**Televisual Culture**

Hum - 200

San Francisco Art Institute

Spring 2020

Professor: Clark Buckner

# Third Paper Assignment

Due: April 23rd

Requirements: a) Papers should be five or six double-spaced pages, with 10 – 12 pt font and reasonable margins. b) Longer quotations should be single-spaced and indented. c) Late papers will be docked a letter grade for every week they are overdue.

Please address *one* of the following questions as clearly, concretely, and completely as possible:

1. Drawing upon examples of your own, consider how do video art – as both not-art and not-television – problematize the boundaries of art and art history, undermining the distinction between high and low culture, and contributing to the dissolution of medium specificity and complication of art and everyday life that characterize the contemporary (in its distinction from the modern/modernist)?

Alternatively, make this argument with respect to artists working with contemporary new media? How does their work lie at the borders between art, entertainment, and industry, complicating the boundaries between art history and the broader field of visual culture? Does this undermine art’s unique power to shed light on experience? Or does it open up novel possibilities for how we make and see images and the world?

1. Rather than producing their works *ex nihilo*, video and other media artists frequently appropriate already existing images, drawn from the circulating systems of film, television, social media, and other information technologies. A) Identify an artist or group of artists who work in this way. B) How does Derrida’s concept of “*iterability*” help to explain how they work (i.e., how their artwork means what it does) by citing from an already existing chain of signifiers? C) In the process, be sure to explain Derrida’s concept.
2. Homi Bhaba draws a connection between the hybrid subjectivity of post-colonialism with the playful underdetermination of signifying systems, emphasized in poststructuralism. How might his argument be expanded further to include the technological mediation of identity? A post-colonial cyborg, perhaps? How does this mediation provide novel opportunities for transformative change, if not exactly emancipation? In your response, consider focusing on examples of your own, drawn from art, history, or popular culture.
3. What are the implications of social media for understanding the power of images in modern life? Does the ubiquitous documentation of the Instagram era express and/or instill a nostalgia for an ever absent present? Is the selfie’s performance of identity artificial, authentic, or, somewhere between the two, revealing in its artificial presentation? Etc…
4. Beyond merely an instrument for communication, how has the Internet become an integral part of experience: an extension of our worlds and a mirror in which we come to see and understand ourselves? Is this mediation of experience alienating, or does it present novel possibilities for self-expression and social relationships? How is the virtual best understood in relationship to what we otherwise take to be reality? Is it an escape from the difficulties of life? Or does it reveal the illusions that shape experience, and the opportunity to change them?
5. How have the decentralized communication of the Internet subverted the hegemonic dominance of Network Television and the corporate mass media, ushering in a newly democratic age of freely circulating information and ideas? How has the Internet, to the contrary, ushered in an even more oppressive age of government and corporate surveillance, in which our metadata are systematically collected and commodified? Consider the contours of this contradiction? What is the best way forward?

**Other Possible Topics to Consider**

1. Narrative Film Review

Despite the generally conservative, leveling, even stultifying tendency in film as a form of popular entertainment, in different ways through the years, directors have developed unique, singular voices as *auteurs*, whose work challenges their audiences’ sensibilities and social assumptions.

* 1. Drawing upon Peter Biskind’s *Raging Bulls, Easy Riders*, analyze a film, or the work of a director from the Hollywood Renaissance.
  2. Consider a contemporary independent film or the work of an independent filmmaker.

What is the strength in the work? How does it break with the conservative tendencies in Hollywood Cinema? Is it aesthetically inventive? Does it challenge the audience to see the world differently?

1. Experimental Film Review
   1. Consider an experimental film or the work of an experimental filmmaker. What makes it excellent? How does it challenge its audience’s sensibilities and assumptions about the status quo?
   2. With respect to a film, a set of films, a filmmaker or a group of filmmakers of your choosing, consider… How might the self-reflexivity of experimental film be conceived, in existentialist terms, as an avant-gardist antidote to the nihilistic, meaninglessness and alienation of mass media clichés. A restoration of the problem of what it means *to see*, set against the horizon of time’s unfolding, the loss that it entails, and the play of light and darkness.
2. Video Art Review
   1. Consider a piece of video art or the work of a video artist. What makes it/them excellent? How do they challenge the audience’s sensibilities and assumptions about the world?