History of Media Arts

Course Summary

This course will introduce and develop the aesthetics, practice and history of media arts. Special attention will be given to technological visions of the early avant-garde period, the experimental film of the 1920s, and the 1960s and 1970s art movements. By discussing the milestones of Media art, all time based art practices such as: experimental film, video art, performance, time based installation, interactive multimedia and experimental sound will be explored.

Trying to serve as an overview of the history of media art, this course will include topics such as the early forerunners & utopians of media art, the abstract or Absolute Film of the 1920s, the pioneers of video and audio art, Intermedia and Expanded Cinema.

Course Information

Course structure: Mainly web-based, in an e-learning environment. Additionally 2-3 contact meetings will be scheduled. The course will start with a meeting and end up with a meeting. At least one exhibition tour will be included as well. The detailed program shall be specified and arranged after the course has started.

Credits: 5 ECTS

Instructor: Barbara Sonvilla
Course assistants Martti Raevaara, Esa Salmio

Language of Instruction: English

Important Notes: max. 15 students. Primarily open to students of Art Education, as well as to students of Media Lab.

Course Dates: The course starts January 15th, 2007
The course ends May 25th, 2007

Enrolment details: Registration deadline: 08.01.2007 – to the list outside the room of Annika Fredriksson, 7th floor, School of Art Education

"All   modern art   is media art" (D.Daniels)

Course Description

We are currently facing a unique historical situation when all forms of cultural production and distribution are becoming based on computer and information technologies. This course aims to develop an understanding of the language of new media by looking back to the history of media technologies and modern visual culture.

The course provides a first introduction to history and development of media art by focusing on its very milestones. It will survey the history and theory of the diverse artistic practices of the twentieth century in relation to the development of mass media and new technologies.

Trying to serve as an overview, the course is devoted to the investigation of various topics of media arts, such as the experimental film of the 1920s (Dziga Vertov, Viking Eggeling, Man Ray,), the pioneers of video (Nam June Paik) and audio art (Walter Ruttmann, John Cage), Intermedia (Dick Higgins) and Expanded Cinema (Valie Export).

In our context, the generic term "media art" (also known as "new media art") is used in opposition to "old media" arts (i.e. painting, sculpture, graphic art etc.). New media is more specifically used for cultural forms based on digital technologies.

Dziga Vertov

«They Eye and the Lens superimposed»

Aims & Learning Outcomes

The e-lectures will provide you with illustrative and significant examples to enable investigation and analysis of specific topics and art works. The module will pay particular attention to the early history and theory of media arts, specifically to the field of "Intermedia", the interdisciplinary approach in performance art, installation and video art.

This course's aim is to provide you with a first comprehensive introduction to this subject. It aims to develop your understanding of the emerging of media arts as well as the artists` concepts by assisting you to engage in critical examinations both about these works and about certain sociological and theoretical issues concerning the history of media arts.
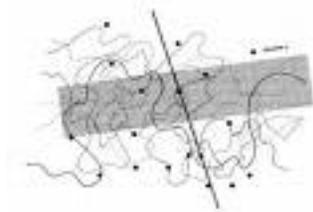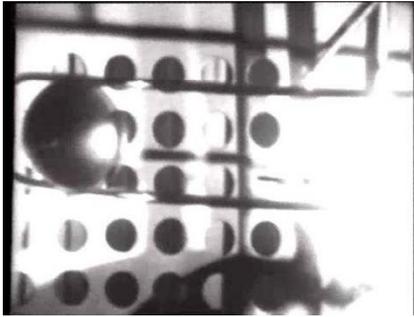

Media art can only be conveyed by multimedia

Selected topics

Early Utopias of Media Art

This course unfolds the panorama of the forerunners and early utopias that were linked to the rise of the new media. At the same time, it serves as an introduction into the topical field of media art.


"The Simultaneous Polycinema" - Visionaries of the Bauhaus

László Moholy-Nagy
«Light Display: Black-White-Grey», 1930. Filmstill

The part which was realized as a film, consists of documentary photographs of a rotation light prop; the large shots of the numerous discs, screens, mirrors, and ball-shaped structures join forces with the fades to produce an abstract play of light and shadow.
http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/lichtspiel/
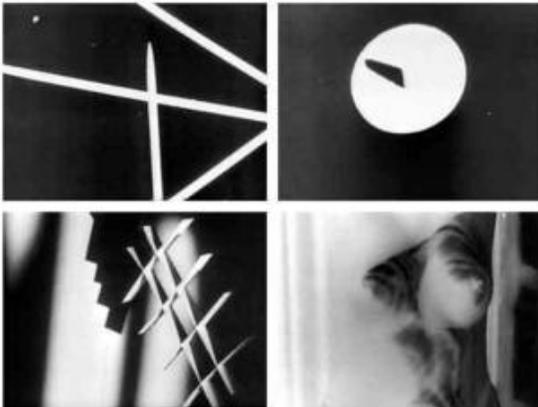
The Early Avantgarde Film

Man Ray, «Return to Reason», 1923
Man Ray pioneered a technique in static photography, the rayograph (or photogramme). Here, an object is placed between a light source and photo-sensitive film, in contrast to traditional photography where photographic film captures light reflected off an object. For the film, a work in experimental Dadaism, Man Ray sought to extend this technique to a moving image. He sprinkled salt and pepper on one piece of film, pins on another, illuminated the film for a few seconds, then developed the film.
http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/retour-a-la-raison/

Zen TV - the pioneers of electronic media art

Nam June Paik, «TV-Buddha», 1974
Paik's possibly most famous video work was produced as a gap-filler for a show. He made a TV viewer out of an antique Buddha statue once purchased as an investment. The subsequent addition of a video camera meant the Buddha now watched his videotaped image on the screen opposite – past and present gaze upon each other in an encounter between Oriental deity and Western media.
http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/tv-buddha/

Sound & Vision - the great forms of media narration

Laurie Anderson
«United States, Part 1-4», 1983

The large-scale multimedia narration combines archaic yet with an technologically altered voice storytelling with a wide range of audiovisual equipment.
http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/united-states/

Topics that we will address in this course:

(1) How can we understand the language of new media by placing it within the history of media technologies and modern visual culture?

(2) What are the ways in which the historical avant-garde explored the interface between the visual and the acoustics and how did music, literature and art influence each other?

(3) What are the ways in which Intermediality became a programme ?