

FALL 2010

**The Politics of Code**

E57.3153: Special Topics in Technology Studies

Wednesdays from 2 - 4:10pm

East Building, room 404

Prof. Alexander R. Galloway

This doctoral seminar focuses on political analyses of computational media. We begin with an overview of cybernetics, information theory, systems theory, distributed communications networks, and theories of postmodernity. Next, we examine the rise of immaterial labor in the service economies and the extension of codified labor practices into the realm of daily life. The seminar will also consider the ramifications of informatic capture and the formation of coded objects and bodies. Finally, we explore networked struggle and, through it, a political theory of the present moment. The course will favor both close readings of specific technologies as well as social and cultural claims about the information age.

**Required Readings**

- Course Reader.
- Jean Baudrillard, *Passwords* (New York: Verso, 2003).
- Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).
- Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010).
- McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

## Schedule

September 8. Course Introduction

September 15. On the Concepts of “Information” and “Media”

- John Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept” *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Winter 2010): 321-362.
- John Durham Peters, “Information: Notes Toward a Critical History,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 12 (1988): 9-23.
- Ben Kafka, “Medium/Media,” Apter, et al., eds., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (forthcoming).

September 22. Cybernetics and Cellular Automata

- N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

September 28, 5-7pm. Special guest lecture: Alberto Toscano speaking on “Fanaticism: The Uses of an Idea.” Location: Humanities Initiative at NYU, 20 Cooper Square (at East 5th Street), Fifth Floor.

September 29. Postmodernity

- Jean Baudrillard, *Passwords* (New York: Verso, 2003).
- Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey, “Toward an Evil Media Studies,” *The Spam Book* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2009), 141-159.

October 6. Theories of Technology

- Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

October 13. The World as Target

- Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

October 20. Politics at the New Millennium, Part I: Tiqqun

Special guest lecture by Jason Smith.

- Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010).
- Critical Art Ensemble, “Electronic Civil Disobedience,” *Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas* (New York: Autonomedia, 1996), 7-34.

October 27. Politics at the New Millennium, Part II: Debord and Wark

- McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

November 3. Methodology and “the Poetics of Social Forms”

- Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9-34.
- Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), ix-xxii, 1-66.
- Fredric Jameson, "Utopia as Replication," *Valences of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 2009), 410-434.

November 10. Networks

- Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

November 17. Netwar

- Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming" and "Postscript on Control Societies," *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169-182.
- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Preface" and "Part 1: The Political Constitution of the Present," *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3-66.
- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Counterinsurgencies," *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 36-95.
- John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)," *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 1-25.

November 24. Identity and Labor Online

- Lisa Nakamura, "Menu-Driven Identities: Making Race Happen Online," *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 101-135.
- Jennifer González, "The Face and the Public: Race, Secrecy, and Digital Art Practice," *Camera Obscura* 70, vol. 24, no. 1 (2009): 37-65.
- Phil Agre, "Surveillance and Capture," *The New Media Reader*, Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort, eds. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 737-760.
- Phil Agre, "Your Face Is Not a Bar Code: Arguments Against Automatic Face Recognition in Public Places," <http://polaris.gseis.ucla.edu/pagre/bar-code.html>.

December 1. Software and Ideology

- N. Katherine Hayles, “Intermediation: Textuality and the Regime of Computation” and “Speech, Writing, Code: Three Worldviews,” *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 15-61.
- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "On Software, or the Persistence of Visual Knowledge," *Grey Room* 18 (Winter 2004): 26-51.
- Alexander R. Galloway, “Language Wants to be Overlooked: On Software and Ideology,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 3 (2006): 315–331.

## December 8. Cinematic Versus Computational Media

- D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- Ian Bogost, "Procedural Rhetoric," *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 1-64.

## Course Assignments

### *Reading*

All students are expected to read the assigned texts in advance of class.

### *Writing*

Each student should write a total of 20 pages for the semester, preferably split into two shorter papers of 10 pages each, but other combinations are also possible. Suggested paper topics will be provided, but students are also encouraged to create their own topics. All papers should be on par with doctoral level work and should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials and exhibit a methodology of critical analysis.

## Grading Requirements

Each student will be evaluated based on the course assignments. All students will be expected to do the course reading, and to write papers of approximately 20 pages total. Grades will be determined according to the following formula:

80% paper(s)

20% in-class participation and discussion