

Isla Hansen

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The Body & Technology

Spring 2016
M/W 1:30 – 4:30
DH B305

Professor: Isla Hansen
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Course Description:

This class prompts students to investigate the relationship between bodies – human, animal, or organic – and technologies of all kinds. Conceptually, this course will bring into dialogue issues surrounding bodily adaptations to new technologies, mediation as amputation or acceleration, and alterations in both gesture and image of bodies over time. We will delve into representation of the body in media, social encounters between physical reality and digital space, and draw from the entertainment, advertising, I.T., food, weapons, and surveillance industries to discuss the notion of “progress” as it relates both to the human/animal body and technology. Reference materials will include both contemporary and historical documents and media, critical media theory, art historical precedents, and the experience of everyday life. Students will also be required to collect and dissect their own reference materials in investigatory bibliographies. As a studio class, this course will encourage a series of experimental projects to be developed by each student in relation to a conceptual or topical concentration of their choosing. These investigations may take the form of sculpture, wearables, prostheses, digital or time based media, social experimentation, performance, or forms yet to be named.

It will be expected that each student begin to develop a vocabulary surrounding their work that encourages interdisciplinary readings. We will work as a class, and in one-on-one student-teacher meetings to cultivate techniques for each artist to explain in writing the methods, inspirations, and desired outcomes of their projects in relation to their audience and context.

While it is not required that students work directly with electronics, media, or other forms of technology while investigating this subject matter, it is highly encouraged. Students will be given guidance through an ongoing class dialogue concerning how to incorporate the use of certain toolsets with a critical eye and hand, using creative ways to both solve and create problems.

Course Objectives / Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, each student should find that they have:

1. Created at least one fully completed new work that deals with the subject matter of the relationship between bodies and technology
2. Investigated a variety of sources and research materials to inspire their work, including historical media and documents, contemporary news sources, social media, as well as critical theory and philosophy
3. Experimented with a range of materials and methods for creating work that indicates an understanding for, or mimicry of, the methodologies practiced by a technological field upon which their work is commenting
4. Participated in a critical dialogue regarding the role of technology in our everyday physical and social existence today and throughout history,

5. Formed their own vocabulary with which to discuss the ways in which their work navigates reference materials, methodologies, aesthetics, politics, and art and historical context

Course Materials:

Note: These books and articles are relevant as whole texts, but optional. Shorter readings & excerpts will be provided for group readings and discussion and study in and out of class.

- Walter Benjamin – *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936)
- Martin Heidegger – *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935), *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954)
- Norbert Wiener - *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (1948), *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950)
- Marshall McLuhan – *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (1967)
- Regis Debray – *Media Manifestos* and *Wired* interview
- Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen (editors) – *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, 7th Edition* (2009)
- Todd McGowan & Sheila Kunle – *Lacan and Contemporary Film* (2004)
- Foucault – *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975)
- Jerry Mander - *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1977)
- Donna Haraway - *Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1985)
- Bruno Latour – *The Pasteurization of France* (1988), *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), *Aramis, or The Love of Technology* (1996)
- Paul Virilio – *War & Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (1989), *The Vision Machine* (1994), *The Information Bomb* (2000), *The Original Accident* (2007). *Grey Ecology* (2009)
- Judith Butler - *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), *Undoing Gender* (2004)
- Katharine Hayles – *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999)
- Friedrich Kittler – *Optical Media* (2002 / 2010), *Film, Typewriter, Gramophone*
- Michael Pollan – *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (2001), *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (2006), *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (2013)
- Mary Flanagan – *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (2013)

Detailed Course Overview:

Week 1:

- Read Walter Benjamin, discuss
- Watch – *Da Vinci* (art film), watch excerpt from *Food Inc*, watch excerpt from Lance Armstrong interview

Assignment: Post to blog reflections on Benjamin. Begin bibliography – collect 2 contemporary sources, 1 historical event / situation, 1 outside interdisciplinary source or theoretical source. Watch film: *The Conversation*

Week 2:

- Watch interview w/ Coppola, discuss *The Conversation*
- Read excerpts from Heidegger, Norbert Wiener, McLuhan together
- Review assignment from Week 1, discuss sources

Assignment: Read provided excerpts from Kittler & Virilio, continue adding to bibliography (at least 3 more sources)

Week 3:

- Discussion of Kittler & Virilio in relation to previous readings
 - Watch films & videos – Olympia (Riefenstahl), Century of the Self (Adam Curtis), Leviathan (Ethnographic Media Lab)
 - Go over proposal writing and Project 1 assignment
- Assignment: Write a proposal for Project 1 to develop a piece influenced by your working bibliography that makes use of technological toolsets involved in your research

Week 4:

- Presentations of proposals and bibliographies to date, group discussion
 - Individual meetings with Isla
- Assignment: Redraft proposal and post to the blog, create a timeline for a 4 week project, read your peers proposals and comment on them on the class blog

Week 5:

- Field Trip: Local bike shop
Movie night & Dinner at Isla's house
- Discussion of field trip & cinematic experience
 - In and out of class work time: gathering materials and troubleshooting project ideas

Week 6:

- In and out of class work time: gathering materials and troubleshooting project ideas
- Individual meetings with Isla

Week 7:

- In and out of class work time: construction, consider context & installation

Week 8:

PROJECT 1 Due – critique

Week 9:

- Reflections on projects
 - Read as a class: excerpts from Haraway & Butler
- Assignment: Post on a blog a reflection of your previous project in relation to your working bibliography. What was successful for you? In what did you feel you failed? How would you do this project again? Are you ready to move on, or do you want to continue working with this subject matter? Come up with a proposal for your next project.

Week 10:

- Read excerpts from Latour & Michael Pollan
- Field Trips: Robotics department, Industrial processing plant
- Present your new proposal
- Assignment: Post to the blog your reflections and new additions to your bibliography

Week 11:

In class work time: material gathering and troubleshooting
Assignment: post a progress report, or documentation of a relevant experience to the blog, comment on peers' posts

Week 12:

Outside of class work time – begin construction, rehearsals, install, whatever
Individual meetings with Isla

Week 13:

In class and out of class work time
Assignment: post one reflection on a new reading, source, or inspiration

Week 14:

In class and out of class work time

Week 15:

FINAL PROJECT DUE – critiques with visiting outside guests from relevant disciplines

Week 16:

Reflections

Requirements & Evaluation:

Attendance

Students are expected to attend and fully participate in all class sessions and scheduled individual meetings. Exceptions are foreseeable absences excused 1 week in advance for valid reasonable conflicts or unforeseeable sickness / emergencies.

Work, Assignments, and blog discussion

Every student will be expected to complete assignments with new work that does not overlap with projects done for other classes or prior to entering this course. Per requirement, every student should post to the blog and writing should be original material or credited and in quotation marks.

Critiques and class discussion

While I recognize that due to different personality types and learning styles, not everyone may be as eager to participate in class discussion. However, out of respect and generosity for your peers, each student will be encouraged to make an effort to reflect upon the work we are discussing and the work of each other student – if not in the form of verbal comment during class dialogue and critiques, then in writing.

Grading

Whether you are successful in this course will be evaluated based on your level of enthusiasm and effort while participating in class discussion, completing assignments, and in generating new work.