

FMST 90: Film and Media Studies Capstone

Instructors: Bob Rehak, (brehak1); office hours W 10-12 and by appt.

Patricia White, (pwhite1); office hours M 1-3; T Th 11:30-12:30 and by appt.

Consulting instructor: Erica Cho (echo2); W 11:30-1 and by appt.

Materializing Media Syllabus

Course Description

As part of our capstone inquiry in the discipline of film and media studies, we raise a series of questions about the status of materiality in media studies, introducing students to recent scholarship and media practices as well as technologies for making media objects themselves. While media archaeology focuses on tracing the material presence and histories of technologies of recording, transmission, and display/exhibition, other lines of critical inquiry probe the variety of material forms that bring life to our fictions, rituals, and art, such as props, costumes, and other production artifacts; collectibles and tie-ins; transformative remixes and mashups; and installations and archives. Theoretical models from anthropology, literary criticism, art history, and philosophy explore our investments in objects and the social relations that position them in our subjective and collective worlds. Most recently, digital tools for designing and “printing” objects have begun to blur the lines between virtual and material ontologies, the mass-produced and the amateur/homemade, and the fictional diegeses of narrative film/television and the navigable, interactive spaces of videogames and imagined worlds. Together, these phenomena demand interdisciplinary study and a collaborative, creative rethinking of traditional modes of research and scholarship.

Course Objectives

- Provide a team-taught collaborative environment and senior experience that draws on critical skills, historical and medium-specific knowledge, and production skills acquired in the FMST curriculum.
- Inaugurate a lab-based mode of working on critical issues in media studies.
- Tie our inquiry to Visualizing Media Futures, a symposium sponsored by the Department of Film and Media Studies and the Institute for the Liberal Arts, which will bring together artists, theorists, and teachers whose work explores the use of media technologies in new modes of creative expression, computer-based culture, and interconnections among the humanities, social sciences and science and technology.
- Connect students to characteristic tools, thinkers, and concepts of 21st-century media studies.

Texts available at the bookstore

- Charles Acland, ed. *Residual Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- Marshall McLuhan with Quentin Fiore. *The Media Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2005).

- Bruce Sterling. *Shaping Things* (Boston: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005).

PDFs or links to electronic versions of additional readings on Moodle.
Please print and bring all texts to class.

Graded Course Components

- 20% Participation/Preparation/Collaboration/Facilitation; includes presence at Visualizing Media Futures symposium; and lab work
- 20% Journals
- 20% Midterm Paper
- 40% Final Project (includes prototype)

Participation/Preparation/Collaboration

Regular attendance and active participation are crucial components of the Capstone. Because it is structured as a workshop, students are expected to engage in dialogue about course concepts as well as each others' creative and scholarly work. Students are also expected to attend all screenings and come to class meetings with the day's assigned materials prepared.

Facilitation

Each week two students will be responsible for facilitating discussion of the course readings and screenings after the break (one hour maximum). They will prepare an outline and discussion question or activity and write a short follow-up to post to Moodle. Facilitation teams are also responsible for bringing food for break (please be sensitive to dietary restrictions of other students).

Journals

1-2 page papers, due at intervals throughout the semester, will respond critically to readings, screenings, and creative assignments based on a prompt. Students will upload their papers to Moodle and read each other's work before class.

Midterm Paper

6-page paper engaging with one or more of the theoretical perspectives on "things" introduced by the course readings and discussions.

Final Project

Creative work using technologies and ideas introduced in the class and the symposium, accompanied by a written statement of creative and theoretical issues addressed in the process and form of the project. The project will be done in two steps, involving the construction of an actual object that belongs in a mediated world—a reproduction of an actual prop or collectible or the creation of an imagined one—and then the staging of that object. The project could be a short film, an installation, a game level, a diorama, or a video essay. By making an object, students engage with moving images in concrete terms and explore their many evocations. The written component can take the form of an artist's statement or a more critical essay and it must be integral to the project. More details will follow. While each student is responsible for his/her

own project, significant collaboration in the workshop is essential and will be factored into your assessment. Final projects will be presented at a community event at the end of the semester.

Lab 1: Token

In Week 2 we will meet in the Language Resource Center (LRC) to experiment with 3D design software. Working in pairs, each student will design his or her own personally and conceptually significant object. The objects will be sent to ITS's 3D printer for output.

Lab 2: Remix Vid

In Week 5 students will meet during the second half of class in the LRC to break ground on their midterm project, a video remix of artifacts found in film and television.

Lab 3: "Mediated" Object Prototype (see Final Project, above)

In Week 9, students will use 3D printing or another form of crafting (wood, fabric, clay, LEGO, etc.) to work on a tangible object that belongs in a media world. This could be a reproduction of an actual movie or franchise prop, costume, or collectible or the creation of an imagined one. Due Week 11.

Class Information

Instructors

Profs. Rehak and White are the primary instructors, and Professor Erica Cho is consulting on labs and assessment of creative work.

Screenings

Unless otherwise announced, all screenings will take place on Monday in LPAC Cinema. Please arrive early enough to get settled before the start time of 7 p.m. Food and drink are not permitted. Phones and other devices – anything with a screen – must be switched off for the duration of the screening. Please clean up after yourself. These conditions are not meant to curtail your comfort, but to minimize distractions and enable you to focus exclusively on the content.

Written work

Please double-space all printed assignments, using 12-pt font and 1-inch margins all around, numbering your pages. MLA citation style is preferred, but any consistent style is adequate. See the guide to Plagiarism and Citation at the Dept. of English Literature website: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x10027.xml>. Please include director and year of release in parenthesis after the first mention of a film title. Credits and release dates can be found at IMDB.com. You do not need to cite dialogue from a film.

Disability Accommodations

If you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services to set up an appointment. Information is available at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/x7687.xml>.

Readings and topics are subject to change. We will sometimes add short readings to Moodle site without advance notice.

Calendar

Week 1 (Jan 23): Introducing Things

Screening: *Rose Hobart* (Joseph Cornell, 1936, 20 min.)
Maltese Falcon (John Huston, 1941, 100 min.)

Read: Vivian Sobchack, "Chasing the Maltese Falcon"
Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret"
Lesley Stern, "Paths that Wind Through the Thicket of Things"

View in class: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*

Week 2 (Jan 30): Fabricating Things

Screening: *Viva* (Anna Biller, 2007, 120 min.)

Lab (meet in LRC): Introduction to 3D design and printing

Read: Neil Gershenfeld, "How to Make Almost Anything"
Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (selections)
Elena Gorfinkel, "Interview with Anna Biller"

Week 3 (Feb 6): Theorizing Things

Screening: *Nostalgia* (Hollis Frampton, 1971, 36 min.)
The Earrings of Madame de.... (Max Ophuls, 1953, France, 105 min.)

Read: Sigmund Freud, "On Fetishism"
Jean Baudrillard, from *The System of Objects*
Susan Buck-Morss, "Dream World of Mass Culture"
Walter Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century"
Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire"

Event: *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, February 8, 8pm LPAC Cinema, Producers in person

Week 4 (Feb 13): Historicizing Things

Screening: *Film Before Film* (Werner Nekes, 1986, Germany, 103 min.)

Read: Charles Acland, Residual Media, selections
Lisa Gitelman, from *Always Already New*

Week 5 (Feb 20): Shaping Things

Screening: *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936, 100 min.)

Lab (meet in LRC): Vid and final project assigned and technologies introduced

Read: Bruce Sterling, *Shaping Things*

Week 6 (Feb 27): Projecting Things

Screening: *Vertical Roll* (Joan Jonas, 1972, 20 min.)
Ydessa, the Bears, and Etc. (Agnès Varda, 2004, 44 min.)
The Attendant (Isaac Julien, 1993, 8 min.)

Read: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (excerpt)
John Hanhardt, "From Screen to Gallery"
Andrew Uroskie, "An Impossible Situation"
Catherine Fowler, "Remembering Cinema 'Elsewhere'"
Isaac Julie, "Confessions of a Snow Queen: Notes on the Making of *The Attendant*"
Laura Marks from *The Skin of the Film*

Week 7 (Mar 6): Transforming Things

Remax vid due Monday, March 4

Francesca Coppa class visit; share vids

Read: Francesca Coppa, "An Editing Room of One's Own: Vidding as Women's Work" and "A Fannish Taxonomy Of Hotness"
Henry Jenkins, "Searching for the Origami Unicorn"
Lawrence Lessig, from *Remix*

7pm: Talk by Francesca Coppa, "Transmedia vs. Fan Media," SCI 199

Midterm paper due Friday at midnight

Spring break

U Penn: Agnes Varda visit March 14 and Chris Marker Symposium, March 15-16

Week 8 (Mar 20): Visualizing Media Futures

Screening: *Side by Side* (Christopher Kenneally, 2012, 90 min.)

Read: Writings by and about symposium participants Shawn Brixey, Sheldon Brown, Philomene Longpre, Richard Rinehart, Holly Willis

Final project proposal due

Mar 21-23: Visualizing Media Futures Symposium

Week 9 (Mar 27): Playthings

Screening: *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967, 155 min.)

Lab: Meet in LRC to work on Mediated Object Prototype

Week 10 (Apr 3): Collecting Things

Screening: *Super 8* (J. J. Abrams, 2011, 112 min.)

Read: Bob Rehak, "Materializing Monsters: Aurora Models, Garage Kits, and the Object Practices of Horror Fandom"
D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Experience: Notes on the First Not-Me Object"
Marc Steinberg, from *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*
Lincoln Geraghty, from *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture*

Week 11 (Apr 10): Touching Things

Screening: *Transitional Objects* (Jennifer Montgomery, 2000, 19 min.)
Flaming Creatures (Jack Smith, 1963, 45 min.)

Read: Charles Eckert, "The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window"
Jack Smith, "On the Perfect Cinematic Appositeness of Maria Montez"
Barbara Johnson, "Using People: Kant With Winnicott"
Amelie Hastie, "Miscellany of Film History" and "Eating in the Dark"
Mary Desjardins, "Ephemeral Culture/E-bay Culture: Film Collectables and Fan Investments"
Patricia White, "Black and White: Mercedes d'Acosta's Glorious Enthusiasms"

Prototype of Mediated Object due

Week 12 (Apr 17): Mediating Things

Screening: *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1987, 83 min.)

Read: Marshall McLuhan with Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*
Lucas Hilderbrand, from *Inherent Vice*
Caetlin Benson-Alcott, "VCR Autopsy"

Field trip to American Museum of the Moving Image on April 19

Week 13 (Apr 24): Curating Things

Screening: *Decasia* (Bill Morrison, 2002, 67 min.); Orphan film selection

Read: Antonia Lant, "Curse of the Pharaoh: How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania"
Fatimah Rony, "Writing Race in Film"
James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority" (excerpt)
Dan Streible, ed. *Moviegoing in America* (read one or two articles on reserve)

Week 14 (May 1): Last Things

Screening: *Toy Story 3* (Lee Unkrich, 2010, 103 min.)

Lab: Meet in LRC work on final projects

Event: May 1 Tri-Co Film Festival

Event: May 15 presentation of final projects