

## **MCMA 557 – MFA Studio Practice**

Fall 2007

Mondays 3-6 PM; COMM 12

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### **Course Description**

This first year course for all incoming MFA students in the college serves as an introduction to media creation strategies and concepts. The emphasis is on aesthetic and conceptual development as encountered within a variety of media arts. The course is team taught by a number of faculty in modules dedicated to various media forms—still image, time-based, spatial, and interactive.

### **Course Objectives**

- 1) Develop a deeper understanding of contemporary issues and strategies in a range of artistic practices.
- 2) Produce two complete, original artworks in response to these currents.
- 3) Expand the creative repertoire technically, formally, and conceptually.

### **Course Structure**

The semester is organized around three conceptual themes of particular relevance to a broad cross-section of contemporary artistic practice. These themes are performance, edit/redit, and participation. Themes will be explored in units of approximately one month each and each will include a project. Scheduled class times will be used for lecture, discussion, sharing studio process, and viewing artwork.

Each unit will include an assigned project. These projects should be considered an invitation for student responses to the themes presented in class. Students are expected to develop works-in-progress for all assignments and chose two to bring to completion. All work will be critiqued in MCMA 558 – MFA Critique, though each student will have at least two chances to workshop ideas in studio class time during the semester.

In addition, a “menu” of technical skill sessions will be offered on Fridays throughout the semester. Lead by faculty and staff, these workshops will introduce students to production concepts and platforms in a variety of media. While students are not required to attend these workshops, we highly encourage you to sample from the menu of offerings in order to open new avenues for your creative work. While the forms students employ in their own projects are open, workshops will be scheduled to reinforce concepts and artworks discussed in regular class hours. A schedule of these workshops will be distributed at the end of the second week of the semester.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation in a graduate arts course is necessarily holistic and will take into account the depth and quality of student engagement with the course material as evidenced by in class participation

and projects; artistic development as evidenced by an increasing sophistication of concept, form, and technique of the two projects completed during the semester; and progress toward developing a consistent and self-motivated studio practice. Students missing more than one class meeting or being late excessively may be penalized on their final grade.

### **Schedule**

August 20

Course Introduction; detailed walkthrough of New Media Center and production facilities with Mark Stoffel and Chris Parr

#### **Unit I: Performance**

In the last twenty-five years, the idea of “performance” has moved beyond the live and narrative arts and has become a key concept in fields as diverse as literature, geography, gender studies, architecture, and digital culture. Many of the concerns addressed by first-generation performance artists in the 1960s and 1970s—the concept of ‘presence,’ the relationship of the body to its environment, how the body is raced and gendered, and the mediation of experience—continue to motivate artists today, though they sometimes work in media that were science fiction a generation ago. Performance in contemporary art practices often foregrounds the person of the artist and investigates the blurry borderlands between self and other, private and public, personal and collective. Directing the performance of others is a significant part of both narrative filmmaking and interactive art. Issues central to authorship and the multiform roles of the autobiographic voice have become threads that cross from the graphic novel, video art, the still image, and more traditional forms of documentary. This unit explores the concept of performance as it relates to documentary and narrative media arts and performance art coming out of a studio tradition.

August 27

Introductory Panel on Performance  
Performance Art 101 (Kanouse)

September 3: Labor Day/No Class

September 10

Performance and Narrativity (Needham)

September 17

Directing Performance (Boruszkowski)  
Workshop project ideas

September 24

Re-enactment in Contemporary Art (Kreider)  
Workshop project ideas

#### **Unit II: Edit/Re-Edit**

Continuing in the tradition of Dada collage artists, sound pioneers like Pierre Schaeffer, Situationist detournement, and hip hop sampling, re-mix artistry and culture is flourishing in the latest wave of electronic media. The now ubiquitous audio sample and video clip migrate between street, gallery and web in a dynamic interplay of cultural contexts. In creating work through the compilation of found materials the original meaning of these objects changes through being placed in a new context, which puts into question its status as truth or fiction. While contemporary cultures of appropriation and creative reuse may be enabled by emergent technologies and open source culture, they are part of a longer history of artists, musicians, and filmmakers using found

footage and the remnants of mass culture to reimagine media and images in varied ways. Andre Breton's surrealist theorization of the found object (objet trouvé) is one important art historical precedent that anticipates Lacan's objet petit a - the lost object which paradoxically represents both a hole in the integrity of our world and that which hides the hole. Structuralist-materialist film theory insisted that the original meaning or content of all source materials in a found footage work be ignored totally in favor of exploring the medium's abstract or ontological qualities. This unit considers the edit—the assembly of a work out of available pieces—as an aesthetic, structural, and political practice in contemporary media art.

October 1  
Introductory Panel on Edit/Re-edit  
Screening

October 8  
Found Footage/Collage (Boruszkowski)  
Workshop project ideas

October 15  
The Remix (Needham)  
Workshop project ideas

October 22  
Post-Production as Method I (Kanouse)  
Workshop project ideas

October 29  
Post-Production as Method II (Kreider)  
Workshop project ideas

### **Unit III: Participation**

Transforming an audience from spectators to participants has long been an avant-garde dream, from the 'Dada Seasons' of the early 1920s through Bertholt Brecht's ideas of a two-way radio to the Happenings of the 1950s and 1960s. The concept of participation motivates a wide swath of contemporary artists, many of whom define it in different ways. New Media artists build computer-mediated experiences responsive to input received from the viewer, while Social Practice artists initiate and sculpt direct encounters between participants. Transmission artists working in micropower and pirate broadcasting use the atmosphere for the diffusion of works and propose a much broader participation in the public airwaves, while an increasing number of documentarians hand their cameras to their subjects and edit whatever is brought back. At the same time, artists have responded to the increasing centralization of cultural expression by self-organizing exhibition and screening spaces and developing alternate distribution channels. This unit investigates how the ideal of participation is pursued in a wide variety of contemporary practices and how that ideal might need to be refined in the era of Blogging and YouTube.

November 5  
Introductory Panel on Participation  
Transmission Arts (Needham)

November 12  
Social Practice (Kanouse)  
Workshop project ideas

November 19: Thanksgiving Break/No Class

November 26  
Interactivity in New Media (Guest)  
Workshop project ideas

December 3  
Systems of distribution in/as art (Kreider)  
Workshop project ideas

December 10: Open