

## IMD 540

Topics in Intermedia Theory & History:

The Century of the Self

Instructor: Nate Aldrich

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office hours: Monday, 3:30 – 4:30 pm @ Lord 312

Course materials are available for download at:  
[www.nbaldrich.com/century\\_of\\_the\\_self.html](http://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, three (3) to five (5) pages 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 ten (10) points toward the final grade, for a possible total of forty (40) points.
2. Each student will create a large-scale 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 forty (40) 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 present 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 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 no later than the final day of class unless otherwise agreed to in advance by the instructor.

### **About presenting the proposals for final project:**

Each student will propose his/her final project in the form of a 30-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.

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*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.*

*If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Ann Smith, Director of Disability Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.*

*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 on-line 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. An instructor who has probable cause or reason to believe a student has cheated may act upon such evidence, including reporting this to the Department Chair for appropriate action.*

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### **9/10 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)?

### **9/17 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

### **9/24 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: written response #1*

### **10/1 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: written response #2*

### **10/8 Fall Break**

### **10/15 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: written response #3*

## **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: written response #4*

## **10/29 Student Run Class: Project Proposals 1**

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

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

## **11/5 Student Run Class: Project Proposals 2**

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

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

## **11/2 Exploring the Thesis**

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

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

## **11/19 Applying the Thesis**

Once an robust thesis is designed, how does that thesis define and direct creative work?

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

## **11/26 Student Run Class: Project Updates 1**

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

### **12/3 Student Run Class: Project Updates 2**

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

### **12/10 Post-Mortem**

So, how did we do?