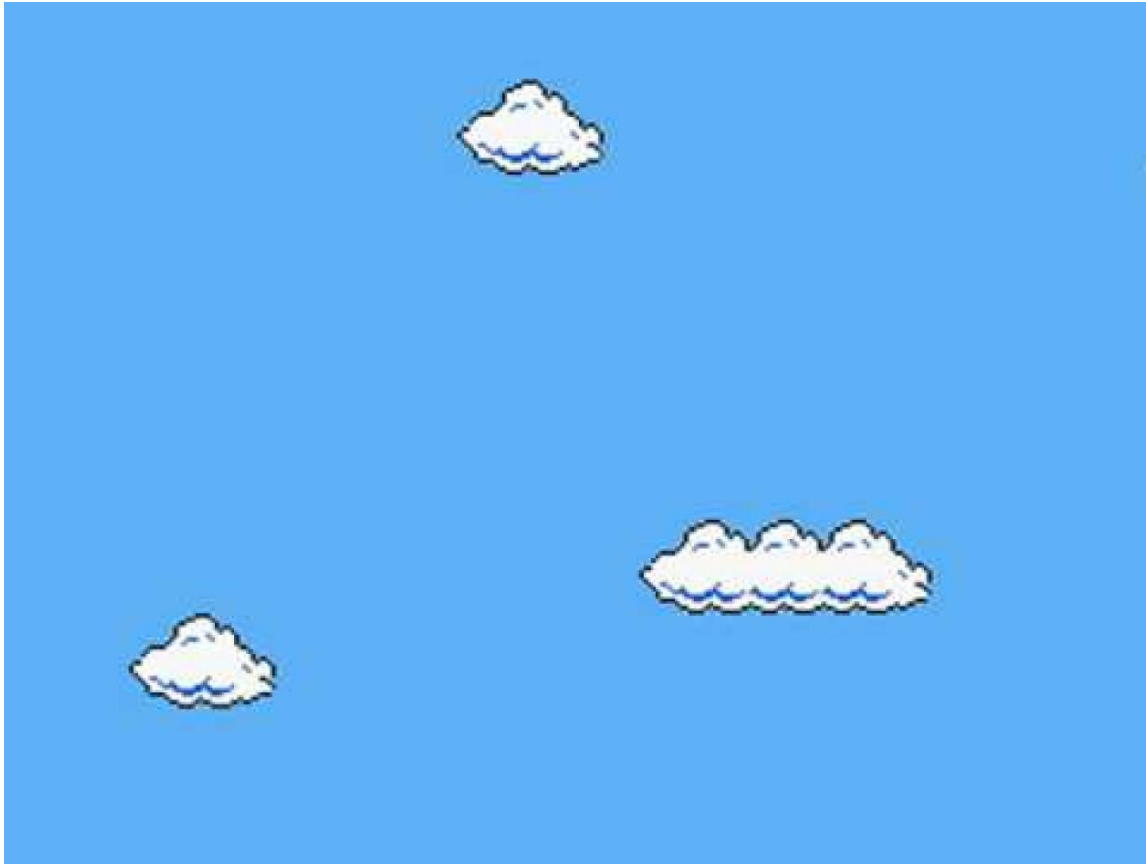# London South Bank
University

Critical Theories of Digital Media
AME_5_CTD

Department of Arts and Media
Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

2014-2015 - Semester 1

Module Co-ordinator: Daniel Rourke
Office: B401
Email: rourked@lsbu.ac.uk

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MODULE DETAILS

Module Title:	Critical Theories of Digital Media
Module Level:	5
Module Reference Number:	AME-5-CTD
Credit Value:	20
Student Study Hours:	200
Contact Hours:	36
Private Study Hours:	164
Pre-requisite Learning (If applicable):	None
Co-requisite Modules (If applicable):	None
Course(s):	BA (Hons) Digital Media Arts
Year and Semester:	2013-2014, Semester 1
Room / Location and Timeslot:	Studio 56 – K204, 13:00 – 16:00
Module Coordinator:	***Daniel Rourke***
MC Contact Details (Email)	**rourked@lsbu.ac.uk**

Subject Area:	Arts and Media
Summary of Assessment Method:	- **Critical Review of Field Trip (0% Pass/Fail) due Mon 10th Nov** - **100% Coursework due Fri 9th Jan 2015**

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This unit explores the critical and cultural contexts for practice in digital and new media art. Students will be introduced to a range of work by media arts practitioners, and encouraged to explore the relationship between theory and practice in their work.

AIMS OF THE MODULE

The aims of this unit are to:

- Enable students to explore key concepts and themes underpinning media art practices
- Enable students to encounter and research a broad range of professional work
- Encourage students to explore the relationship between theory and practice
- Develop independent research skills which will inform the Research Paper at Level 6

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of this unit students will be able to:

Knowledge and Understanding

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- Identify a range of media arts practices and hybrid art forms
- Identify key concepts which inform new media practices
- Identify online and offline resources for researching digital media arts

Intellectual Skills

- Compare and contrast different forms of digital art
- Discuss the relationship of theory to practice in relation to the work of a new media practitioner

Practical Skills

- Use academic writing conventions and Harvard referencing style
- Create a presentation using audio visual tools and present it to a group
- Use a variety of online tools to conduct independent research

Transferable Skills

- Practice written communication skills appropriate to academic study
- Practice oral communication skills through group discussion and presentation
- Demonstrate skills in detailed observation and analysis
- Demonstrate independent research skills through the production of a research portfolio

ASSESSMENT OF THE MODULE

Formative:
- Production of an online research 'notebook'
- 5 minute presentation of research in progress.

Summative:
- Approx. 300-word write-up of a 'field trip' (Weighting 0% (Pass/Fail)
- 100% Research Portfolio of approx 3000 words.

Formative assessment:

Research 'Notebook'

You are required to keep an online 'notebook' throughout the module that represents your interests and shows the development of your research. Using online blogging and/or note keeping tools (such as Tumblr, Blogger, public Google Doc etc.) this notebook will contain material that reflects your aesthetic and formal interests, in the form of images, video, text and other sources gleaned from the web. The material collected in the notebook can make up the basis of your research presentation (see below). **Your Research Notebook must be submitted with your final portfolio (in the form of a web address).**

Research Presentation

You are required to give a 5 minute presentation on your chosen theme and practitioner(s), outlining the key issues which frame your research, which will inform your research portfolio. The oral presentation must include audio-visual material to support your

discussion, possibly sourced from your 'notebook'. Please see Moodle for your allocated week of assessment (**either week 10 or 11**).

The aim of the presentations is to give you formative feedback on the ideas and questions you will be developing in your research portfolio. Use this valuable opportunity to bounce ideas off your audience, and develop your presentation skills.

In developing your presentations, some key questions which it may help you to consider are:

- Why did you choose your specific theme? (ie interface/play/network) What excites you about it?
- Why is this concept important in understanding new media?
- What are the key debates around this concept? Who are the theorists writing about it?
- Which 2 practitioners/projects have you selected to analyse in your portfolio? How does their work relate to the theories surrounding your theme?
- Reflect: How is your research progressing? Is there anything you need help with? Are you able to find academic sources?

In preparing this task, you may want to consult the following resources:

Becker, L and Van Emden, J (2004) <u>Presentation Skills for Students</u>, London: Palgrave.

Cottrell, S (2005) <u>Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument</u> London:Palgrave.

Reynolds, G., (2008) <u>Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery</u>, Berkeley, CA: New Riders Pub.

Note: If you are unable to attend your allocated presentation, you are required to produce a Doctor's certificate as evidence.

Critical Review (0% Pass/Fail) Coursework 1

In week 7 you will make an independent Field Trip. You will visit an art gallery, museum or institution hosting art works or other materials that reflect your interests. For week 8 you are required to write a 300 word assessment of your field trip. **Failure to hand this in by Monday 10th November (week 8) will result in you failing the course.**

How to structure your Critical Review:
- Your Critical Review title should include the name of the exhibition, artists and the location
- Your text must be 300 words long
- Why did you choose this exhibition? How does it relate to your interests?
- Why is the exhibition/artworks useful in understanding new/digital media?
- Write about the artist(s), their work and add one quote (critical or otherwise) that supports your 300 words *(this quote will not be counted in the final word count).*

Research Portfolio (100%) Coursework 2

The Research Portfolio should document the research you have undertaken during the unit into a critical concept in digital media arts. It is a *self-directed research project* into the way in which a *concept or idea* has informed the work of *key practitioners*.

The portfolio should have four sections:
- An introduction contextual statement with a rationale for choosing the concept/theme (approx 300 words)
- An overview of the critical concept you have chosen, and a discussion of how it has emerged as a key concern in digital media. Your discussion should identify key debates in relation to this concept and identify 2 key texts which have contributed to our understanding of this theoretical area. (approx 800 words)
- A critical analysis of the works by two new media practitioners, projects or artist collectives whose work is informed by this theoretical area. What is the relationship of this theory to their work? (approx 1500 words).
- An evaluation of the research and development of your portfolio, and any key reflections you have as a result of compiling it. (approx 400 words)

Critical Concepts may include:
- The Interface
- Networks
- Social activity online / Social Media
- Information
- Surveillance / Control
- The Copy
- Glitch
- Play
- Interactivity
- Remediation
- Simulation

Links to key texts and artists will be provided on Moodle to help start your research. The research portfolio should be compiled from the notes you have made each week about the research you have carried out independently, including notes and URLs you have discovered, and notes from discussions within the seminars.

Assessment Criteria
The portfolio should aim to be insightful and reflective. When assessing the Research Portfolio we will be looking for the following:
- A **contextual statement** with a **rationale** for choosing the concept/theme
- **Development of the ideas** you are exploring on your selected concept/theme
- Use of **well selected visual material** (including screenshots, diagrams, images)
- The citing of URLs used for research material and references.
- **Evaluation** of the research and development process

Presentation of Work

When compiling the portfolio it is important that you explain the significance of any research undertaken. The document should be well edited, professionally produced and bound. Whilst there is no standard format for the portfolio, please make sure that the portfolio includes:

- A title page
- A numbered contents page
- Clear headings and subheadings
- An appendix of any relevant material, or project documentation including a completed student self-assessment and presentation record forms.
- The web address of your Research Notebook must be submitted with your final portfolio.
- Comprehensive and accurate referencing of both academic and professional sources, laid out according to the Harvard referencing system.

Your research portfolio should be submitted as a bound document, with margins and at least 1.5 spacing, with a length of approximately 3,000 words (excluding appendices).

Submission of Work

Please submit **2 copies** to the Faculty Office (B266) and one copy as Moodle 'Assignment' by:

Friday January 9th 2015

FEEDBACK

Feedback will normally be given to students 15 working days after the submission of an assignment and will consist of written feedback which can be picked up from the Faculty Office, B266.

In addition, formative feedback will be given to you during the unit through class discussion and critique of class activities.

INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING THE MODULE

Overview of the Main Content

Classes will explore key theories and concepts in relation to new media.
These may broadly include: The network; Interactivity; Information; Mapping; Surveillance; Open-source Software; The interface; The Archive; Simulation.

Each week the work of key practitioners will be examined whose work intersects, critiques or is informed by each critical area. Seminars will be supplemented by skills workshops exploring academic research and presentation skills.

Overview of Types of Classes

The unit will be delivered over 12 weeks, 3 hours per week via a combination of

- Lectures introducing specific topics
- Seminars exploring media art practice
- Student presentations (including individual *and* group presentations)
- Class discussions
- Formative feedback tutorials
- Field trip

Importance of Student Self-Managed Learning Time

Students are expected to spend approximately seven hours per week, outside of the supervised session, to self-managed learning. This should include time for independent research and study and completion of the set tasks set by the tutors.

Employability

According to the Skillset report, Creating the Future: The UK Skills Action Plan for the Interactive Media & Computer Games Industries media workers need a significant suite of transferable skills in addition to 'transient and enduring specialist skills'. These include 'general personal, communication and presentation skills', 'self-directed learning', 'research and study skills' and 'general ICT skills including a focus on the use of search engines'. This unit supports the development of such 'soft skills' through its structure of interactive seminars and specialist workshops on developing academic research and presentation skills. Through working on a research portfolio, students are encouraged to be self-directed in their learning and self-reflective about the process of doing research

THE PROGRAMME OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Week 1: Monday 22nd September: **Introduction**

We will begin by getting to know the aims of the unit. This will be an opportunity for students to ask questions about the structure of the unit, the timetable, the assignments. You will have the opportunity to discuss tools and techniques for approaching research.

This will be followed by an introduction to research, referencing, and plagiarism.

> **Reading:** *Introduction: Concepts and Media* in Beer, N. and Beer, D. (2008). New Media: The Key Concepts, Oxford:BERG

Week 2: Monday 29th September: **Interface**

This session will address the importance of Interface in considering new media culture, and will examine the work of practitioners who aim to complicate or disrupt the interface.

> *See Moodle for electronic readings & links to material relevant to this week's theme*

Week 3: Monday 6th October: **Network and the Social**

This session will address important issues of networks, mapping, hierarchy, surveillance, and online social presence.

See Moodle for electronic readings & links to material relevant to this week's theme

Week 4: Monday 13th October: **Information, Surveillance, Control**

What is the materiality of information? Who owns it, who has access to it? How is information becoming a central 'material' for new media practitioners?

See Moodle for electronic readings & links to material relevant to this week's theme

Week 5: Monday 20th October: **Glitch Workshop**

In this session we will explore the political implications of media practice by examining glitch art and aesthetics. **This session will take place in <u>K203 Lab.</u>**

See Moodle for electronic readings & links to material relevant to this week's theme

Week 6: Monday 27th October: **The Copy**

In this session we will explore the notion of the 'copy' in media, production and contemporary digital culture, and the act of appropriation as an aspect of practice.

See Moodle for electronic readings & links to material relevant to this week's theme

Week 7: Week of Mon 3rd November: **Independent Research (Fieldtrip)**

In weeks 5 and 6 I will offer you some ideas of exhibitions to visit in London. *You are not required to attend class in week 7*, instead, you will be visiting a chosen exhibition in small groups. **In week 8 you are required to submit a 300 word Critical Review of your field trip (see pg. 5 for details).**

See Moodle for field trip suggestions

Week 8: Monday 10th November: **Simulation**

In this session we will explore notions of the posthuman and Baudrillard's concept of Simulacrum. **This week you are required to submit a 300 word Critical Review of your field trip (see pg. 5 for details).**

See Moodle for electronic readings & links to material relevant to this week's theme

Week 9: Monday 17th November: **Evaluation**
This week you will have the opportunity to discuss the development of your Research Notebook and Portfolio. We will also go through the Critical Review write-ups in practice and preparation for your final writing task.

Week 10: Monday 24th November: Presentations

This week half the group will be presenting their research: *See Moodle for your time slot.*

Week 11: Monday 1st December: Presentations

This week half the group will be presenting their research: *See Moodle for your time slot.*

Week 12: Monday 8th December: Evaluation

In this session we will review the unit and discuss the requirements for the portfolio in detail. There will also be time for your final tutorials before the end of term.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Informal student feedback will be sought throughout the unit via class discussions and tutorials. Formal student feedback will be taken in week 12 via a survey; the feedback collected in this way will inform the future development of the unit.

As a result of feedback on the module in previous years we have simplified the assessment from 3 pieces of coursework to a single portfolio submission (plus Critical Review task), changed the date of submission, and included 1 to 1 tutorials. There continues to be positive feedback on the content on the module and its delivery, as past students have valued the opportunity to do self-directed research into an area of interest.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Core Reading Materials

(these can be found via Moodle or in the library)

- Fuller, Matthew. ed. (2008) *Software studies: A Lexicon.* MIT Press
- Benjamin, Walter. (1955) *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility.* Taurus
- Beer, N. and Beer, D. (2008) *New Media: The Key Concepts*, BERG.
- Manovich, Lev (2001) *The Language of New Media.* Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Steyerl, Hito. (2008) *In Defence of The Poor Image.* e-flux journal

Supplementary Reading Materials

(pay attention to Moodle for more)

- Steyerl, Hito. (2012) *The Wretched of the Screen.* Sternberg Press
- Flanagan, Mary. (2013) *Critical Play: Radical Game Design.* MIT Press
- Lister, Martin, ed. (2009) New Media: A Critical Introduction (2nd ed.)
- Bolter, J and Gruisin, R (ed) (2000) Remediation: Understanding New Media MIT Press.
- Corby, Tom (2006) Network Art: Practices and Positions Routledge
- Grau, O (2007) MediaArtHistories, MIT Press
- Wands, B., (2007) Art of the Digital Age New ed., Thames & Hudson.
- Gere, C., (2006) Art, Time and Technology: v. 2 English Ed., Berg Publishers.
- Becker, L and Van Emden, J (2004) Presentation Skills for Students, London: Palgrave.
- Cottrell, S (2005) Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument London: Palgrave.

Online Research Tools:

Zotero (bibliography tool): http://zotero.com
Google Books (for checking references): http://books.google.co.uk
Google Docs (for word processing & collaboration): http://docs.google.com
Evernote (online/collaborative note keeping): http://evernote.com
Pocket (for saving links/articles etc.): http://getpocket.com
Dragdis (for saving images etc.): http://dragdis.com
Tumblr (blogging/scapbook): http://tumblr.com
Blogger (blogging): http://bloger.com
Wordpress (blogging): http://wordpress.com (free hosting) http://wordpress.org (self-hosted)
Square Space (portfolio creation): http://www.squarespace.com
Cargo Collective (portfolio creation): http://cargocollective.com
Vimeo (video hosting): http://vimeo.com
IFTTT (for linking services together): http://ifttt.com

Useful Websites for Research:

New Media / Digital Arts
Rhizome: http://www.rhizome.org
We Make Money Not Art: http://www.we-make-money-not-art.com
Furtherfield: http://www.furtherfield.org
Metamute: http://www.metamute.org/
Hyperallergic: http://hyperallergic.com/
The Creators Project : http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com
Dazed Digital: http://www.dazeddigital.com/
Wired: http://www.wired.com/
Motherboard: http://motherboard.vice.com
Netartnet: http://netartnet.net/
or-bits: http://or-bits.com/
GLI.TC/H Wiki: http://gli.tc/h/wiki/index.php/Main_Page
Arcadia Missa: http://www.arcadiamissa.com/

Journals
Arstechnica: http://arstechnica.com
e-flux: http://e-flux.com
Turbulence: http://www.turbulence.org
Media Art Net: http://www.mediaartnet.org/themes/
C|Theory: http://www.ctheory.net/
Fibreculture Journal: http://journal.fibreculture.org/
Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies:
http://www.luton.ac.uk/Convergence/volumethree/numberfour/.
Stanza: http://www.stanza.co.uk/

Some Facebook Group Suggestions:
(ask to 'join' for updates in your feed)

Media Art Culture : https://www.facebook.com/groups/mediaartculture/
Media Archaeology : https://www.facebook.com/groups/123296384347827/
✦ℙ☻ST INTERNET✦ : https://www.facebook.com/groups/122763294467994/
G L I T C H : https://www.facebook.com/groups/glitchglitch/
P2P Art & Culture : https://www.facebook.com/groups/125436957615117/
MARart- Mixed and Augmented Reality Art : https://www.facebook.com/groups/463219190427934
Post Digital Cultures Research: https://www.facebook.com/groups/569282063146189/