

Individual Study Projects (CMDP 5910)

Research and Production Course
Tuesday and Thursday 3:30–5:15
Environmental Design Building Classroom 214B
University of Colorado Boulder
Spring 2017

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course requires students to conduct self-directed research and produce original work in a seminar setting among a small cohort of peers. Assignments are intended as opportunities for students to write, curate, and produce work that will ultimately assist them as they formulate their final MFA thesis projects. In substance, the course's focus will be on process. To these ends, we will read a few works that discuss what it is to make and how making alters our perception of the world. Along these ends, we will read some work by artists and film-/media-makers who have sought to better articulate (not necessarily "theorize") their practice. Together we will view a wide variety of works in fiction, documentary, and avant-garde cinema, while recognizing that these are in no way monolithic forms.

Course Objectives

- Produce two new audiovisual works that assist you as you conceptualize your MFA thesis project
- Curate a short series of two programs of work significant to your own work and future MFA thesis and present them to the class, with related readings
- Write evocative treatments of work for the class and future work for the MFA thesis, complete with listed influences in the form of short bibliographies and filmographies
- Demonstrate an analytical grasp of how your work stands in relation to different traditions of cinema and media
- Speak critically about audiovisual works, while describing their aesthetics, structure, and formal qualities

Course requirements and assignments

Class Participation

(25% of grade)

This is a seminar-style graduate level production course. Active classroom participation is on par with graded assignments. Each student is expected to read assigned materials, including those proposed by students in preparation for their curated classes. Active engagement and response to screened works, including that of fellow students, is a must for each class. On those days when readings are assigned, one student will be called upon to lead the class in discussion, however **students will not know in advance who will lead the class discussion**. For this reason, it is absolutely crucial that students come to class having read each work with a fine-toothed comb, identifying underlying arguments or assumptions, and questions posed. For classroom screenings of work, complete immersive attention and engagement is also required. Students are encouraged to take notes only when viewing works-in-progress by fellow students, so that they may give specific and detailed feedback in the classroom conversation that follows.

Treatments

(15% of grade)

Students will write three treatments over the course of the semester; two one-page single spaced treatments for the short works they produce in-class and one for their future MFA thesis project. This final treatment should be longer (three pages, single spaced) and will need to include a fourth page with a filmography, exhibition list, and/or biography framing the context for their proposed thesis work. A suggested structure and guidelines will be given to students in advance of this final treatment deadline. Should students be seeking external funding for their thesis project, treatments may be geared toward specific funding sources; however, please let me know in advance if this is your intention.

Curatorial Assignments

(30% of grade)

To better tailor course screenings to the individual needs and interests of students, as well as to provide students an opportunity to curate and receive feedback from their cohort, each student will research and propose two “programs” for the class that are related in form or content to the particular student’s interests. These works (film, video, performance documentation) must not have been screened in the context of previous coursework, but be an opportunity for individual research, to expose yourself and your peers to new work. The programs will necessarily be constrained by the limitations of our class structure, two weekly 90-minute sessions. For this reason, I strongly encourage you to consider two programs comprised of short or medium length works, allowing for at least 15 minutes of feedback at the end of class. If you feel strongly about screening a feature length film, for example, please consult with me directly outside of class. I will do my best to assist you in obtaining the materials you need and can suggest resources that are available to us through the university.

In preparation for curatorial assignments, students are expected to write succinct (and insightful!) two page introductory essays for their program, which they will hand out in advance of their curated program. In class, student-curators will need to introduce the work(s) prior to the screening and, during the conversations that follow, be able to speak fluidly about the formal qualities of each work, the structure they follow or subvert, and their aesthetic qualities. If students read reviews or other programs about their film(s) students must reference these sources in a bibliography with their handout and in the body of the text. (Ask me for more details about this and refer to CU Boulder’s university-wide policies on academic integrity.)

Original Work

(30% of grade)

Students will develop and produce two new short works (no more than 10 minutes each) in the course of the class, going through a process of screening rough cuts, fine cuts, and final cuts of each project. These assignments are a chance for you to experiment with form and style in preparation for your final MFA thesis. That said, please do not squander these opportunities to build your body of work. If initially you are struggling to find a framework for these assignments, I will gladly help you come up with a productive set of parameters or constraints for you to work within.

Grading

Class Participation: 25%
Treatments: 15%
Curatorial Project One: 15%
Original Work One: 15%
Curatorial Project Two: 15%
Original Work Two: 15%

Course Equipment

As students enrolled in the course, you will have access to a shared resource of available cameras and sound recording equipment in the Department of Critical Media Practices. Jason Gnerre is the manager of equipment and labs for the department and he may be reached at gnerre@colorado.edu for questions about specific equipment. If you wish to check out equipment, please use the following address: cmdp-checkout@colorado.edu. Details about the department's policies for equipment checkout are available online at: <http://www.criticalmediapractices.org/officialpolicies/>.

Classroom Policy

- Our classroom has a no electronics policy. Please turn off all electronics, including phones, computers, and tablets. You are expected to take notes on paper during class time. For discussions of our readings, please print them out with your notes for easy reference during classroom discussions.
- Give screenings of completed work or student-led curated programs your full attention. I ask that you reserve note taking for only the most urgent of thoughts during the screening. I challenge you to give yourself over to the work that we listen to or view in class, so that you may more fully be present as it unfolds. That said, when viewing works-in-progress by peers, note taking is encouraged so that you may give detailed and specific feedback. In either case, ask yourself not whether or not you “like” a given work, but what the work is doing and how.
- University-wide policies regarding academic integrity, as well as sexual, racial, religious, disability, and/or nationality-based discrimination and misconduct apply, as do standards for professional courtesy and engagement. If you prefer an alternate gender pronoun or name, other than that designated by the class roster, please let me know.

Attendance

You are permitted no more than three absences from class during the course of the semester. For each ensuing absence, with the exception of documented medical or family emergencies, your grade will drop by 3.5%. Be seated and ready for screenings and classroom discussions at the start of class. Being late twice counts as one absence.

Disabilities

If you have any disabilities or learning difficulties that make it difficult for you to follow course policies, or that require special accommodation, please let me know immediately! I will make every effort to accommodate you.

(Preliminary) List of Course Texts

Art as Experience, John Dewey

The Corporeal Image, David MacDougall

I Love Dick, Chris Kraus

Essential Brakhage, Stan Brakhage

Devotional Cinema, Nathaniel Dorsky

John Cage Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse), John Cage

Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees, Robert Irwin and Lawrence Weschler

Course Outline

(subject to change)

Week One

Tuesday 01/17
Thursday 01/19

Introductions

Initial introductions, individual meetings with students
Group discussion of tailored topics, review of the semester's production schedule, screening and class discussion

Week Two

Tuesday, 01/24

In-class screening and class discussion

***Email digital copies of your first treatments to class members by midnight on Tuesday

Thursday, 01/26

Discuss treatments of peers in-class

Week Three

Tuesday, 01/31
Thursday, 02/02

Discussion of *Art as Experience*, screening and discussion

Screening and in-class discussion

Week Four

Tuesday, 02/07
Thursday, 02/09

Curatorial Exercise No. 1 (student-led)

Discussion of readings; screening and discussion

Week Five

Tuesday, 02/14
Thursday, 02/16

Curatorial Exercise No. 1 (student-led)

Discussion of *The Corporeal Image* (selections), David MacDougall; *Essential Brakhage* (selections), Brakhage; and *Devotional Cinema*, Nathaniel Dorsky

Related screenings and discussion

Week Six

Tuesday, 02/21
Thursday, 02/23

Curatorial Exercise No. 1 (student-led)

Discussion of *John Cage Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* (selections); *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* (selections)

Meeting with students individually to discuss projects

Week Seven

Tuesday, 02/28
Thursday, 03/02

Curatorial Exercise No. 1 (student-led)

Discussion of *I Love Dick*, Chris Kraus

Meeting with students individually to discuss projects

Week Eight

Tuesday, 03/07
Thursday, 03/09

Workday in preparation for week ten's critiques

Workday in preparation for week ten's critiques

Week Nine

Tuesday, 03/14
Thursday, 03/16

Individual meetings with two students to look at work

Individual meetings with two students to look at work

Week Ten

Tuesday, 03/21
Thursday, 03/23

Completion of first project or prototype of final project

Group critiques of student work

Group critiques of student work

Week Eleven**SPRING BREAK**

Week Twelve

Tuesday, 04/04
Thursday, 04/06

Curatorial Exercise No. 2
Curatorial Exercise No. 2

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, 04/11
Thursday, 04/13

Curatorial Exercise No. 2
Curatorial Exercise No. 2

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, 04/18
Thursday, 04/20

Rough cuts / performances

Individual meetings with two students to look at work
Individual meetings with two students to look at work

Week Fifteen

Tuesday, 04/25
Thursday, 04/27

Fine cuts / performances

Individual meetings with two students to look at work
Individual meetings with two students to look at work

Week Sixteen

Tuesday, 05/02
Thursday 05/04

Final cuts / performances of semester-long project

Final cuts by two students followed by extended group critique
Final cuts by two students followed by extended group critique