

Media and Modernity: Spectacle and Society
SAIC ARTHI 2800-001 and VCS 3001-012 Fall 2005 MC 1307 Thursdays 1 - 4 PM
Instructor: Christopher Cutrone

Course title: Media and Modernity: Spectacle and Society

Instructor: Chris Cutrone (e-mail: ccutrone@speedsite.com), office hours by appointment

Course description:

With the advent in the 19th Century of modern media (newspapers, photography, etc.) and the social-political emergence of “the masses,” a set of problems developed concerning the structuring role of media in society. Through the development of various forms of culture industry in the 20th Century -- the bestseller, tabloid journalism, recorded music, cinema, radio, television, the internet, etc. -- we have arrived at the “spectacular” culture of the present. How does “mass”/“popular” culture in modern media inform our lives -- even the most intimate of our relations? What do these cultural forms say about our social reality? The course investigates these questions through viewing and reading about art of modern media: seminal works of early cinema; works by media artists such as Ruttmann, Eisenstein, Vertov, Buñuel, Hitchcock, Deren, Brakhage, Schneemann, Resnais, Godard, Marker, et al.; and writings by Kracauer, Benjamin, Adorno, Debord, Baudrillard, et al.

Course requirements and grading policy:

This is a discussion-based course organized as a seminar that meets once per week. Attendance and in-class student participation will be crucial to the ongoing development of our considerations of the course material. No unexcused absences are allowed. Following SAIC policy, and because of the centrality of the in-class screenings for the course, more than 3 absences may result in no credit for the course.



Class participation will consist of student attendance and discussion. Students volunteer for very short, 5-10 minute class presentations of the readings, based on 2-3 double-spaced page write-ups/outlines consisting of critical reactions and going beyond summary overview. All students will be expected to attend every class session and bring one or two written reaction questions for each of the assigned readings. Student reactions to the readings will guide the class discussion.

The grade evaluation of student performance in the course will consist of 3 components:

1. Attendance and class discussion participation: **10%** (~1% per class session)
2. In-class presentations on readings (several per student, depending on enrollment): **10%**
3. Writing assignments: 2 short papers (4-5 double-spaced pages): **80%** (40% each)

Course books:  [* required; bookstore-retail price / ~ amazon.com price]



- * Adorno, *The Culture Industry (CI)* [Routledge, 2001: ISBN 0415253802] - \$15.00 / ~\$11.00
- * Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication (EC)* [Semiotext(e), 1988: ISBN 0936756365] -\$12.00 / ~\$10.00
- * Benjamin, *Reflections (R)* [Schocken, 1986: ISBN 080520802X] - \$16.00 / ~\$11.00
- * Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle (SS)* [Zone, 1995: ISBN: 0942299795] - \$15.00 / ~\$11.00
- * Eisenstein, *Film Form (FF)* [Harvest Books, 1969: ISBN 0156309203] - \$17.00 / ~\$12.00
- * Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament (MO)* [Harvard, 1995: ISBN 067455163X] - \$31.00



Additional readings will be available on e-reserve at <http://docutek.artic.edu> (password: “media”):  

Also, 2 audio CDs, *Adorno CDs 1 & 2*, are available for listening before Week 8: ☺

Course schedule:

Week 1: Introduction: the media of modernity 9/1/05

  Thomas Mann, “Fullness of Harmony,” from the novel *The Magic Mountain* (1929)

  Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty” (1934)

  Theodor W. Adorno, “The Curves of the Needle” (1927)

Audio presentation: Franz Schubert, “Der Lindenbaum,” from *Winterreise*

Screening: Walter Ruttmann, *Opus 1* (1922, 10 min.), and *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (1927, 62 min.)

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Part I. Promise of progress: Eisenstein and Vertov in the Russian Revolution

Week 2: 9/8/05

- 📖 Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle" (1933), *Reflections (R)*, 3-60 [1]
📖📄 Adorno, "The Form of the Phonograph Record" (1934) [1]
Screening: Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925, 75 min.)

Week 3: 9/15/05

- 📖 Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (1927), "Calico-World" (1926),
"The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" (1927), and "Film 1928" (1928),
The Mass Ornament (MO), 75-86, 281-288, 291-304, and 307-320 [4]
Screening: Eisenstein, *October* (1927, 95 min.)

Week 4: 9/22/05

- 📖 Benjamin, "One-Way Street (Selection)" (1928), *R*, 61-94 [2]
📖 Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," "A Dialectic Approach to Film
Form," "The Filmic Fourth Dimension," and "Methods of Montage" (1929),
Film Form (FF), 28-44, 45-63, 64-71, and 72-83 [2]
Screening: Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, 68 min.)

Week 5: 9/29/05

- 📖 Kracauer, "Photography" (1927), *MO*, 47-63 [1]
📖📄 Benjamin, "Little History of Photography" (1931), and "The Author as Producer" (1934),
R, 220-238 [2]
📖📄 Vertov, "WE, variant of a manifesto" (1922) [1]
Screening: Vertov, *Three Songs about Lenin* (1934, 62 min.)

Part II. Alienation: the two "torn halves" of "culture industry" and the avant-garde

Week 6: 10/6/05

- 📖 Kracauer, "Lad and Bull," "Two Planes," and "Analysis of a City Map" (1926),
MO, 33-34, 37-39, and 41-44
📖 Benjamin, "Marseilles" (1929), "Hashish in Marseilles" (1932), and "Surrealism" (1929),
R, 131-136, 137-145, and 177-192 [2]
Screening: Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *Un Chien Andalou* (1928, 17 min.), and
L'Age D'Or (1930, 63 min.)

>>> 1st paper (on one of the films by Ruttmann, Eisenstein, or Vertov) due in class 10/6/05 <<<

Week 7: 10/13/05

- 📖 Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction" (1926), *MO*, 323-328
📖📄 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) [1]
📖📄 Adorno, letter to Benjamin on the "Work of Art" essay (1936) [1]
Screening: René Clair, *Entr'acte* (1924, 10 min.); Hans Richter, *Rhythmus 21* (1921, 3 min.), and
Ghosts Before Breakfast (1927, 9 min.); Marcel Duchamp, *Anemic Cinema* (1926, 6 min.);
Fernand Léger, *Ballet Mécanique* (1924, 11 min.); Man Ray, *Le Retour à la Raison* (1923, 2
min.), and *L'Etoile de Mer* (1928, 15 min.)

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Week 8: [☉ Please listen to Adorno CDs 1 & 2 prior to the Week 8 class session] 10/20/05

- 📖 Benjamin, "Mickey Mouse" (1931)
 - 📖 Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty" (1933), *R*, 333-336 [1]
 - 📖 Adorno, "Commodity Music Analysed" (1934-40)
 - 📖 Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), *CI*, 29-60 [1]
- Screening: *Fantasia* (Disney, 1940-42, 120 min.)

Week 9: 10/27/05

- 📖 Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture" (1944-47), and "Culture Industry Reconsidered," *CI*, 61-97, and 98-106 [2]
- Screening: Alfred Hitchcock, *The Birds* (1963, 120 min.)

Part III. Media as art, or, art as media: subjectivity and society

Week 10: 11/3/05

- 📖 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 7-46 [2]
 - 📖 Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1967), *CI*, 178-186
- Screening: Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, 14 min.); Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1962, 28 min.); Stan Brakhage, "Wedlock House" (1959, 11 min.), "Cat's Cradle" (1959, 6 min.), "Window Water Baby Moving" (1959, 12 min.), and "Mothlight" (1963, 3 min.); and Carolee Schneemann, *Fuses* (1964-67, 22 min.)

Week 11: 11/10/05

- 📖 Debord, *SS*, 47-117 [2]
- Screening: Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (1955, 31 min.), and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959, 90 min.)

Week 12: 11/17/05

- 📖 Debord, *SS*, 119-154 [2]
 - 📖 Kracauer, "Boredom" (1924), *MO*, 331-334
 - 📖 Benjamin, "The Destructive Character" (1931), *R*, 301-303
 - 📖 Adorno, "Free Time" (1969), *CI*, 187-197
- Screening: Jean-Luc Godard, *Contempt* (1963, 104 min.)

Week 13: [Thanksgiving break, no class session; please read ahead for Week 14] 11/24/05

Week 14: 12/1/05

- 📖 Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 9-56 [2]
- Screening: Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (1982, 100 min.)

Week 15: [Critique Week, no class session; please read ahead for Week 16] 12/8/05

Week 16: 12/15/05

- 📖 Baudrillard, *EC*, 57-104 [2]
- Screening: Ant Farm Collective, *The Eternal Frame* (1976, 23 min.); Richard Serra, *Television Delivers People* (1973, 6 min.); and Dara Birnbaum, *Technology/Transformation/Wonder Woman* (1978, 6 min.) [on Video Data Bank, *Surveying the First Decade: Video Art and Alternative Media in the United States*, Volume 2, Program 7: *Critiques of Art and Media as Commodity and Spectacle*]

>>> final paper (on "culture industry," avant-garde, and media art works) due in class 12/15/05 <<<