

IMD 540

Topics in Intermedia Theory & History:

The Century of the Self

Instructor: Nate Aldrich

nathaniel.aldrich@maine.edu

office hours: TBD

Course materials are available for download at:
www.nbaldrich.com/century_of_the_self.html

Documentary film-maker Adam Curtis describes the co-opting of Freudian psychoanalysis by market forces in the 20th century as constructing the “Century of the Self” in his powerful and thought-provoking 2002 documentary series of the same name. This course will examine in detail the ideas and arguments at the heart of this documentary, which attempts to draw together the streams of capitalism, democracy and the media spectacle as a grand collusion in contemporary Western culture. Using this examination as a starting point, students will respond with creative research projects relative to their individual course of study that further extrapolate on Curtis’ thesis in whole or in part. These projects can be in forms ranging from artwork to essay and may deal with a variety of topics from the semiotics of the hyperreal to techniques of the contemporary documentarian and anything in between.

How the grade is constructed:

1. Each student will compose four (4) brief essays, +/- 1000 words in length, in response to the question(s) posed in each of the four (4) readings packets. The due dates for these essays are indicated in the syllabus timeline below. We will use these essays as starting points for discussions about the readings and the associated episodes of the documentary, so students should bring them to class and be prepared to present them to the class, as well as present a copy (via hard copy or e-mail) to the instructor. Each of these essays will be worth a possible fifteen (15) points toward the final grade, for a possible total of sixty (60) points.
2. Each student will create a research project pursuing a line of inquiry predicated on some aspect of the course material. The type of project (artwork, essay, documentary, etc.) and the specific topic and content of that project is up to each student. Students will propose their projects to the class and the class will then critique the proposals in a process intended to help refine the thinking and hone the creation of the final work. This final project will be worth a possible twenty (20) points toward the final grade.
3. As this course takes the form of a seminar meeting once a week, each student

should actively participate in the classroom discussions. These discussions should serve a vital role in the exchange of ideas and examination of the various topics raised by the course material. Student participation, with attendance obviously being an extremely important factor, will contribute the final twenty (20) points to your grade. The instructor will be the final and sole arbiter in assigning these points.

4. The final grade will be constructed by adding the numbers together, then assigning the grade indicated by the total. Simple!

Please note: Any missed assignments may or may not be made up, through late submission or alternate assignments, solely at the discretion of the instructor. Work not submitted will receive 0 points.

About the readings and viewings:

Along with the screenings of the episodes *Century of the Self* are readings and additional screenings that provide context by presenting ideas both derived and extrapolated from the documentary. Some of this information will be parallel, some tangential, some in the role of support, some as speculation. It is all designed to provoke our thinking about how many collateral issues are extant in Curtis' primary theses. They are also there to help provide different possible directions for the formulation of your final project.

About creating the final project:

The form and content of the final project is up to the individual student. The project could be a focal point for applying some aspect of the students overall course of study, or equally could be an opportunity to engage a new or peripheral pursuit. Each project will be proposed via presentation to the class-at-large (see below) and subsequently critiqued for clarity and merit by the class. This process is designed to help strengthen the final project. Each project should be thorough, robust, coherent and demonstrably relevant to both the course material and the student's proposal as presented in class.

The final projects are due for completion on the date indicated in the syllabus *unless otherwise agreed to in advance by the instructor.*

About presenting the proposals for final project:

Each student will propose their final project in the form of a 20-minute presentation to the class. Consider yourself a guest lecturer. Each presentation should clearly outline the thesis for the project and the form the project will take (essay; artwork; whatever) and *the relationship between the content and the form chosen*. Each presentation should be accompanied by appropriate supporting materials (readings may be assigned

if deemed necessary) and should outline how the student arrived at her/his decisions regarding the proposed project. Students should be prepared for a question-and-answer session after the presentation that allows your peers to critique any and all aspects of the project as proposed.

On electronic devices in the classroom:

Due to an escalating potential for classroom disruption, the following is the current policy for this course:

"Be here now."
- Ram Dass

Please shut your phone off prior to class time. If your phone rings or if you are found using it, it will be confiscated for the duration of the class period. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent for that day.

If you are found to be using your laptop for *anything other than class notes*, and that includes doing your work for class during class or googling something we may be discussing, you will be asked to shut your computer off. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent that day. If this somehow creates a hardship, please come speak to me.

Classroom Expectations:

Students and instructors each play an important role in maintaining a classroom environment optimal for learning, and are expected to treat each other with respect. Class discussions require diverse opinions to be shared; please be thoughtful in sharing your perspectives and responses with one another.

Disruptive behavior is defined as any type of activity that would interrupt, in a negative manner, the normal flow of information exchange in the classroom or on the UMaine campus. Such conduct can not be tolerated as it interferes with the financial and educational investments of other students. Students that exhibit such unacceptable behavior will be asked to leave the classroom setting, and their future presence in the class will come under the review of an officer of the University.

Examples of inappropriate behavior include but are not limited to the following:

- verbal or physical abuse of another person
- sexual harassment or discrimination

- threats
- malicious destruction, damage or misuse of college property
- indecent or disorderly conduct.

The instructor will be the arbiter of what constitutes disruptive behavior. This behavior can affect your grade!

Use of IMRC Studios, Labs and Other Facilities:

You are encouraged to use the IMRC facilities to complete your work this semester. Access to the departmental facilities is a privilege. If there are problems - doors left unlocked, tools missing or damaged, trash everywhere, unsafe use of tools and materials, or allowing access to unapproved users - your access may be suspended.

In the Event of an Extended Disruption

In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

Academic Honesty

Standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. These require that students never present the work of others as their own. Nor should the same work be turned in for more than one class. Violations will result in failing the class and other disciplinary actions. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism and all forms of misrepresentation in academic work, and is unacceptable at The University of Maine. As stated in the University of Maine's online undergraduate "Student Handbook," plagiarism (the submission of another's work without appropriate attribution) and cheating are violations of The University of Maine Student Conduct Code.

Students with a Disabling Condition

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require special accommodations in order to meet course requirements should notify the instructor as soon as possible with appropriate documentation and meet with the instructor to clarify and arrange what is needed. If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

Religious Holy Days

If you expect to miss a class due to the observance of a religious holy day, you must inform the instructor, in writing, by the sixteenth day of the semester in order to make accommodations for exams or assignments.

Sexual Discrimination Reporting

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct or any form of gender discrimination involving members of the campus, your teacher is required to report this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity.

If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

For confidential resources on campus: Counseling Center: 207-581-1392 or Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000

For confidential resources off campus: Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000 or Spruce Run: 1-800-863-9909.

Other resources: The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:

For support services on campus: Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention: 207-581-1406

Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409 University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911 Or see the OSAVP website for a complete list of services at <http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>

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9/3 Introduction

How this course will work; what's expected; readings and viewings; meet & greet: who are we and why are we here (in this particular course, and perhaps in the universe at large)?

9/10 Happiness Machine

We will watch part 1 of *The Century of the Self* and engage in a discussion about the assigned reading and its relevance to the viewing.

please read: An Outline of Psycho-Analysis by Sigmund Freud

9/17 The Engineering of Consent

We will engage in a discussion about the assigned reading and then watch part 2 of *The Century of the Self*.

please read: The Century of the Self reader pt. 1
assignment due: written response #1

9/24 There is a Policeman Inside All of our Heads: He Must Be Destroyed

We will engage in a discussion about the assigned reading and then watch part 3 of *The Century of the Self*.

please read: The Century of the Self reader pt. 2
assignment due: written response #2

10/1 Eight People Sipping Wine In Kettering

We will engage in a discussion about the assigned reading and then watch part 4 of *The Century of the Self*.

please read: The Century of the Self reader pt. 3
assignment due: written response #3

10/8 Art, Thesis & Research

Let's pause to examine how *Century of the Self* wraps a thesis, or a system of theses, into a work of art predicated on a creative research practice. Consider this an opportunity to bring questions or comments to the class.

10/15 Fall Break!

10/22 We Live in Public

We will engage in a discussion about the assigned reading and then watch the documentary *We Live in Public* by Ondi Timoner in an attempt to expand one step beyond Curtis.

please read: The Century of the Self reader pt. 4
assignment due: written response #4

10/29 Research Project Proposals

This class period is reserved for student presentations of proposals for their final projects.

assignment due: please prepare for a class presentation using the guidelines previously provided in this syllabus.

11/5 Exploring the Thesis

Composing a thesis is a foundational aspect of intermedial practice. This class is dedicated to examining/workshopping the process of generating a thesis: a clear, concise and actionable premise for your final project.

assignment due: please bring a one (1) sentence thesis to class that will be the working outline for your final project

11/12 Applying the Thesis

Once a robust thesis is developed, how does that thesis define and direct creative work?

assignment due: please bring your reworked one (1) sentence thesis to class that will be the working outline for you final project

11/19 Research Project Updates

This class period is reserved for student presentations updating the progress of their final projects specifically focusing on the incorporation and expansion of the project thesis.

assignment: please prepare a class presentation updating the progress on your final project.

11/26 No Class!

12/3 Projects Due!

This class period is reserved for student presentations of their final projects.

assignment due: please be prepared to present your final project to the class.

12/10 Post-Mortem

So, how did we do?