Media Cultures of the Cold War  
Communication 386/Art History 475  
Spring, 2012  
Wednesdays, 2:15-5:05  
Art Building, Room 103

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Seminar Goals:

This course examines the intersection of politics, aesthetics and new media technologies in the United States between the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Topics include the aesthetics of "thinking the unthinkable” in the wake of the atom bomb; Abstract Expressionism and “modern man” discourse; game theory, cybernetics and new models of art making; the rise of television, intermedia and the counterculture; and the continuing influence of the early cold war on contemporary media aesthetics. Readings will be drawn from primary and secondary sources, and from the fields of art history, communication, and critical theory.

Assignments & Grading:

We’ve designed this course as a springboard for your own, independent research, during and after the quarter. Thus, you will need to do two kinds of work: first, you’ll need to read and analyze course materials; second, you’ll need to identify important questions and objects needing further research. The assignments are designed to help you accomplish both these goals.

1. Active and useful seminar participation. As part of this, you are asked to lead one (1) presentation of the weekly readings. 40%

2. A Bibliographic Essay. 5-8 pages of text, plus notes. Due in class Week 6 (May 9) (30%)

We would like you to finish this course with a rich understanding of the major theoretical and historical debates in media studies and art history in this period, and with a map for a research project of your own. To get started, we would like you to work from required and recommended course readings, as well as your own research in primary and secondary sources, to build and analyze a bibliography around an analytical question of your choice. Your bibliographic essay should map an intellectual debate related to media in the period, outlining its key questions, texts and players. It should also identify the importance of that debate in shaping or potentially re-shaping our understanding of the era. Finally, it should identify and explain the likely significance of some object or objects that will become the basis of your final research proposal for the course.
3. **Final assignment: Research Proposal for a Journal Article.** 10-12 pages of text, plus notes. Due Exam Week (Precise date TBA). (30%)

We would like you to identify a relevant journal (such as *Grey Room; October; Critical Inquiry; Media, Culture and Society; The Information Society*; or *Technology and Culture*) and write a detailed proposal for an article within it. The proposal will need to address how your topic and approach relate to the existing literature in the field, the primary and secondary source work you have done and still have to do, and the importance of your research project for the journal’s audience and the relevant field more broadly. In contrast to the midterm bibliographic essay, this proposal will depend heavily on primary sources and archival work. (For example, Special Collections or the Hoover Institution archives.)

**Readings:**
(Please buy the following through Amazon)


Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2005


**Course Schedule:**

**Section One: Mass and Networked Models of Communication After World War II**

**Week 1—April 4:** Mass versus Network Culture

**Readings:**

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

**Week 2 -- April 11**: Personal Expression as Propaganda

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


Christine Mehring, “The Art of a Miracle: Toward a History of German Pop,” in *Art of the Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures*, Los Angeles: LACMA

Paul Kaiser, “Symbolic Revolts in the ‘Workers’ and ‘Peasants’ State: Countercultural Art Programs in the GDR” in *Art of the Two Germanys*

Susanne Leeb, “Abstraction as International Language,” in *Art of the Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures*

**Week 3 – April 18**: The Bomb and Seeing: Performance and Simulation

**Required:**

Tracy Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense*, pp 1-102


**Recommended:**


“Dr. Strangelove” (the movie)


**Week 4 – April 25:** Systems of vision

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Section Two: Media in Everyday Life, At Home and Abroad**

**Week 5 – May 2:**

*Required:*


*Watch:* Emile de Antonio, *Point of Order*

*Recommended:*


**Week 6 – May 9:** New Media Spaces

*Due: Bibliographic Essay*

*Required:*

Martin, *The Organizational Complex,* Chapter 5, “Computer Architectures.”


**Recommended:**

The films of Ray and Charles Eames (on DVD, at SUL)


**Week 7 – May 16:** Decolonization and the "Third World"

**Required:**


Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” “On National Culture,” and “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*: 35-106; 206-310


**Recommended:**


**Section 3: From Counterculture to Neoliberalism**

**Week 8 – May 23:** Early Counterculture and the Turn to Performance and Participation

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 9 – May 30:** High Counterculture (no pun intended) as Collision of Mass and Networked Media

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 10 – June 6:** The Coming of Neoliberalism

**Required:**

Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*


Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, Chapters 5-8.

**Recommended:**