Kluge. *The big mess*, 1969/70.

5. New Media and old media. The language of new media.

References:

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, 2001 "What is New Media", 18-61.

Hansen, Mark. *New Philosophy for New Media*, MIT Press, 2006. Part 1. "Between Body and Image: On the Newness of New Media Art", 21-46

References:

Dziga Vertov. *The man with a movie camera*, 1929.

Jeffrey Shaw's website: <http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net>

Lev Manovich and Andreas Kratky's *Soft Cinema*: <http://www.softcinema.net/?reload>

6. Post-Media Condition: the mixing of media or archeology of medium?

References:

Krauss. Rosalind. *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, 1999.

Reading: <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/annotations/kraussvoyage.htm>

Weibel, Peter: [Postmedia Condition](http://www.medialabmadrid.org/medialab/medialab.php?l=0&a=a&i=329):

<http://www.medialabmadrid.org/medialab/medialab.php?l=0&a=a&i=329>

Hansen, Mark. *New Philosophy for New Media*, MIT Press, 2006. Part 1. "Between Body and Image: On the Newness of New Media Art", 21-46

Videography:

Journey to the Moon by William Kentridge: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKOJSEU-Sy>

Zachary Lieberman's works: <http://www.thesystemis.com/>

7 and 8. Critical concepts for computing in the arts: troubling and discussing concepts such as:

Hybridism, remixing, data aesthetics, interactivity, collaboration.

Midterm evaluation: Students must bring short definitions of important concepts and works related to new media and contemporary art in order to note similarities and differences. A round table discussion will review studied concepts and the definitions related to the computer field.

9. Precedents: Unbearable screen. Collaborative works from the sixties and Structuralism.

Dreams realized?

References:

Hansen, Mark. *New Philosophy for New Media*, MIT Press, 2006. Part 1. "Between Body and Image: On the Newness of New Media Art", 21-46

filmography:

Jean-Luc Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin. *Wind from the East*, 1968.

Alexander Kluge: *The patriot* (1979) and *The power of the emotion* (1983).

10. Questions for the final essay:

Have computer been (really) augmenting our senses? / If the computer is going to be a reference in the history of our perceptual machines – in which way it is going to be referred? / What are the ideological issues involved with the computer as a perceptual machine?

Couchot, Edmond. "The automatization of Figurative Techniques: Toward to Autonomous Image" In *MediaArtHistories*. (ed. Oliver Grau) MIT Press, 2007. 181-191

References:

Chris Marclay

Quartet: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=9VmXoeZir7A>

Telephone: <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=nOvKx3n5ikk&NR=1>

Matthias Muller

Vacancy: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6289997202502803574>

Steven Mcqueen

About him:

<http://www.artnet.com/Galleries/Exhibitions.asp?gid=424680828&cid=131339&source=2&type=2>

Omer Fast

Spielberg's list: http://www.hmkv.de/dyn/e_archive_artist/detail.php?nr=2296&rubric=artists&

Godville: http://www.voxphoto.com/en/exhibitions/fast/fast_en.html

Youtube / CNN concentrated (2002): <http://br.youtube.com/watch?v=wNwj7WLEqkY>